

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BUREAU STAIRÉ MILIT. TA 1913-21
NO. **W.S. 1,610**

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. **W.S.** 1610.

Witness

Michael McCoy,
Fairview Terrace,
Mullingar,
Co. Westmeath.

Identity.

Capt. Mullingar Coy., I. Vols., Co. Westmeath.
Battalion O/C.

Subject.

Mullingar Battalion I.R.A.
1917-21.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

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STATEMENT BY MICHAEL McCOY,

Fairview Terrace, Patrick St., Mullingar,
Co. Westmeath.

I was born in Mullingar and went to school at St. Mary's Christian Brothers Schools. There was nothing taught in school those days of an outstanding Irish nature. In fact, one could say it was quite the opposite. Irish language and history were taught, but purely as just another subject. There was no special emphasis on them.

I became interested in Irish political affairs around 1906. There was a by-election due to take place in the county then, and one evening as I and some other boys were returning from school we noticed a large number of cars (horse) assembled, and there seemed to be an air of excitement around the place. We made our way into the building and listened to what was going on. It was really a convention to select a candidate. Larry Ginnell and Sir Walter Nugent were the proposed candidates. Ginnell was selected and he was returned unopposed for the constituency, so there was no election. The Irish Parliamentary Party were seldom opposed then. The proceedings at the convention were quite incomprehensible to me, but when I got home I asked my mother about it and she explained the whole matter to me. From then on I took a lively interest in Irish political affairs.

When the Irish Volunteers were started in 1913, I joined that movement. There were about four hundred men in the Volunteers in Mullingar, who were organised into four companies. The Ancient Order of Hibernians controlled the movement in Mullingar, as elsewhere throughout the country. The Volunteers had no arms of

any type and used wooden guns to drill and exercise with. After the Howth gun-running, we did get a few of the Mauser rifles brought in there. A man named Spears was in charge of the Volunteers, who were organised into a battalion of four companies. Spears was the Battalion Commandant. Thomas Reddy of Cullion House was Colonel in Chief for the whole county.

When the split took place in the Volunteers as a result of John Redmond's speech at Woodenbridge, Co. Wicklow, and that gentleman's activities as a recruiting agent for the British army, all the Volunteers in Mullingar, with the exception of about a dozen or so of us, took the Redmondite side and then became the Irish National Volunteers. They did not survive too long and gradually died out. I took the side of the dozen or so who remained loyal to the Irish Volunteers. Mick Maguire took charge of the Volunteers who remained loyal. A man named O'Hara and I used to make pike heads. Our section kept in contact, mostly through the language classes run by the Gaelic League. We did very little training or other activity, and we had no arms of any kind. Mick Maguire, Paddy Hickey, Joseph Judge, Paddy O'Hara, Michael Sugrue, a man named Walsh who was a chemist in the town, Joseph Mulready and another man called Mongey and a few others comprised the Volunteers who remained loyal.

Prior to the 1916 Rebellion, we had practically no contact with Irish Volunteer headquarters in Dublin and nothing happened in the Mullingar area during the Rebellion. There did not seem much that we could do, since we had no arms or experience with service weapons.

Ned Whelehan, who had been working in Liverpool, had returned to Mullingar some time previous to the Rebellion. Whelehan tried to get to Dublin when the fighting started there, but was unable to do so. He tried getting into the city by several routes, but was held up on all of them and had to return to Mullingar. There were no arrests in Mullingar area around, or after, the Rebellion.

After the Rebellion, Volunteer activities in Mullingar died out and the movement was dead for some time. Brother Angelus of the Christian Brothers was very enthusiastic and he had copies of the 1916 proclamation typed, and also copies of the speeches made by the executed leaders, and given to the children to bring home and distribute. This helped to keep interest alive in the matter. In the end of 1916, the Volunteers were restarted again under the command of Ned Whelehan. I rejoined. Our strength was roughly fifteen to twenty, as it varied quite a bit. Some new men would join up, while others became inactive and left off. We did not take any oath or make any declaration on joining. Regular parades were held at least once per week. With the exception of a few revolvers of different calibre and which were all small type, there was no other armament. The ammunition available for the revolvers was very limited also. The revolvers were the property of individual Volunteers, who had purchased them or acquired them by different means.

Ned Whelehan was the Company Captain and also the instructor in drill and other subjects. David Burke was the Company Adjutant. Mick Maguire was a Lieutenant of the company, and he also took a hand in the instruction

given. He was a shoe-maker by trade and, as such, he visited the military barracks and was able to pick up a lot of details about training from watching the soldiers there.

The year 1917 was a quiet year as regards Volunteer activities. We carried on with parades and training as usual. Volunteer companies had by now been organised in Castlepollard, Loughanvalley and a few other centres. We were part of the Athlone Brigade of Seamus O'Mara of Connaught St., Athlone. Units were also organised in Myvore, Forgenny and Ballynacargy. Joseph Kennedy was our Battalion O/C, and the battalion comprised Mullingar, Castlepollard and the surrounding areas. We had now begun to pick up an odd service rifle. Those rifles were generally bought from British soldiers who were going on leave to England. It was customary at this time for soldiers proceeding on leave to take their rifles with them. Joseph McMahon, who came from Co. Clare and who worked in Mullingar, procured most of the rifles. The soldiers were conscripts and hated soldiering, and were glad to avail of any chance to get away from it. McMahon would get in touch with them and become friendly. This usually was followed up by providing them with civilian clothes and purchasing the rifles from them. He was a real adventurous type of young man and he often dressed in the uniform he had taken from a deserter and went into the military barracks in it, where he would mix with the soldiers. In this way he got in touch with the armour sergeant and procured seven or eight rifles from him. The sergeant handed out the rifles through one of the loopholes in the barrack wall, but he did not give the bolts of the rifles. He held on to them until he was paid for the rifles, and then handed them over. The sergeant was transferred

out of the barracks shortly after this, so this source dried up.

An all-Ireland convention of Sinn Féin was held in Mullingar in January, 1917, and was attended by a big number of delegates from all over the country. In the early part of 1918, the British were in dire straits with their war effort and were desperately short of men. They introduced a conscription act for Ireland in the House of Commons and, despite the opposition of the Irish Parliamentary Party, succeeded in having it passed by the British Parliament. The Irish Party withdrew from the Commons as a protest and returned to Ireland. The act only wanted the signature of the King to make it law. The passing of the act aroused a great wave of resentment throughout Ireland, and steps were taken everywhere to oppose the application of the act. The Catholic clergy took a leading part in opposing the measure. Sinn Féin and the Irish Party and other elements came together in conference to devise ways to defeat the act.

