

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1611

ROINN



COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1611.

Witness

Martin Conneely,
Knocknacanna,
Salthill,
Galway.

Identity.

Adjnt., West Connemara Brigade,
August 1920 - Truce.

Subject.

Leenane Battn., West Connemara Brigade, I.R.A.,
& Brigade Flying Column, 1914 - Truce 11.7.1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

File No .S. 2886.

Form B S M 2

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO' STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

NO. W.S. 1,611

STATEMENT BY MR. MARTIN CONNEELY

Knocknacarra, Salthill, CO. GALWAY

In the early part of 1914, George Nicolls, Solicitor, Galway, and Padraig O'Maille arrived in Leenane and, after addressing a meeting, formed the first company of Volunteers there. Along with 30 others who were present, I joined and received my first instructions in drill. I was 15½ years at the time.

Afterwards, instructions were given by T. Tormey, an ex-British army man, who travelled by cycle or sidecar from Westport - a distance of 20 miles - every Sunday for about two months. He was replaced by M. McDonnell from Tully, Renvyle, another ex-British army man, who came to work in Leenane.

P.J. McDonnell was company captain, M. Joyce, 1st Lieut. and J. Coyne, 2nd Lieutenant. Another company, which was formed in Kilmilken at the same time, fell through after a short period. This was responsible for a rival company to ours being formed in Leenane by Padraig O'Maille. I'm not quite clear as to what brought this about.

A few months afterwards, a meeting was held in Letterfrack, 12 miles from Leenane. Our company marched there and back. Padraig O'Maille used sidecars to convey his company, which was numerically much smaller than ours. Most of his company were herds and tenants of the Joyces' and O'Mailles' - a good many of them getting on in years. That, I think, was their last appearance in public. We continued on, doing the usual training - footdrill, route marches, etc. As we progressed we went on to arms drill; our rifles were wooden ones, made in the workshop of P.J. McDonnell, our O/C. Everything went well until the Redmondite split, when for one reason or another, the company dwindled to a mere handful. About this

time - end of 1914 - P.J. McDonnell organised a branch of the A.O.H. (Irish American Alliance). If I remember rightly, we were one of the few branches in Co. Galway, if not the only one. Because of this, we became affiliated to the Mayo Branches and paraded with them every St. Patrick's Day. Within the A.O.H. a branch of the Hibernian Rifles was formed and a lot of the Volunteers who had become A.O.H. members were merged into it and so became active again. Foot drill, rifle drill, night exercises, etc. were regularly held. Our usual meeting-place was the village of Glanaginla, two miles from Leenane. At this time we had a few shotguns which tended to make the exercises more interesting and realistic.

On 17th March 1916, 20 members left Leenane by sidecar to attend an A.O.H. rally in Westport. We were told that another party would be holding a meeting also that evening and that, when our meeting concluded and after leaving our banners at the Hall, we could attend it. On our way from the rally to the A.O.H. Hall, we saw the platform of the other meeting and on it was a man in Volunteer uniform. On seeing this, P.J. McDonnell wheeled our unit in front of the platform with the A.O.H. banner aloft. A lot of the Mayo units were taken by surprise at our action, but it was not long until they followed suit. The man addressing the meeting in Volunteer uniform was The O'Rahilly, who a few weeks later was killed in action in Dublin. It was the first time I saw a Volunteer uniform. The other man on the platform was Darrel Figgis. There were large numbers of R.I.C. drafted into Westport that day. Two of them from Leenane followed us to keep us under observation.

About the beginning of April 1916, a beautiful white yacht steamed up the Killary Bay, escorted by six British destroyers, seemingly under arrest. The narrow entrance to the

Bay was also guarded by a cruiser. The rumours at the time were that she was supposed to have left America on a world cruise before World War I started and knew nothing about it until accosted by British warships. Her papers were supposed to be in order. It was rumoured that Major John McBride was on board. Of this I cannot be certain, but I do know that someone from the yacht contacted Pdraig O'Maille and that he went on board. The name of the yacht was the "Sayonora". It remained in Killary Bay about four days. The escorting cruiser went direct to the Dardanelles and was sunk immediately on arrival there.

On Easter Sunday evening 1916, we were returning home from Glanagimla after drill, in small groups so as to avoid suspicion, when we saw two R.I.C. men on patrol carrying rifles. We did not know the reason until some time afterwards, as we had no intimation of what was going on elsewhere - in Connemara. We were more or less cut off from the rest of the country, although word was sent to us about the Rising, we never got it. It was only on the following Sunday that we knew what happened, when the R.I.C. had notices posted up to the effect that the Rebellion was over. As the A.O.H. (I.A.A.) was proclaimed in 1916, there was no further Volunteer activity until 1917, when P.J. McDonnell revived the Leenane Company again and, if I remember rightly, he organised and got other companies going in adjacent areas. These were later grouped together and formed into a battalion of the Galway Brigade with P.J. McDonnell as Battalion O/C. At this time, all Co. Galway was organised as a brigade with brigade headquarters in Galway City.

During the conscription scare, a great many young men came into the Volunteers, but it was only temporary; a lot fell away again when the scare was over. Raids for arms were

carried out in likely places, but the results were negligible, due, I think, to the fact that all weapons had to be handed in to the R.I.C. some time before. During this time also, republican courts were established in the area and, although they were slow to get functioning, they gradually got most of the work previously done by the Petty Sessions Court, due to there being only two R.I.C. barracks in Connemara - one in Clifden and the other in Maam.

Early in 1920, all small R.I.C. barracks were closed and the men transferred to other areas. All barracks vacated were burned by the Volunteers. Of the two remaining, Clifden held about 25 men and Maam 8 or 9 men.

As I mentioned earlier, our battalion was under Galway Brigade. Our O/C. went to the Brigade staff with plans for the capture of Maam Barracks. They did not agree with his proposal and also refused his request for material that would be necessary in making an assault on it. The Brigade staff also vetoed an arrangement he made with Westport Battalion for an attack on a barrack in that area in which some of us were to participate. They told him he was not to take part in any operation outside his own area.

In August or September 1920, Dick Mulcahy, Chief of Staff, came to stay in Tommy O'Malley's home in Kilmilken (4 miles from Leenane) to recuperate from an illness. His presence here was known only to his host and the battalion O/C. The O/C. discussed all his problems with him and made various suggestions for reorganising Connemara. When Mulcahy got back to Dublin he brought the matter before G.H.Q. The effect of this was that Connemara was to be divided into two brigades - West Connemara Brigade and East Connemara Brigade. We were to be the West Connemara Brigade. Pending sanction from G.H.Q., a meeting of all the principal officers of the area was called.

The meeting was held in Leenane about Nov. 1920. The area was divided into four battalions as follows:

No. 1	Battalion	Leenane	O/C. T. O'Malley
2		Rosmuck	O/C. Colm O'Gaora
3		Roundstone	" Jim King
4		Clifden	" Gerald Bartley

It was also at this meeting that the brigade staff was appointed. They were as follows: Brigade O/C. P.J. McDonnell; Brigade V.O/C. - John J. Connolly; Adjutant - M. Conneely (myself); Brigade Q.M. - J. Feehan.

Battalion O/Cs. were instructed to appoint their officers, organise their areas, get the companies active, raid for arms and, most important of all, get money collected so that we would be able to purchase arms to enable us to get a flying column started as quickly as possible. The collection amounted to £120, which the O/C. took to Dublin to get rifles, etc. He was only able to get two rifles and some ammunition. Some time later we got another small consignment.

During this period - I think it was the end of November 1920, the Brigade Vice O/C. Jack Connolly asked me to come with him to Maam Cross railway station to collect a crate of arms belonging to the West Mayo Brigade. The stationmaster - Mr. Kelly - was in our confidence and he was a very reliable man; hence it was that the stuff came through Maam Cross station, not alone for us but for the West Mayo Brigade. This particular crate that we went to collect was consigned to Leenane Hotel, where Jack Connolly worked as a driver-mechanic. He was an ex-British army man and was, as far as the police were concerned a loyal British subject, although, along with being brigade vice-O/C., he was also acting as brigade intelligence officer. When we arrived at the goods shed, the only persons to be seen were two R.I.C. men from Maam Barracks who were on duty. We saw our crate and it looked a bit too heavy for us to lift into the back of the car. Jack said to me: "I think I'll ask

the two boys to give us a lift". We walked in, the two policemen left aside their rifles and hoisted the crate into the car with us.

Our plans were to return by the Recess road to avoid going through Leenane; we were to hide the crate in an old disused fish-house, about two miles from the village on the Leenane-Recess road. The R.I.C. men, who knew John well, asked him if he would give them a lift as far as the barracks (four miles). We had no other option; they got into the car and sat on the crate. We were worried, as we thought it might be a ruse to get us to the barracks with the arms. How relieved we were when they got off near the barracks and said goodbye!