Meanwhile, there was a rush throughout the country to join the Volunteers, and membership of the organisation was thrown open. Previously it had been on a very selected basis and only good, reliable types were taken in. Our strength went up rapidly to over two hundred, and there was a branch of the Cumann na mBan in the town which now had a strength of over sixty. Fr. Carpenter, who was the Administrator in Mullingar, was really responsible for getting all the young men to join the Volunteers. There were numerous anti-conscription meetings, at which the Volunteers paraded. Drilling and training were carried out practically every evening and Sunday. Parades and

drills were held in the open and were watched by the R.I.C. I think it was the policy of G.H.Q. Volunteers to demonstrate as much as possible before the R.I.C. and to show the greatest determination to resist conscription. I expect the R.I.C. were just as opposed to conscription as we were, and their reports to their superiors lost nothing in effect as a result. The national executive formed to oppose conscription decreed that everyone should sign a national pledge to oppose it, and the Volunteers went around and had everyone sign this pledge. The Volunteers also assisted in collecting money for a fund to oppose the act, and a big sum was realised. A number of pike heads were made by Paddy O'Hara, and these were mounted on long ash handles and stored away. The national executive had drawn up plans to meet the menace. All communications in the way of bridges and roads were to be destroyed. Telephonic and telegraphic communications were to be cut everywhere so that repair would be impossible. Wanted men were to go 'on the run' and, if captured, were to refuse to do drill or wear uniform and so forth. The English government apparently thought the game would not be worth the candle so to speak, and they never had the King sign the measure and gradually the opposition to it died out. The English government never scrapped the measure but held it there as a threat to obtain voluntary recruits. Having failed, however, to enforce the measure, they could not resurrect it again, as the Irish people now realised they could defeat oppression by becoming united.

As the conscription menace died down, so also did our Volunteer force, and soon our effective strength was reduced to about twenty-five or thirty men. In January,

1918, we raided Shaw's business premises for explosives and ammunition. Anthony Cunniffe, who was a member of the Gaelic League and who worked in Shaw's, told us at a meeting of that class one night that the R.I.C. were going to collect all that sort of material from Shaw's. He arranged to leave the door open for us to get in. We raided the place that night and took away with us some ammunition of a sporting type, a lot of shotgun cartridges, two bags of heavy shot and three or four cases of gelnite. We concealed the stuff in the grounds of the seminary, and on the following night we transferred it to Joseph Mulready's place at Walshestown. The R.I.C. investigated the raid but did not make any arrests.

In the summer of 1918, there was a by-election held in Offaly around the month of August. Dr. McCartan was the Sinn Féin candidate. Anti-Sinn Féin elements, including the followers of the Irish Party, were strong in that area. A big Sinn Féin meeting was scheduled to be held in Tullamore and it was decided that we, the Mullingar Volunteers, should attend there. We went by brakes (horse drawn vehicles) and cycles to Kilbeggan, and marched from there to Tullamore. There were Volunteers in Tullamore from all areas of the surrounding countryside, and a large gathering of people. The R.I.C. attended also in force, but there was no clash with them and everything went off quietly. We provided a guard of honour at the platform, on which, amongst others, were de Valera, Count Plunkett and Laurence Ginnell.

Some nights prior to proceeding to Tullamore, we held a meeting to arrange about getting to Tullamore. The R.I.C. raided the meeting. We were using candles for light and we quenched those and put the police in the dark. Some of our members made their escape through a

trap door. The police procured lamps and then took the names and addresses of about eighteen of us who were still there. We were on County Council premises without permission, and the County Council at first decided to prosecute us but then withdrew the charges again.

A general election took place in the latter part of 1918. P.J. Weymes contested the vacancy in our area against Larry Ginnell, who stood for Sinn Féin. There was the usual canvassing of voters by the Volunteers, also collection for the election fund and, of course, personation by the Volunteers on polling day at the voting stations for Ginnell. Ginnell won by a large majority. There were no serious clashes with the opposing forces and the election went off quietly enough.

On the night of the declaration of the poll in the Co. Longford by-election in May, 1917, we did have a clash with the R.I.C. in Mullingar. We were celebrating the victory of Sinn Féin in the by-election. We marched through the town, carrying a coffin which was supposed to represent the funeral of the Irish Parliamentary Party. The R.I.C. tried to take the coffin off us, but they got the worst of the encounter and had to withdraw, while we held on to the coffin. We then burned the coffin, which had an inscription "Irish Party, R.I.P."

On the anniversary of the 1916 Rebellion, we put a tricolour on the wires over the railway. The R.I.C. tried to take it down but could not do so. They had to cut the wires to get it down, and when the wires fell the flag fell across a wall away from where the R.I.C. were and we retrieved it before the police could get round to it or pull the wire back over the wall, much to their annoyance and also the military who were looking on.

Prior to the 1918 election, an incident took place in Mullingar which we used to our advantage during the election. A man from the Ballaghaderreen, area who had been working in England, was returning to his home. He arrived at Mullingar railway station and was awaiting the Sligo train. Some soldiers who were at the station, seeing that he had some personal kit with him, took him to be a man who was running away to avoid conscription in England. They started to get on to him and to revile him as such, and he, in turn, answered them back with retorts such as "Why the - are you not in France fighting for your country instead of being over here enjoying yourselves" and so forth. Some R.I.C. came on the scene and arrested the man. He was taken before P.J. Weymes, who was then a Justice of the Peace. He was charged with using language likely to cause a breach of the peace, and insulting members of His Majesty's forces and suchlike. Weymes sentenced him to twelve months' imprisonment, and he was taken away to prison. Weymes, as a Justice of the Peace, had no authority to impose any sentence. All he could do was remand a prisoner to a higher court. The man had to be brought back and retried before an official magistrate, and he was then sentenced to three months' imprisonment. When the campaign for the general election started, we got this man to come from Ballaghaderreen to Mullingar. Weymes was the Irish Party candidate and opposing Laurence Ginnell, who was the Sinn Féin candidate. We took the Ballaghaderreen man around the country to all the meetings, where we exhibited him on the platform as the man who Weymes had sentenced to twelve months' imprisonment, much to the delight of our supporters and the chagrin of the supporters of Weymes.