After the second lot of arms arrived for us, which I believe was only a small lot, I sent out dispatches notifying the battalion O/Cs. that a Brigade Council meeting was to be held in the home of Padraig O'Maille, Mounterown. The whole position re arms, formation of a flying column, the number of men required from each battalion, etc. was discussed. Eventually, it was decided that a column of twenty men was the most we could put under arms and be badly armed at that, considering we had only 4 magazine rifles, 2 or 3 Martini Henry carbines, a few revolvers, mostly old type, and practically obsolete, and some shotguns.

It was on 10th March 1921, that the column was mobilised at a place called Aille-na-veagh in the Twelve Pins, about six or seven miles east of Clifden. There was an old derelict house there which we decided to make habitable. Jack Feehan, the brigade Q.M., got three men from Letterfrack to do the job. The men were: Patrick Conneely, O/C. Letterfrack Company (a carpenter), Val Conneely, 1st Lieutenant. and Stephen Coyne, brigade police officer. They had to carry timber etc. several miles over the mountain to do the repairs. This site was selected because it was within easy reach of Clifden,

and both roads leading to it were - Recess Road on the south and Leenane Road on the north. Ambush positions were manned during the day and the men travelled three or four miles over mountains to take up positions on the off-chance that the enemy patrol might come along.

Training in the use of rifles was carried out in the camp. This was very necessary, as most of the men never handled a rifle previously. As there seemed no likelihood of a patrol appearing, it was decided to enter Clifden and attack a town patrol which, according to the information we received, was usually from four to six men.

The attacking party was picked and of necessity it had to be limited to those who were most familiar in the use of arms. It was also essential to have as many men as possible in it who knew Clifden and surrounding district. The attack went as planned, except that only two R.I.C. were contacted, instead of the usual four to six. The two policemen were killed and their arms captured, 1 rifle and 2 Webley revolvers. A section under Jim King, O/C. Roundstone, kept the barrack under cover and opened fire when the attack on the patrol began. The column returned safely to camp.

The next evening, Tans and Auxiliaries arrived from Galway and began reprisals on the town and the inhabitants. One civilian was killed and several had narrow escapes. Thirteen houses were burned that night.

As there was no reasonable chance of a future attack in this quarter owing to enemy reinforcements having been drafted into Clifden and not having sufficient arms, it was decided to move the column to Mounterown, the home of Padraig O'Maille, three miles from Leenane. About four or five miles to the east of Mounterown, there was a police barracks. It stood about 500 yards to the south of Maam village, a big old-type square building with no house or other building close to it,

no trees or shrubbery close enough to give cover to an attacking party. All the windows were covered with heavy steel loop-holed shutters and a steel door inside the entrance door. There were also barbed wire entanglements surrounding the barracks.

Talks were held and plans discussed, but it had to be shelved owing to insufficient material, particularly explosives, which were essential.

Whilst at Mounterown, I got permission to go home for a few days. The first morning there, I heard lorries approaching from Clifden direction. I got dressed quickly as I heard them slow down. There was a man staying in the house at the time who was acting as temporary postman in Leenane. He was Patk. Flaherty from Lettergesh, Renvyle, who from the very early days was an active Volunteer. He was known to everyone as "Slippy". The military came in, searched every place, questioned us and told the two of us to accompany them to Leenane for identification. The policeman who identified me was stationed in Leenane a few years previously. I think his name was Leahy. He told the officer in charge that I was all right and I was let go. I was not long in making my departure.

In the meantime, the O/C. and Gerald Bartley visited Rosmuck area to see the battalion O/C. - Colm O'Gaora, who was ill at the time, suffering from a paralysis of the face, - to find out about police patrol movements in that area. From the information the O/C. received from Colm, he decided to move the column to Rosmuck battalion area right away, as there was a good chance of contacting a police patrol. It was at that particular time that I was at home and, as the column had to move off hurriedly, I was not able to be with it. Needless to say, I was disappointed. The men were placed in ambush position at Screebe, about five miles south of Maam Cross. After some waiting, the expected patrol appeared. Definite

orders were given by the O/C. and, despite all precautions, a shot was fired prematurely by one of the column, as a result of which three of the R.I.C. got away. The two leading men were got - one was injured - and their arms captured - one Lee Enfield rifle and two Webley revolvers. This attack took place on 10th April 1921.

We made our H.Q. at Padraig O'Maille's house in Mounterown. It faced north on to the Leenane-Maam road and stood back on a height about 250-300 yards from the road, with the Raoghe Mountain on the right and Leigh valley at the back, but hidden from view. On the left, a wide expanse of bog and moorland gave a clear view for several miles towards Maam. On the right, there was a clear view of the road towards Leenane for about two miles. All those advantages made the house eminently suitable as a headquarters.

Firing positions were laid out around the house and on the cliff at the rear. In the event of an attack, we all knew where to take up our allotted positions. Owing to our nearness to Maam Barracks, a guard was mounted every night and changed every two hours. This was necessary in case of a surprise raid at night.

During the day, we occupied our time in training, a lot of which we did in the Leigh Valley - foot drill, rifle practice etc. We had a .22 rifle and a fairly good supply of ammunition for it.

One of the column, Willie Conneely, was accidentally wounded about this time. He had a Bulldog revolver which he usually carried in his breast pocket and, one day as he was stooping down to get some turf for the fire, it fell out, the hammer hit the floor and fired the bullet; it entered his leg in front and came out through the calf at back without touching the bone. Dr. O'Brien, Leenane, who was brigade medical officer attended him and in less than a week he was able to move about again. He was lucky, because a few days later we were in action

On the night of 22nd April I was one of the guard on duty. My turn on sentry duty was from 1 to 3 a.m. We went out in pairs - I cannot remember who my companion was, but I remember being relieved by Mick Conroy and another man. When I went in I had something to eat, then lay down for a sleep, but I didn't have my nap, for the officer of the guard who, I think, was Jim King, told us to get up and get to our positions. Mick Conroy, who was on sentry duty, thought he saw some dark objects on the road. He immediately notified the officer of the guard and the O/C. The O/C. went out to investigate and, although it was not quite daylight, he had no difficulty in identifying the 'dark objects' as police. When he returned, he gave us all last minute instructions and one particular order, the importance of which he stressed, was that on no account was any shot to be fired until the police had crossed the stepping stones and got on to the path which led to the house. Those stones were used as a means of crossing the river on foot; since then a bridge has been erected there.

We then moved to our pre-arranged positions which ran from right to left of the house. We had a commanding position over this path which offered little or no cover for the enemy; consequently, it meant that the fight should be over in a short time. The arrangement was to let the police approach the house and, at a given signal, fire was to be opened. But this was not to be. While the main body of R.I.C. was assembling on the road, a small party of three or four began to negotiate the stepping stones. At that particular moment a shot rang out, I imagine it was accidentally fired by one of the R.I.C. Then, almost immediately, another shot rang out on my right. It came from one of the column, whether it was accidental or not I don't know; certainly it changed the whole position; what should have been a fight of probably half an hour could now last

for hours. Actually, it was 13½ or 14 hours after when all was over. All the men in that section were queried afterwards, but no one admitted firing, although the man who fired the shot at Screebe was strongly suspected.

Immediately the shot was fired, all the enemy dashed for cover, some into the ditch on the roadside; others into the river bed and behind a sod fence which ran parallel with the road. Another group took cover on the north side of the road in a dried-up stream which ran between two hillocks. In all, they had perfect cover. We could not get near enough to dislodge them as the intervening ground was devoid of all cover. Actually, during the fight, the O/C. decided to try if it would be possible to get close enough to dislodge them. He took Volunteer Tommy Coyne with him at great personal risk to get quite close to the police, but as there was no further cover between where they were and the police, they decided it would be suicide to go any further. In going there and returning they were under fire from one of the police, but between running from cover to cover and crawling, they managed to get back unscathed.

Now that the police were 'dug-in' they could hold out for a long time; also, there was the possibility that other parties might be crossing the mountain and get us in the rear. The O/C. anticipated this. I heard him tell John Dundass, Adjutant, Roundstone Battalion, what was worrying him and, without the slightest hesitation, John, who was a fearless and brave soldier, started to climb the hill at the rear of the house just behind us. During this time, the police were concentrating their fire on the house, as they believed we were in it, but when they spotted John Dundass racing up the hillside, they turned their fire on him. I can still see him forging ahead with a shotgun in his hand and a haversack on

his back. I saw him when he reached the brow of the hill and silhouetted against the sky, turning around, putting his thumb to his nose in mock salute; How he reached the top of the hill - a distance of 150-200 yards - without being hit, I don't know! considering that most of the police were firing at him.