Weymes, at this time, was the biggest business man in Mullingar and he handled all kinds of lines. Provisions were in short supply and many commodities were rationed. Bacon was very scarce, but Weymes was able to get a plentiful supply of it, which he disposed of freely to the people. We contended that he did this to gather votes for himself, and a song was composed about this which was sung lustily at all the meetings - "Weymes's hairy bacon". When sentencing the man, Mr. Weymes had made a lengthy speech about intolerance towards our soldiers, who were fighting for King, Empire and freedom. At this time he was tendering for the appointment of Fellmonger to the British army in Ireland. A copy of Weymes's speech was handed to the British Prime Minister by John Redmond, and within a few days Weymes was appointed Fellmonger for the greater part of Ireland.

During the election campaign, the R.I.C. - a force of twenty-one of them - raided the Sinn Féin election rooms in Dominick St. They removed the typewriter and a large amount of documents, and arrested James Gaffney, who was Sinn Féin election agent. We now made a long and large scroll which read: "Twenty-one armed police raid Sinn Féin election rooms" and placed it on the wall of the election rooms on the street side. Gaffney, I think, was given three months' imprisonment for possessing seditious documents. He was at this time, I think, Captain of Ballynacargy Company.

Ginnell won the election by a big majority. Personation on behalf of Sinn Féin was carried out on a large scale. When the voting was concluded, the Volunteers put a guard on the ballot boxes which were collected into the County Hall from all over the country.

The R.I.C. also had a guard on the boxes, but they occupied a different room from the Volunteers and there was no clash between them.

A big mobilisation of Volunteers was now ordered for the Hill of Uisneach. This was really an occasion to demonstrate the strength of the Volunteers. Quite a good few Volunteers were in uniform there that day. We travelled by bicycles and cars to Loughanvalley and marched from there to the Hill. Seamus O'Mara took charge of the parade at the Hill, and Ned Whelehan took command of our battalion. The R.I.C. were there in strength also. There were about fifty Volunteers mounted on horseback and they played the devil with the police. They kept backing their horses on to the police where they were assembled, and forcing them further back all the time from the platform, so that the police could not hear or make notes of the speeches that were being made. Seán T. O'Kelly, now President of Ireland, and Joe McGuinness and Laurence Ginnell were amongst the speakers on the platform. We all got back safely from this parade.

About a week after this parade, Patrick O'Hara was arrested while wearing uniform and carrying a revolver. He was sentenced to twelve months' imprisonment. He did not serve the full sentence, as he was released under the "Cat and Mouse Act". Joseph McMahon, who was later killed in Cavan by an accidental bomb explosion, was also arrested for purchasing arms from the British soldiers and was sentenced and sent to Belfast Jail. He was there when the prisoners went on strike and broke up the jail.

The Dáil met in Dublin in January, 1919, and set themselves up as the government of the Irish Republic. Quite a few of its members were still in jail at this time. The Dáil re-affirmed its allegiance to the Irish Republic as proclaimed in 1916, and appointed a Cabinet of Ministers for the various Departments of State. One of the first acts of the Dáil was to float a national loan to obtain money for its exchequer. The main work in canvassing for this loan and collecting for it fell on the shoulders of the Volunteers. It was really amazing how well the people supported this venture, although at the time it looked only a loan in name and the hopes of it ever being repaid were small indeed. It was a new venture in Irish political life and it appealed to the people. We got subscriptions from the most unexpected sources. A big sum was realised in our area. Each subscriber was given a temporary receipt and later received an official receipt from the Minister of Finance, Michael Collins. Every penny subscribed was accounted for, which in itself was a remarkable feat. Mr. Patrick Brett, a business man in the town, and Mr. Patrick Ross Buiche acted as agents for the loan in the Mullingar area and received all the monies collected.

The Dáil now took over control of the Volunteer force and established them as the recognised army of the Irish Republic, hence the name, I.R.A. Our strength at this time was around seventy men. The Dáil decreed that every officer and man would have to take an oath of allegiance to the Dáil as the government of the Republic. This oath was purely voluntary and any Volunteer was free to refuse to take it. Any Volunteer who refused to take it would cease to be a member of that organisation.

Around thirty or so of our members availed of this opportunity to get out and refused to take the oath. Our strength was then reduced to about forty or so.

The Battalion O/C at this time was David Burke. Patrick O'Hara had replaced McMahon as Company Captain, Mullingar Company, when the latter was arrested, and when O'Hara was arrested I became Captain. Our battalion was part of the Athlone Brigade still. The companies making up the battalion were: - 'A', Mullingar; 'B', The Downs; 'C', Taughmon; 'D', Ballynacargy. The armament of the battalion consisted of about eight rifles and a fair sprinkling of revolvers of different types, including a few Smith & Wesson and bulldogs which were a service type weapon. We also had a few Martini rifles which were used for drill purposes. We had around fourteen or fifteen hundred rounds of .303 service ammunition for the rifles. This had been bought in small lots from the British soldiers, particularly when they were going to and from the rifle range. McMahon, who had procured greatest number of the rifles, brought two of them to the Co. Clare with him when he was returning there after his release from jail. He did this with our permission. A few rifles had also been sent to other battalion areas for training purposes. The greatest part of the material was in the Mullingar Company area.

Sinn Féin was now well organised in the area and got their courts going, which consisted of courts of justice and arbitration courts. The people as a whole took well to the courts and soon the British courts were practically deserted. At first the courts were held

openly and the R.I.C. did not interfere, but later on they did and then the courts had to be held in secret. The decisions of the courts were deemed to be very fair and wise, and the people abided loyally by these decisions. The lawyers practised at the Sinn Féin courts, the judges of which were local men of standing in business and other modes of life. The Volunteers had now taken over the policing of the country, even in the centres where the R.I.C. were still located, and made a great success of it. The Volunteers had the co-operation of the people to an extent that the R.I.C. never had. That force was always looked upon with suspicion and distrust, and the people only recognised them as part of the English garrison in the country. They had always acted in the interests of the oppressor and against the interests of the people. There was, of course, always a big portion of the population who carried favour with the police for their own personal purposes, but between the ordinary people and the police there was always an unbridgeable gap. Now this gap had become a huge chasm. Recruits for the police force came from the ordinary people of the country, but they got such a grinding during their training that they seemed to have changed their personality completely.

The Volunteers, during the course of their police duties, had to make a number of arrests. Persons arrested were usually removed well away from their own locality and detained in some secret place. Such places were called "unknown destinations". There were quite a lot of petty robberies around town. Two young lads named Cohen and Wilson, did quite a bit of such robberies. Their

method of working was for one of them to conceal himself in the shop before closing time, and when all was quiet that night he would let his comrade in and together they would do their robbing. They eventually stole some sovereigns from a house, and when they passed some of them this gave us a line on them. They were arrested by the Volunteers and brought before a Volunteer courtmartial. Cohen was deported and Wilson was given over to his father to be dealt with. Another man named Keenagh was also arrested and he was summarily dealt with by his own ash stick. We used the cells in the old disused prison as a place of detention in the town, and the Volunteers kept a continuous guard on the place. Curiously enough, the R.I.C. never got to know about our using the place.