During this time, Miss Jane O'Maille, Mrs. Eamon O'Maille and her two children were in the house. As police fire intensified, they had to get out as the place was becoming untenable. They found refuge in an outhouse at the back and, by some means or other, were able to get a fire lighted and a kettle boiled. They then managed to send us out tea, bread and butter, which we appreciated.

As I mentioned earlier, there was no cover between us and the police and therefore, from the positions we were occupying, there was no possibility of dislodging them, so the O/C. decided to send four men with rifles to the north side to see what the chances were of attacking them from the rear. He sent Gerald Bartley and Dick Joyce to the right and Jack Feehan and Jim King to the left. Both of those parties had to make a wide detour under scant cover in order to reach their objectives.

In the meantime, a car travelling from Leenane going towards Maam, and driven by Frank Joyce of Leenane, passed through the ambush area. Seemingly, he didn't expect anything, probably due to a lull in the firing, until it was too late. As he was passing through, one of the R.I.C. who was in a ditch on the roadside jumped on to the running board of the car, held a revolver to Frank's head; telling him to drive "all out". Gerald Bartley and Dick Joyce had just crossed the road further on and saw what had happened. They immediately opened fire and I believe the policeman was hit on the wrist; the windscreen was also smashed. On arrival at Maam Post Office, he sent a

message through to Galway for reinforcements. Shortly after this, a horse and cart, driven by Johnny Coyne of Leenane, passed through the ambush, the cart was loaded with empty two-gallon petrol tins for Maam Cross station. He was very lucky to get through as, apparently, he came in the line of fire before he realised it, then decided his best plan was to get the horse into a gallop and get through as fast as he could. At least 13 or 14 cans were pierced with bullets. He ran the horse into the first yard he came to, left it there without unharnessing it and returned to Leenane by crossing over the mountains.

The column during this period was keeping up a desultory fire on the enemy, only on odd occasions was there a visible target, when the R.I.C. sometimes tried to move to other positions. They nearly all had to remain in their original places and kept pinned down due to the accuracy of our riflemen. Several of the police were standing or kneeling in water or damp, unable to move, and had to remain so until their reinforcements arrived late in the evening. They then had to be carried to the lorries.

A beggar-man came along the Maam road and, despite warning shots fired in his direction, he kept going to where the police were. They hailed him and apparently told him to get the priest from Leenane to attend their wounded. About three-quarters of an hour later, a car came from the Leenane direction and halted about 200 yards from the ambush area. A tall man dressed in black got out. Previous to this, the column was extended along the mountain side to our left under cover of fences etc. At the same time, the day was becoming misty. It was then that the car from Leenane came along and stopped at a point opposite to where Christy Breen - a rifleman was in position. He saw a figure in black get out of the car and, due to the visibility and being 600-700 yards away,

he took him to be a policeman. He put his rifle to his shoulder and fired. His shot must have been very close, as his target dived into a ditch on the roadside. The 'policeman' was Father Cunningham of Leenane coming to the ambush in response to the message sent by the R.I.C. The similarity between him and a policeman was that he was wearing his soutane which, at that distance and bad light, would resemble an R.I.C. man wearing his overcoat. I saw him myself and certainly would have taken him to be a policeman. The driver of the car was our Brigade Vice O/C. Jack Connolly, who also had to take cover in the ditch. They had to remain there until the reinforcements arrived from Galway about 2-2½ hours later. As Fr. Cunningham got out of the car, he threw his rug over the back door. Christy, on seeing this black object, thought it was another policeman in the back of the car and fired four or five more shots. His marksmanship must have been very good as three bullets hit the hood sticks and only a few inches apart. Fr. Cunningham, naturally, was very annoyed at being fired at, but when it was explained to him a day or so later, he took it all in good part.

Perhaps it is well to note here that he was not in the 'good books' of the police, due, as far as I can remember, to an incident which occurred near Headford six or seven months previously when he was fired on by Black and Tans and taken into custody for about a week. When the reinforcements arrived in Mounterown, he was personally complimented by Divisional Inspector Cruise (who was in charge) for having risked his life in coming to attend the wounded R.I.C.

About 3.30, the reinforcements arrived from Galway. The O/C., who was keeping the Maam road under observation with binoculars, saw them coming about five miles away. This gave us ample time to get further up the hill, so that, if necessary, we could put up a running fight. In all, there were 10 or 11

lorries and an armoured car. A few of the lorries and the armoured car came straight on to the ambush area, the remainder stopped short about three-quarters of a mile. The latter alighted and proceeded in extended formation towards the house. From the road in front, the armoured car directed machine gun fire on the house while the attacking party moved closer in. They then threw grenades in and entered the house. To their great surprise they found the house empty. They took the two women and two children into custody, who, during all the bombardment, had been sheltering in an outhouse at the back. Afterwards, they were taken to Leenane and released.