When the national loan was being floated, we applied to H.Q. in Dublin for posters and literature in connection with it, but we never got any. We now decided to print our own. We seized the old "Midland Reporter"s" offices one night. This place had formerly been a newspaper office, the "Midland Reporter" being produced there. It also did a big business in job printing but was now only used as a place to do local printing jobs. The place was unoccupied at night. We got into it by opening the door with a key which we had taken from the County Council office. One of our men secured a bunch of keys there and one of them worked O.K. The place contained a hand printing machine only. We sorted out the available type, and Paddy Byrne, who was a compositor, set it up. Meanwhile, others of us designed the poster we wanted to print. The poster set out several reasons why the national or Dáil loan should be supported. One of the headings was: - "If a policeman is worth £1,500, what is the Irish nation worth?" This

was a reference to the compensation awarded by the British courts to the widows or relatives of policemen who had been shot.

We worked all night and produced some thousands of posters. We then dumped the type and decamped. The old printing machine made an awful noise when being operated, and it was extraordinary that we were not found at it by the police. When leaving the place, one of our party banged the door very hard to close it. The fanlight over the door was cracked and fell out. The R.I.C., when investigating the affair, decided that this was the way entrance had been made to the premises. On the following Saturday night, we pasted our posters all over the town so that they would be seen by everyone on the following morning when going to Mass or church. We paid particular attention to the premises of people who were hostile to us, and ensured that they had plenty of posters on their windows. We also put some on the piers of the gate of the D.I.'s residence and on the gate of the R.I.C. barracks itself. When we had no further place to put them, we found a donkey wandering around the streets and we covered his body with them. The following day, Sunday, the R.I.C. spent hours removing the posters, and when they thought they had completed the job to their satisfaction, down the street came the donkey covered all over with them.

During the year 1919 I was enrolled a member of the I.R.B. (Irish Republican Brotherhood). David Burke was a member of the I.R.B. in Dublin, where he had worked for some time prior to returning to Mullingar after 1916, and Ned Whelan, who worked in Liverpool, was a member there before his return to Mullingar at the end of 1915. They approached me and explained the aims and objects of the organisation. I felt very proud to be accepted as a member. As far as I can remember, Patrick O'Hara was already a member. Other members enrolled at that time were: - Harry Killeavy, Seamus Murphy, Joseph Judge, Seamus Hynes, Seán Grogan, Terence Smyth, Patrick Byrne, and Thomas Lennon. The last four named members are now deceased. Lennon came from Athlone and was a member there prior to his transfer to Mullingar.

In December, 1919, the Mullingar Battalion was mobilised to attend the funeral of Paddy Seery, a native of Tyrrellspass, who was wounded in the course of an attack on Clara R.I.C. barrack and died later in a Dublin hospital. Patrick O'Hara and Joseph McMahon returned to Mullingar for the purpose of attending the funeral and stayed on for some time afterwards.

About this time the Gaelic League was proclaimed an illegal organisation. For the purpose of raising funds we were producing a play called "The Hook and the Harvest" which we intended running in the County Hall. When we had posters out announcing the date of the play, the County Council refused the use of the hall. A protest march to the hall was organised. Joe McMahon proposed that we should arm ourselves and attack the R.I.C. if they attempted to interfere. We decided that any such action might involve Fr. Carpenter, who was an

enthusiastic supporter of the Gaelic League, and we therefore abandoned the idea of using physical force. When we arrived at the hall we found all doors locked and the R.I.C. in occupation.

Fr. Carpenter then suggested running the play under the name of a different producer and object. This being done, we were allowed to use the hall. I had a part in the play but was arrested four days before its first production. Even with such short notice, Dr. Stanley took over my part and put it over successfully.

While McMahon and O'Hara were in Mullingar at the end of 1919, they decided that it would be good for the morale and training of the men to carry out duty under arms. It was decided to hold up cars and deprive the owners of British permits then in force. The Irish Automobile Drivers' Union had issued instructions to its members in the end of November, 1919, not to apply for such permits. In the middle of December, 1919, three patrols from the Mullingar Company were sent out armed with shotguns. Similar patrols were sent out at intervals afterwards.

One of our patrols halted a car driven by Colonel Batten. He refused to halt and was fired upon. He then drove to the R.I.C. barrack and reported the incident. Later, when on his way home on the Lynn road, he was again halted by another of our patrols, refused to stop and was fired upon. He thought these attacks were personal. An R.I.C. patrol was rushed out but failed to make contact with any of our men.

In January, 1920, the post office staff had organised a dance in the County Hall. About a dozen

members of the R.I.C. were expected to attend the dance. We decided to fire a few shots in the vicinity of the hall for the purpose of annoying the R.I.C. attending. We also thought it might have the effect of having them recalled for duty. At the same time we had patrols on the road holding up cars. One of these patrols fired on Colonel Batten's driver when he refused to halt. He reported the incident and an R.I.C. patrol was sent out. After firing some shots in the vicinity of the hall, we withdrew but ran into this patrol at the junction of Millmount Road and Sunday Well Road. Shots were exchanged on both sides. Two of our men - William Murray and James Tormy managed to escape. Terence Smyth, Patrick Byrne and myself failed to get away and we were arrested. Smyth was armed with a Smyth and Wesson revolver. Byrne managed to dump his shotgun but forgot to get rid of some cartridges which he had in his pocket. I was not armed at the time.

We were detained in the R.I.C. barrack that night and transferred to Mountjoy jail on the following day. No charge was preferred against us for about three weeks. Smyth and Byrne were tried by military courtmartial. Smyth was sentenced to three years' penal servitude, and Byrne to one year. I was taken back to Mullingar and tried before a civil court, where I was sentenced to five months imprisonment for associating with armed men to the terror and danger of His Majesty's forces. I was then returned to Mountjoy jail.

We did not make contact with the other political prisoners in Mountjoy until after our sentence. Eddie Malone from Kildare was O/C of prisoners in the early stages. Then a party of prisoners was transferred from Cork jail, their O/C being Christopher Lucey. Two O/Cs

of prisoners led to some confusion. At this time the prisoners were demanding treatment as political prisoners as apart from criminals.

Maurice Crowe from Tipperary then arrived as a prisoner and he was appointed O/C. The prison authorities were not made aware of this appointment. Charles Monroe was then Prison Governor, a man named Ryan being Chief Warder. So far as I can remember, a warder named Peter Keenan was the main contact for us with our people outside.

Failing in our demand to be treated as political prisoners, we refused to obey prison regulations and were constantly locked in our cells. Crowe advised us to obey regulations and get out of cells so that arrangements could be made for breaking up the prison. A large number of prisoners had been interned there at an earlier date and were released under the "Cat and Mouse Act" and were well acquainted with the lay-out of the prison. Some men I could mention were - Maher, Foley, Ryan, and Michael O'Connor who had been arrested in connection with the rescue of Seán Hogan at Knocklong.

It was decided to break up our cells and go on hunger-strike. This action was to commence at Easter. We were instructed to equip ourselves with iron bars or any such instruments that we could pick up that would be useful in breaking through the walls between each cell. The criminal prisoners located in cells above ours must have had an idea of our intentions, as they would occasionally lower a note with a piece of cord asking for cigarettes and they would provide bars in exchange. Practically every prisoner was equipped with a bar of some description before the date fixed for the riot. Working quietly, bricks were loosened in the walls at night;

on the following day the beds were made up in such a way as to cover all trace of the work.

Holy Thursday was the day selected for the start of the smash up. During our exercise period that day we got instructions to commence work on the walls that night by loosening the bricks, working as silently as possible. One floor board was to be sprung inside of each door and propped up so that it would effectively block the door, necessitating the breaking down of the door before entry could be gained to the cell. An alarm system was arranged by tapping on the pipes leading through the cells.

One prisoner named Martin Breen had the breach in his wall nearly finished when a warder flashed a light in his cell and saw what he was at. Breen coolly asked him to hold the light until he finished the job. The warder raised the alarm and the warning message was tapped out on the pipes to the prisoners. By this time all the warders were alerted and a military guard called out. The prisoners commenced to work feverishly irrespective of noise, and in a short space of time the walls were holed from one end of the wing to the other.

The warders then broke down one or two cell doors and got through the walls to remove the obstacles from the back of the remaining doors. Our O/C, Maurice Crowe, had an arrangement with Warder Keenan that the prisoners would not resist provided the warders used no violence. By 1.30 on Good Friday morning all the prisoners were handcuffed. We had instructions to keep up a din until morning by banging on doors, pipes, singing, etc., so as to prevent sleep. The warders had instructions to remove

our handcuffs in the morning to permit us to have breakfast. By the time they arrived, only six prisoners had the handcuffs on; the remainder had acquired the art of opening them without a proper key.

On Easter Monday morning I heard a bit of a commotion outside our cells and could see the Governor and five or six warders moving along. Thinking it was a search for tools, I placed the bar, which was very heavy, that I had in my possession on the window of the cell. It rolled off as the warders were passing, narrowly missing Warder Keenan, for which I was glad as he was very friendly.

We went on hunger-strike on Easter Monday morning. We delayed the time from the break up of the jail on Thursday night so as to be rested for the commencement of the hunger-strike, also to give the general public time to know what was happening inside the prison and to commemorate the Rising of Easter, 1916. We were next moved to a new wing of the prison. Our bedding was a mattress, without bed boards, on a stone floor. When the last of the prisoners were moved to their new quarters the warders went to their lunch. By the time they returned we had the new cells broken through from end to end. We were then handcuffed with our hands behind our backs. A number of slightly built, supple men were able to work their hands down under their feet and again open the handcuffs. I was unable to carry out this manoeuvre.

We kept up the hunger-strike for eleven days, after which time we were unconditionally released. On being notified by the warders of the decision to release us, we were instructed to report to the prison

office to sign a document there. We had orders from our O/C to sign nothing. The first prisoner, a fairly rough type, on being taken into the office, when told by the Governor to sign a document placed before him, said he would kick the table from under him (the Governor) first.

We were then returned to our cells, where I fell asleep. When I awoke most of the prisoners had left. The warders thought that I had collapsed. They put me in an ambulance and I was taken to the Mater Hospital. A number of prisoners were detained there for ten days, at which time we were told to go home. We got a rail travel voucher home at Sinn Féin headquarters in Harcourt St. On my arrival at Mullingar station I was greeted by fog signals on the line and a reception committee on the platform.

During my internment in Mountjoy, the prison plumber came to my cell one day and told me he was there to examine the gas. I told ^{him} that I did not notice anything wrong with it. He said that he must examine it anyhow. He then asked me was my name McCoy. On being informed that it was, he handed me a note saying that I could write a reply and he would call for it later. The message was from Thomas Lennon, a member of Mullingar Company and also a member of the I.R.B. In it he enquired if there were any documents or arms around my home that I required to have removed, which he would undertake to do. He told me that it was safe to send out a reply through the same channels. I thought it might be a trap and it was three days before I decided to send a reply. The plumber took out my letter, which reached Lennon safely. I never met the plumber afterwards, nor do I know his name.

Early in May, 1920, in company with David Burke, Harry Killeavy, Barney Reilly and Thomas Lennon I raided the County Secretary's office in Mullingar and collected all the rate books. The caretaker of the council offices, Patrick Bailey, assisted us. We discovered a four foot deep cavity under the stage in the main hall and deposited the books there, where they remained until after the election of a new county council, which was mostly composed of Sinn Féin members.

Prior to the county council elections in June, 1920, David Burke instructed me to go forward as a candidate for the urban and rural elections. I was not anxious to seek election, but Burke impressed upon me the necessity of having as many of our men as possible representatives on local bodies. I was elected to both urban and rural councils. Another of our members, Dooner, was elected on the urban council.

On the 29th June, 1920, we got information from Michael Horan, a railway employee at Mullingar railway station, that two wagon loads of aviation spirit consigned to the military barrack were lying at the station awaiting collection. The petrol was packed in two gallon containers. We mobilised 26 men from the company and took control of the station, including the telegraph office, allowing no person to leave. The petrol was removed from the wagons. A number of our men were equipped with picks. As the tins were thrown out, they were pierced by a blow from a pick and the contents flowed down the embankment. A short distance away the British forces had erected a hut as a shelter for a military guard that was occasionally placed on military goods at the station awaiting collection. We carried a number of tins of petrol to this hut and set fire to it. The British authorities later lodged a claim

for £3,884 for the property destroyed on this date.