The police and military then proceeded to loot the house, taking anything worth while to their lorries. Piling up mattresses, bedding, clothes, etc., they sprinkled them with petrol or paraffin, set them on fire and burned the house and outoffices. A few more lorries of reinforcements arrived from Clifden about this time. They waited until the fire had taken a firm hold and then departed. I am not too certain regarding enemy casualties; definitely, one R.I.C. man (Boylan) was killed and three or four wounded. Rumours at the time put the numbers much higher. The whole operation lasted about 13 hours.

After the enemy departed, we then proceeded to Cuillaghmore, a village on the Leenane side of Mounterown, where we had something to eat. After we were refreshed, we retraced our steps towards Mounterown, crossed over north to a village near Loughnafoeey. We spent a few days there, where we were well looked after by the people. One evening, while we were there, one of the villagers came to the O/C. and told him there were lorries approaching from the Ballinrobe direction towards the village. We got out and proceeded further up the hill and waited. We thought they might halt at the village,

but no, they continued on their way. We were thankful they did, because most of the ammunition the column possessed had been used in the ^{Mounterown} ~~Serieb~~ attack and the small amount we had would be useless against such a strong force.

We moved from here a few days later and crossed over the mountain to Luggerie, , a small valley at the back of Bengorm, about $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles from Leenane on the Mayo side of Killary Harbour. The bay at this point is very narrow - about 200 yards across. The Brigade Vice O/C. procured a small marquee from Mr. McKeown, Leenane Hotel. This had arrived when we got there, but was not erected because the poles were missing. However, we did not mind sleeping in the open as the weather at the time was warm. The following night, the O/C. went to his workshop in Leenane and got some spars to erect the tent. He was accompanied by P. Wallace. The following night the O/C. went to Leenane again and I was with him. It was late when we left the camp. After visiting the workshop, he called to see his sister (Mrs. Cuffe) on business. I stayed on the bridge about 30 yards away keeping watch. We left about 1.30 a.m. and arrived back in camp about 2.30 a.m.

At daybreak, someone came and told the O/C. that his house and workshop was on fire. We all got out and got to the brow of the hill where we saw flames and smoke shooting up to the sky from the burning buildings. I believe that in or about the time we were leaving the village a few hours earlier, two cyclists came along from Clifden direction and were dressed in clothes similar to those worn by ordinary working men from around the place. They went to Mr. Gaynor's publichouse and knocked on the door. When he opened the door for them, they asked if he knew where Peter McDonnell was or any of the column as they had a message for him. Mr. Gaynor did not know and was not able to give any information regarding our whereabouts.

The two cyclists were R.I.C. men who came in advance of three lorries of police which had halted a few miles from Leenane and who later came in, burned the O/C's. house and workshop.

During our stay in the camp we were well supplied with provisions, cigarettes and tobacco by Mrs. Cuffe. Both she and her sisters played an important part in the national movement in Connemara and often, at great personal risk and inconvenience, brought dispatches, food or some important message to the column. I've known Margaret (nee McDonnell) (the late Mrs. Feehan) to travel 8-10 miles over country roads in the middle of the night with information or dispatches for us.

While in the camp, we expressed a desire to go to Confession and receive Holy Communion. The O/C. arranged with Fr. Cunningham to come to the house of Ml. Wallace, which was just across the narrow inlet of the bay that I mentioned earlier. His house was always at our disposal and was used as a depot for receiving food, messages, etc., while we were in the area. He had two sons in the column - Peter and Patrick. Next night, Fr. Cunningham came at midnight. We all got Confession and received Holy Communion. Peter Wallace and another man then ferried the priest across the narrow channel and escorted him to Leenane. He just got home in time, because 10 minutes or so after he extinguished his light, there was a rat-tat-tat on the door. A round-up on a huge scale by military and police had begun.