On the 10th June, 1920, the evacuated R.I.C. barrack at Crazy Corner, some distance north east of Mullingar, was completely destroyed by fire. An earlier attempt was made to burn the place at Easter, 1920, but the fire burned itself out without doing much damage.

We received information that some arms, private property, were stored in the National Bank, Mullingar, which is situated about 150 yards distant from the R.I.C. barrack. Plans were made to raid the bank on the 24th July, 1920, in daylight. Three Volunteers from the Ballynacargy Company were instructed to carry out the raid - William Murray, Michael Murray and James Redigan. They were called in as they would not be easily identified later. An ex-British soldier named Hoey, who owned a hackney car, was employed to go on a fictitious run. He was held up on the way and compelled to drive back to the bank. The three Volunteers entered the bank, held up the staff and ordered the manager to open the "strong room", where, according to our information, the arms were stored. The manager preceded them into the "strong room". On entering, he attempted to close the door in their faces, locking himself in. Redigan anticipated his move and blocked the door with his foot. Inside were four sporting rifles, four shotguns, three revolvers, a small amount of revolver ammunition, a good quantity of shotgun cartridges and cleaning equipment. The stuff was removed and taken out to the Ballynacargy area. Volunteers from Mullingar Company supplied protection while the raid was in progress.

After the councils were elected in 1920, an order was issued to retain all monies collected, such as rates, etc., the councils to be responsible for all salaries and expenses of officials within the county. I was appointed

paymaster and issued all cheques as required. I carried out this work until my arrest in 1921, at which time there was a balance of £73 to credit in the bank.

On 20th August, 1920, we held up the mail train from Galway to Dublin at the Downs Crossing, about two miles from Mullingar. I entered the mail van and removed some mails. The sorter told me that there were some mails there that were no use to me and would probably cause trouble for me at a later date. I did not touch the registered mails as a result. After I had left the van, James Redigan (mentioned in connection with the bank raid) entered and removed the registered mails without my knowledge. Some short time afterwards the post office authorities reported the loss of £300 cash in the raid. An enquiry was ordered by G.H.Q. and £100 was handed over to David Burke by Redigan and William Murray. Burke instructed them to attend an inquiry to be held by the Battalion Staff, but they cleared out of the area and the money was never recovered.

Shortly afterwards a series of bank robberies occurred around Dublin. David Burke had a suspicion that Redigan and his party might be the culprits, and so informed Michael Collins. Collins passed on the information to some friends in the D.M.P., and Redigan and a man named Weymes were arrested and sentenced to a term of imprisonment. It was suspected that Redigan then gave information to the British authorities as to the location of the arms in Mullingar. In February, 1921, after David Burke was arrested, an R.I.C. man told him that they had information that arms were stored in a disused oven in McDonnell's bakery in Dominick St. Their information was perfectly correct. Burke got a message out to me and we had them removed shortly before the place was raided.

In August, 1920, the I.R.A. was reorganised in Westmeath. A second brigade was then organised and comprised the following battalions: - 1st Battalion - Mullingar; 2nd, Loughnavalley; 3rd, Kinnegad-Milltownpass; 4th, Castlepollard. David Burke was appointed Brigade O/C, but after a short time he decided that he had not time to give proper attention to the work and resigned his appointment and asked to be left in charge of the dispatch work within the brigade. James McGuire, Gleniden, who had then returned home from Liverpool, was appointed in his place. Seamus Murphy, railway clerk, was Brigade Adjutant. Terry Smyth was Brigade Quartermaster. He was assisted in the work by Thomas Lennon, then Quartermaster of the 1st Battalion. I was appointed O/C 1st Battalion; Paddy Byrne, Adjutant; and Thomas Lennon, Quartermaster. There was no Battalion Vice O/C appointed then. We considered it important to leave as many officers as possible with the companies.

On the 24th August, 1920, we got information that another consignment of petrol, together with some aeroplane parts, had arrived at the station that night. I mobilised some men and proceeded to the station, where we held up the entire staff on duty. We uncoupled the two wagons concerned, pushed them back the line for some distance and destroyed the lot by fire.

Around that time I had complaints from some men in Skeigh Company, in my battalion, that their company O/C was drinking heavily and, as a result, was in the habit of leaving documents relating to the company organisation lying around, leaving the men dissatisfied. Accompanied by my adjutant I attended a company parade, appointed a new staff and fixed up things generally. On my return from the parade and when approaching the Dublin Bridge, I encountered

two armoured cars, about 150 British troops and about 25 members of the R.I.C. spread out between the Dublin road and the Mental Hospital road. The time would be about 12.30 a.m. I kept going and was almost away when firing started. The fire was opened on a car which approached at a fast pace from the Mental Hospital road. I learned later that the car was the property of a man named Corcoran who did not realise until too late that he was being called on to halt. He then decided to keep going. He got through safely and got the car into his garage without using lights. The R.I.C. were unable to trace him afterwards. I was also informed that the British forces had information that Michael Collins was travelling to Granard on that night and they were waiting to arrest him.

A brigade conference was held at which plans were made for an attack on an R.I.C. patrol in Mullingar. Before the attack was due to take place, Paddy Byrne, Battalion Adjutant, was arrested and kept a prisoner in the military barrack. I had a suspicion that the R.I.C. had some information about the impending attack. I decided that I would take no action until I got word from Byrne. He sent out a message to do nothing for the present as there was a chance that he might be released in a short time.

The next message I got from Byrne was that together with some other prisoners he was making plans for an attempt to escape. The details of the plan were as follows: - it was the general practice on a Sunday morning for two sentries to escort the prisoners to the toilet. They proposed to overpower the sentries at the toilet. I was to provide a party ready to assist, provide a ladder

and ropes, have a motor car ready to take them away and another party ready to block the road behind the car. I had everything in readiness at the arranged time and we took up our position outside the barrack wall, where we remained until 10.30 a.m. Up to that time we had got no signal and we withdrew. For some unknown reason, the prisoners were not taken out that morning. They were also confined in their rooms for a week afterwards.

Earlier in this narrative I mentioned that the R.I.C. had got information about the location of arms in Mullingar. On receipt of a message from David Burke in February, 1921, informing me of the leakage of information, I decided to move the rifles immediately. I mobilised some men in Joe Mulready's, a shop in Dominick St., two doors away from McDonnell's bakery. Terry Smyth, Brigade Q/M, was foreman in the bakery; consequently he had free access to the place. He had a look around and saw a number of men at the front and rear whom he suspected to be R.I.C. in plain clothes.

We then got over the roof of Mulready's shed and entered the bakery. On a close inspection of the place we noticed two metal girders laid from wall to wall supporting a brick wall to the roof of the building. We removed some bricks and laid the rifles flat on the girders, then replacing the bricks. Smyth then mixed some dough and used it as mortar to keep the bricks steady. He then blackened the wall with soot from the ovens. This had the effect of covering all trace of interference with the wall.

On the following morning, shortly after Smyth entered the bakery, three lorry loads of R.I.C. drove up and surrounded the place. They detained Smyth and spent over two hours in a thorough search of the place, but failed to find the rifles. The R.I.C. then noticed an

old disused water tank on the roof and, procuring a ladder, one of their members climbed up and found a .22 rifle and one detonator. Smyth was not aware of the existence of this stuff but he was charged with possession of firearms and sentenced to five years penal servitude.

Some time before this raid a message was received from the Rector, Franciscan Friary, Multyfarnham, that there was a rifle and some other stuff there that he wished to have removed. A Volunteer named Barney Donnelly and another man collected the rifle and detonator, took them into Mullingar and hid them in the tank on the roof of the bakery with the aforementioned result.

On the night following Smyth's arrest I called at my home to enquire about my father who was very ill. I did not sleep at home then. I was only a few minutes in the house when it was surrounded by 25 R.I.C. The first thing they picked up was a letter from my sister. In it she mentioned about a rumour she heard about a serious disease that had broken out in a police barrack. She finished up with some uncomplimentary remarks about that force. I was then arrested and taken to the R.I.C. barrack where Terry Smyth was already detained.

Before my arrest I had made arrangements with Barney Carroll to prepare a dump for our rifles out at the filter beds attached to the water works where he was in charge. The dump was ready and all available Volunteers in the town were engaged in removing the rifles there on the Tuesday night following my arrest. They succeeded in removing all the stuff in safety to the dump, where it was left for some time. At a later date it was moved to a cave at Lynn. While the men were placing the stuff in the dump they could hear the sound of rifle fire coming

from the direction of the railway station. It transpired that the firing was a result of the arrest of Seán MacEoin, who broke away from his captors, was wounded and recaptured. James McGuire, Brigade O/C, who apparently had heard about our arrest, came into Mullingar that night but could not find any Volunteer to give him any information.

Smyth and myself realised that there was great excitement in the R.I.C. barrack. Lorries were moving in and out amidst great commotion. Some time later Fr. Joseph Kelly called to see us and told us that he had been called in to attend Seán MacEoin who had been shot and captured. He told us that he thought there was no hope for his survival.

I was detained in the R.I.C. barrack for ten or twelve days. From there I was transferred to the military barrack, Mullingar. At that time there were over thirty prisoners detained there, some in the guard room and the remainder in "S" Block. During my time there, Harry Begnal was captured under arms in a house owned by a man named Morrison at Milltownpass. It looked as if the R.I.C. had some information, as he had been in the house only ten minutes when it was surrounded. Morrison and his two brothers were also arrested that day.

It was feared that Begnal would be executed and plans were made for his escape. Finally it was decided that he would try to slip out under the guise of a Cumann na mBan girl. Members of the Cumann na mBan visited the prisoners each day at dinner time. On an arranged day Miss Leonard and Miss Fitzsimons came in with a basket of food. On their arrival a number of prisoners gathered around them, with Begnal in the centre of the circle. They covered him from view while he made a quick change

into ladies shoes and stockings, a coat and beret. Then, taking the basket on his arm, he walked out the gate without question. A bicycle was left lying ready for him outside, which he mounted and cycled away to freedom. At the change of guard a prisoner was missed. A roll call was ordered and one of the prisoners, Paddy Medly, answered for Begnal. This caused more confusion, but every delay assisted Begnal in getting out of the area.

His escape was near being foiled by a remark made unwittingly by a prisoner named Mick McGuire. Begnal was wearing top boots when arrested but discarded them when changing into the ladies shoes. The boots were taken back to his billet. McGuire was visited that day by his wife and Mrs. McDonnell. He was allowed to talk to his friends outside, which was a concession.

On his return to the billet and on seeing Begnal's boots, he called out, "Is Begnal gone?". Fortunately none of the guard heard the remark.

I was one of twelve prisoners transferred from Mullingar to Athlone. An incident happened during my sojourn there which I would like to record. A convoy of British troops was attacked outside Athlone where one soldier was badly wounded. The military dismounted and commenced a search for the attackers. Two men working in a field nearby ran away at the approach of the military. They were captured and badly beaten, then taken into Athlone barrack where they were attended by a doctor. Their heads were swathed in bandages and in that state they were brought down with eight other prisoners on an identification parade to the hospital where the wounded soldier lay. An officer was sitting at the head of the soldier's bed. He asked him could he identify the man that shot him. The soldier shook his head.

Sergeant Newcombe, Provost Sergeant, then stepped behind one of the bandaged men and placed his cane on his shoulder. The soldier then said that he thought he was one of the men. The same procedure was adopted with the second man. Both men were then removed to the cells. Two weeks later they were released. The British authorities were well aware that the men had no connection with the I.R.A. and had taken no part in the attack.

A short time afterwards a large scale round-up was carried out by the British forces from Athlone. A large number of men working in a bog near Clara were arrested and taken into Athlone barracks, where they were detained for a few weeks and then released.

I was on a draft for the Curragh Detention Camp, but due to an outbreak of scabies my transfer was held up until June. Prior to that time the first tunnel made by the prisoners in an attempt to escape had been discovered in the Rath Camp. On my arrival the military had just completed a six foot trench on three sides of the camp. In doing so they came upon the tunnel and packed it with barbed wire.

At this time the prisoners in the camps were organised in their own brigade areas. A prisoner named Brady, a miner from Arigna coal mines, was responsible for the working of the first tunnel. Three weeks after its discovery our camp staff decided to start on another tunnel. The new tunnel was to be cut across and connect with the first one beyond the barbed wire block. It was decided to make this tunnel much wider. The soil being of a sandy nature, bed boards were used to prop it so as to prevent a cave in.

At the same time Brady decided to start on yet another tunnel on his own initiative, working from a different angle. When both tunnels were near completion, the military started to erect a new compound for prisoners on the spot where the tunnel exit was arranged. The work on the tunnels continued; Brady's tunnel was completed three days before the main tunnel. By this time the military had a double wire barrier erected around the new compound and the place lighted. Some tents were also erected. Brady's party decided that they would not wait for the completion of the main tunnel but would make the attempt to escape on their own.