At Ml. Wallace's house, after the priest left, we all had a good meal. As accommodation was limited, we had to await our turn to get served. As each group finished their meal, they set off for the camp. I had finished my meal and was about to move off along with Colm O'Gaora and Jim King, when someone came in and said there were a lot of lights on the Westport road, just past Ansleigh, about $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles from where

we were. The O/C. - Jack Feehan - and a few others were having their meal at the time. We all went outside and I remember seeing a long string of lights stretching for over a mile. The lights were stationary, but, a little later, were all extinguished; then we heard the hum of the engines as they began to move off. The road we were on is three-quarters of a mile from Ansláigh where it joins the Leenane-Westport Road. I'd imagine we were all thinking the same thing at the same time - which road would they take when they came to the junction? To our great relief, we saw them taking the Leenane road.

Colm O'Gaora, Jim King and myself moved off; it was getting bright then, but not full daylight. We could see the long winding string of lorries as they moved along, with an armoured car in front. We kept going ahead, using whatever bit of cover that was available; we were not able to hurry because Colm was a sick man and unable to move quickly. We had only gone about 300 yards when we heard the lorries stopping; we looked back and saw the armoured car halted directly opposite Wallace's house which would be about 350 yards across from us as the crow flies. We immediately came to the conclusion that they had spotted some members of the column. However, that was not so. We found out afterwards that, in passing over a small culvert in the road, the armoured car sank and stopped. The activity we noticed was the men getting out of the lorries to try and lift or move the armoured car. They succeeded in getting it out and after being held up for about three quarters of an hour proceeded on their way to Leenane. I often wondered why we were not seen that morning as at times we were quite exposed owing to scarcity of cover. Even though Colm was a sick man, he was in the best of humour, having a 'dig' at Jim King every now and again. Once he whispered to me to tell Jim that the

place around us was supposed to be haunted, that 'fairies' were seen there. I told Jim in all seriousness - I know he didn't believe me, but Colm got a great kick out of it. This was the way he felt, in spite of the fact that the enemy was within 'hailing distance'. Years after, whenever I met Colm, he spoke about Jim and the fairies. Colm O'Gaora and Jim King went to a little 'dugout' nearby and I continued on to the camp.

The military began operations by spreading out over a wide area and arresting all men between 16 or 17 and 60 years, taking them to Maam Barracks to be identified by police who had been, at some time or other, stationed in the district.

Another group of military spread out from Maam Cross to Recess and began a search of the mountains from that side and continued over the hills until they met the military who started from the Leenane side. That meant that they combed all the mountain area between the Maam Cross-Recess Road on one side and the Maam to Kylemore road on the other side. A strange feature of this operation was that not one house on the opposite side of the road was searched. They also had a plane which they apparently used for 'spotting' and giving details of the search to Maam Barracks, by dropping messages. Although they deployed between 1000-1500 troops in this 'round-up', they did not detain a single man. Actually they took in one of the column - Willie King - who had gone home for a few days to help his uncle. Although recognised by some of the police, they were not able to connect him with the column. Nevertheless, they were in doubt and tried to make him talk by using 'third degree' methods. They beat him with rifle butts, kicked him and threw him into the water. He had an injured ankle for a long time afterwards.

All during the time this 'round-up' was in progress we were on the Mayo side of the bay. I was on the top of

Guard Hill (2500 ft) and, as I had a telescope, I had a good view of the opposite mountains and saw a good deal of what was happening. We were safe enough as far as the military were concerned; our only danger was the plane, which at times skimmed quite close to the mountain tops. Jim King was with me and when it came near we had to lie close to a big rock as cover was scant just where we were.

A short time after this round up, the column was split up; part of it, I think, went to the Clifden area under Gerald Bartley as O/C. The remainder of us stayed in the Leenane area. We abandoned camp in Bengorm and crossed north over the hills towards Doolough. We billeted for a few days in Glanumera - a valley about one mile from Doolough. From there we went to the Muilrea Mountains to a place called Glancaileach na nGabher, where we stayed in the house of Ml. Burke who sheltered us and made us welcome. We moved about from place to place for a couple of weeks. One of the places I went to was Glanlosh - a valley to the back of Mounterown. We stayed a few nights in Kane's - one of the three houses in the valley. On the south side is the Maam Turk Mountain, a steep hill about 2000 feet high which, to look up at, seemed impossible to climb, yet, about halfway up, Pdraig O'Maille had his hideout which he had constructed about two years previously. Getting to it for the first time, it was necessary to have a guide. Johnsy King and myself slept in it a few nights. It was quite roomy and comfortable inside. The roof was of galvanised iron, camouflaged on top with stones, grass and heather to make it look like part of the landscape.