We had some prisoners in the camp at this time who were never members of the I.R.A. They had been picked up in raids from time to time and interned in the Curragh. They were not made aware of any attempt being made to escape. Somehow they got news of the existence of a tunnel and were roaming around looking for it. This made the guards suspicious. Extra sentries were posted and a picket covered the beat between each sentry box.

Joe Leonard was the first man to leave by the tunnel. His task was to bring a wire cutter and cut through the barbed wire barriers beyond the exit. He took a ball of twine and some wooden pegs with him. On reaching the exit he waited until he heard the sentry pass. He then drove a peg into the ground, to which he had tied one end of the twine, trailing it along until he reached the first wire barriers, which he managed to cut through unnoticed. Still trailing the twine, he reached the second wire barrier 15 yards further away and cut a gap in that. Using the twine as a guide in the dark, he made his way back and gave the all clear.

By following the twine the escaping prisoners had no difficulty in locating the gap in the barriers.

The prisoners now started to leave as opportunity offered. Each man had instructions to wait at the exit until he heard the sentry pass. A large number had made their escape by 3 a.m. At that time a prisoner, not a Volunteer, passed through. He left the tunnel just as the sentry was passing. The sentry shouted out, "Oh, Christ". Another sentry called out to know what was wrong. He shouted back, "There are Paddys coming out of the ground here like rabbits". The sentry had let his rifle fall at the first scare. Before he recovered it two more prisoners succeeded in escaping. That finished the attempt. The military spent four days in an effort to check the number and names of prisoners who had escaped. The prisoners left behind added to the confusion by giving wrong names and moving around from place to place, with the result that the military could not arrive at the same count at any attempt.

Jim Staines, a brother of Mick Staines, and Willie Keegan of Tullamore decided to make a bid for liberty one day. A lorry with some timber protruding over the back came into the camp one day. The driver realised that he was in the wrong camp. While he was turning to leave, Staines managed to hide under the timber and escaped. Keegan did not have time to conceal himself and failed in his attempt.

At a later date Vincent Staines and - Murphy from Dublin climbed into a swill cart and lay there while the swill was being emptied over them. A military corporal spotted them through a hole in the wooden hut,

The cart was taken to the trap between the two gates. The guard was turned out with fixed bayonets and ordered to prod the swill. Staines got four jabs of a bayonet before he shouted. They were pulled out and removed to Mountjoy prison.

Although tunnels were made before the Truce on the 11th July, 1921, none of the prisoners succeeded in escaping until after that date. I remember reading a report of a political meeting held after the Truce where a speaker congratulated the prisoners who escaped from the Curragh Internment Camp.

Some time after the first big break-out by the prisoners, another tunnel was commenced and almost completed when it was discovered through a prisoner breaking one of our camp rules in relation to the smuggling out of letters. Each prisoner had instructions that if it was very necessary to pass out a letter without being censored, he was to hand it to our Camp Commandant who had secret channels for getting it through. The prisoner referred to wrote to his friends at home and stated that he expected to be home inside of a week. He gave the letter to a soldier with whom he was friendly, to post. The soldier handed it to his C.O., who ordered a thorough search of the camp for the purpose of locating the tunnel. After a search which continued for 12 hours, the camp guards found the tunnel and closed it up.

A prisoner named Christopher Dunne from either Kildare or Offaly had been detailed to assist in the fumigation of blankets etc. each time the fumigator was brought into the camp. He had worked at the job on several occasions when suddenly it occurred to him that the fumigator might provide a means of escape. That evening,

when the work on fumigating was finished and the machine was about to be taken out of the camp, he hopped inside and escaped without detection.

The last attempt at making a tunnel was commenced at the corner of the last hut in A. line. The tunnel was sunk to go under the deep trench around the camp, under a block house and eventually under the outer wire barricade and came up in the floor of a horse stable outside. It was completed and men from each brigade detailed to make the attempt to escape. I was one of the men so detailed. A very heavy rainfall upset our plans. The rain flooded the trench; from there it soaked through and flooded the tunnel, rendering it impassable. After a week, and just when the tunnel was drying up, the camp guards carried out one of their periodical searches in the camp. They lifted all floor boards but found nothing. As they were replacing the boards in the hut, under which the entrance was located, they heard something fall underneath. This noise was caused by a gravel rake, which was used to rake the sand and clay over the tunnel mouth covering and was hidden along the floor joist, becoming dislodged. The floor was again lifted and this time the tunnel was discovered.

A general release of all prisoners in the camp was ordered to commence on the 6th December, 1921. Half the prisoners were released on that date and the remainder were freed on the following day. We were taken in lorries to the railway station at Kildare, and all prisoners from the Midlands and West of Ireland were sent by special train to Athlone. The reason for making Athlone our destination was to avoid too great an influx into Dublin on that single date.

On arrival in Athlone we boarded a train back to Mullingar, where men from Sligo, Leitrim and Longford got a train to their destinations. As we were about to board the train in Athlone en route to Mullingar, the engine driver - Joseph Daly - recognised me and insisted that I would take the green flag and act as guard to Mullingar. Daly's sister was a member of Cumann na mBan and a very enthusiastic worker. She subscribed what money she had saved - £20 or £30, I cannot remember which - towards the purchase of arms in the brigade. During my term as a prisoner in Athlone, I am aware that she sent in a load of turf each week and kept up the supply over a long period. The turf was the most useful thing we could receive as our supply of coal and cooking facilities were very restricted; sometimes it was lunch-time when the last of the breakfast was cooked. The turf supply enabled us to use extra fires and expedite the job of cooking.

We got a great welcome on our arrival home. I reported to my unit and found that there had been a great influx of Volunteers into the ranks of the I.R.A. after the Truce. Mullingar Company comprised about 200 all ranks. At the time of my arrest it would be difficult to muster forty men.

The Brigade O/C instructed me to organise the police force in my battalion in January, 1922. Things needed a bit of tightening up generally. There was a danger of a lawless element taking advantage of the situation then existing. I carried out these instructions. I provided a guard for the banks in the town. Four men were on continuous duty during bank opening hours. The banks contributed £6 per week to assist in paying the men

on duty. A number of reliable men were selected to do police duty at the various courts throughout the area.

This work was continued until the "Free State Army", as our army was then called, took over the military barracks in Mullingar from the British forces and relieved us of this duty and left us free to return to our various occupations in life and pick up the threads where we had left off at the commencement of our part in the fight for freedom from British rule in Ireland.

Signed: Michael Mc Coy

Date: 4th May 1957.

Witness: James Conway
(Investigator).