In the last week of June, I was not feeling well and decided to go home for a few days, even though I was taking a chance in doing so. My home was about one mile west of Leenane and about 60 or 70 yards off the road which ran along side the Killary Bay. I was at home only a few days when the

second big search by military and police took place. The O/C and part of the column were in and around the village of Bundurragha at the time, but luckily he received information the night before and was able to move the men across the bay in boats to Derrynasliggan on the south side.

Next morning a plane arrived scouting along Killary and then turned north into the Mayo Mountains. Two destroyers entered the bay and disembarked troops along the Mayo side. All boats and currachs on both sides of the bay were collected and tied on behind one of the destroyers. She steamed up the bay and anchored directly opposite my house with her flotilla of boats and currachs. I saw sailors slide a curragh into the water and, when they began to row, it spun around, first one way and then the other. Eventually, after a good many tries, they got it out to the destroyer. This search was directed against the Mayo column; as in the previous big round-up, no one was captured.

About three days after this search, I had to go to bed and sent for Dr. O'Brien. He informed me that my temperature was 103-5. In coming to see me, he took every precaution, never attempting to enter the house if anyone was in sight. Next morning three lorries of police came along from Leenane, and as they were about to round a bend near the house I heard brakes being applied quickly and the lorries pull up. Sick as I was, I got up and got out, and under cover of walls, etc., I got to a point about 200 yards from the house. There, on a mattress brought to me, I stayed until evening. Luckily the day was warm and sunny. Later I found out that it was a donkey and cart coming around the bend that compelled the lorries to pull up quickly.

Next day Dr. O'Brien called again and my temperature was still the same. When I told him what I did the previous day, he would hardly believe me. I began to get better quickly and decided to move out to a little hide-out up on the mountainside about a mile from the house. I believe it was used in the penal days by some wanted person. It was called Scealp a Chogah. You had to crawl in, but once inside it was dry and comfortable. What prompted me to move into this hide-out was that a party of about 50 Auxiliaries took up quarters in Leenane Hotel. They were there less than a week when the Truce was declared. The evening before, July 10th, a courier arrived from Dublin. He wanted to see Jack Connolly, Vice O/C, who later brought him to the Bde. O/C. He was the bearer of the official Truce notice. When he arrived at the hotel that evening, he was confronted immediately by the officer in charge of the Auxies, who apparently recognised him. The courier produced his identity cards and told him the purpose of his mission, so that was that.

Next morning they left Leenane and were apparently in good humour, singing and laughing as they passed through the village, and so ended another chapter in the fight for freedom.

Although the part we played in it was small in comparison with other areas, yet when you consider the country we had to operate in, the equipment at our disposal and the absence of enemy patrols - I think we did very well, if it was only the part we played in drawing large enemy forces from other areas in which they were constantly harassing the I.R.A.

If, in the beginning, we had been able to get sufficient arms from G.H.Q. to equip a column of 25-30 men,

the position would have been different. We had plenty of good men, willing and anxious to fight, who would render a good account of themselves comparable with the best in the country.

Before concluding this statement, I would like to pay a tribute to P.J. McDonnell, Bde. O/C and Column Commander, for his untiring efforts from early 1914 onwards in the fight for freedom. It was he who fostered, organised and, to a great extent on his own, kept the national movement going in West Connemara. Although principally concerned with the Volunteers and later with the I.R.A., that did not prevent him from playing his part in other spheres of national concern. It was due to him and men of his calibre that the I.R.A. became the powerful and well organised army that it was, and which compelled England to negotiate for a Truce in July, 1921.

The following are the men who were members of the column. Some are still happily with us, others are scattered in foreign lands, and some are gone to their last resting place, R.I.P.

Peter J. McDonnell - O/C Bgde. & O/C Column.
 Martin Conneely (myself); Brigade Adjutant.
 John Feehan - " Q/M.

1st Battn. (Leenane).

Thomas Coyne
 Johnny King
 William King
 Patrick Wallace
 Peter Wallace
 Richard Joyce
 Patrick Keane.

2nd Battalion (Rosmuc)

Colm O Gaora - O/C 2nd Battalion.
George Staunton- Vice O/C 2nd Battn.

3rd Battalion (Roundstone)

James King
Michael Conroy
John Dundas
John King
John Conneely
Denis Keane
Stephen Mannion.

4th Battalion (Clifden).

Gerald Bartley - O/C 4th Battalion.
Paul Bartley
James Madden
Christy Breen
William Conneely.

Signed:

Martin Conneely

Date:

2nd May 1957

Witness:

Sean Brennan Lieut- Col.

(Investigator).

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1.611