

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1.650

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1650.

Witness

Patrick O'Reilly,
Bellair,
Moynalty,
Co. Meath.

Identity.

Capt., Moynalty Company;
Vice Comdt., Kells Battn.

Subject.

Moynalty Company, Irish Volunteers,
Meath Brigade, 1913-21.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

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STATEMENT OF PATRICK O'REILLY,

Bellair, Moynalty, Co. Meath.

I was five years of age in 1900, when the Boer War was raging. My recollections of the period are very vivid. The neighbours around who gathered at our house in the evenings discussed with vigour the pros and cons of the war. All were in favour of the Boers and had the greatest contempt for the British. The weekly papers, giving details of the fighting, would be read and re-read several times. In all these discussions, we youngsters became familiar with such names as Kruger, De Wet, Cronje. Horses and dogs were named after those heroes. We also heard stories of the famine, of Parnell and Davitt and of the landlords who rack-rented the people and spent their hard earned money across the water in England and France on wild orgies of drinking and immorality.

The people around this time were mere slaves and it was the habit of the tenants' wives and labourers' wives to bend the knee to those monsters of landlords whenever they met them on the road. If the tenant improved his miserable holding, the rent would at once be raised. I remember on one occasion, when my father was going to pay the rent on gale day, saying to him "Daddy, you have your old clothes on". He replied "Sure avick, if I put on my good clothes the landlord would raise the rent on me."

The hours of workmen were from 6 o'clock in the morning until 6 o'clock in the evening and the wages 7/- per week. Boys were paid eight pence per day. I myself worked for that princely sum in the years 1908 and 1909. There were no motor cars and very few bicycles in the country at the time. No telephones, wireless or

aeroplanes. Very few people owned a horse or even a donkey. The ordinary tenant or labourer was forbidden to cross or trespass on the landlord's land as the following will testify:-

The poet Tevlin from Billywood, was caught by a henchman of one of those landlords - Chandlo~~r~~ - snaring a hare. He was brought before the magistrates in Moynalty Courthouse and was fined £3. or a month in jail. Asked if he had anything to say, he replied "I'll pay no fine, send me to jail if you like. The crafty fox and the timid hare by tyrants are protected. The face of man they can't endure. God's likeness is rejected."

If a man's dog happened to stray on to the land, he was shot instantly, and no week passed without some poor man's dog being shot gleefully by the henchmen of those tyrants. We heard stories of the Fenians and of all the great deeds done by them. The remnants of Parnell's Party were gradually coming together again after their disastrous split. They were good earnest men who were doing their best for the poor people under the most adverse conditions. In our parish we had such men, among them being Pat Carpenter, Tom Kearney, M. Gilsenan, G. O'Connor, Pat Morris, M. O'Brien and, previous to 1900, we had the great Rev. Father Mullen, P.P., and the Rev. Father Gallagher, C.C. Were it not for those last two, the people would have given up in despair. They fought the battles of the people, marched with them to the meeting places and defied the British Military when the meetings were proclaimed.

In the pay-no-rent-campaign, hundreds of the persons' stock were seized and those tenants who had no stock which could be seized were evicted from their homes and had to take the

immigrant ship after which their lands were given to 'shoneens' and old retainers.

We were told stories of The United Irishmen, of Henry Joe McCracken, Wolfe Tone and Robert Emmett. We were taught the songs about those men, such as "Bold Robert Emmett", "The Grave of Wolfe Tone", "The Dawning of the Day", "Fontenoy", "Rising of the Moon", "Boys of Wexford", "Ninety Eight" and "The Bard of Armagh".

There was an R.I.C. barracks in every town and village in the county and one every few miles of the road. There were plenty of 'shoneens' and old retainers to keep the police well supplied with the necessary information, false or otherwise. So it can be seen that John Bull was well planted in the country at the close of the last century and early years of the present one.

But thank God, through the hard work of the priests and people, not forgetting a good few bishops and national leaders, the dark clouds were beginning to show a little silver lining. The great Pope Leo XIII. had issued an Encyclical, his famous "Rerum Novarum"; or The Workingman's Charter. Acts were passed in the British House of Commons whereby a tenant could purchase his holding from the landlord at so many years' purchase; the money to be paid as an annuity including both principal and interest. Thousands of tenants all over the country took advantage of those acts, the best of which was the Wyndham Act. Then came the Labourers' Act about 1907, by which an agricultural labourer was given a cottage and a half-acre of land, later increased to one acre. Previously a labourer had only a small patch of garden for which he had to pay his boss with so many free days in the Harvest.

In 1908, the Old Age Pension Act was introduced, granting 5/- per week to a worker at the age of 70 years. The granting of The Old Age Pension kept many a poor man and woman from going to the hated Workhouse.

About this time the Irish Labour Party found its way into country districts where branches were formed. They succeeded in having working hours shortened from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. ^{to 7 A.M. to 6 P.M.} and later ~~to~~ 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Wages were also improved from 7/- per week to 10/- per week and later advanced to 12/- per week. By then a few employers, of their own free will, had already reduced working hours and increased wages.

We now come to a more militant side of the picture. It was the agitation for the division of the ranches led by Larry Ginnell, M.P., the man who refused to take off his hat in the House of Commons and succeeded one way or another in persisting in his refusal. The battle cry adopted was "The land for the people and the bullock for the road". Meetings were held on some of the ranches or convenient thereto. Inflammatory speeches were made at those meetings and, before the R.I.C. or landlords knew, thousands of cattle were driven off the lands at night, sometimes for a distance of from ten to twenty miles and left roaming through the countryside for days. There were arrests and prosecutions and hundreds of young men were flung into jail. As usual, the R.I.C. had the assistance of the 'shoneens' and hangers-on. Men called 'Emergency Men' were recruited to guard the farms and give information. Gradually the will of the people prevailed and the lands were divided among evicted tenants and uneconomic holders. Lands which had been held for centuries by those scoundrels of the British Plantation were now the scene of many happy homes.

Thanks to Larry Ginnell and his gallant comrades. With all this came the hope that our country's wrongs would be righted at last, and that the anguish, tears, sneers and coldness would be forgotten and buried with the past.

Then followed a great turning point in Irish History - The Tramway Strike in Dublin 1913. Before this the workers were not properly organised and now they had to face one of the greatest capitalist firms in the land, namely Martin Murphy & Co., Ltd., who were also the owners of Independent Newspapers Ltd. Workers were treated as slaves in those days but they had been organised by Jim Larkin and James Connolly. One of the most bitter strikes ^{was} ~~was~~ carried out ^{and} which lasted several months ~~and~~ was carried to a successful conclusion. I was working in Scotland at the time in Nobel's Dynamite Works and through our Union we paid sixpence each per week to the strike fund in Dublin. Tom Mann was our leader in Scotland and I remember him quoting Jim Larkin when we were going on strike ourselves. He quoted, "Stand up on your hind legs and fight the capitalists, don't let your children starve any longer."

It was as a result of all those small improvements that the Nation was just beginning to feel in a more or less independent mood, and was getting ready, as it were, for the more strenuous days that lay ahead. It is not easy to be independent or to carry on a grim fight without food or finance. The people were now getting a little of both. And so it was when the great war broke out in August, 1914. Quite a large number of young men now began taking notice of Arthur Griffith's Sinn Féin policy. They had got sick and tired of the ^{Irish} ~~Irish~~ Nationalist Party. The Home

Rule Bill had been shelved and Redmond and his party, from platforms all over the country, were asking the youth of Ireland to join the British Army to fight for the rights of small nationalities. We had recruiting meetings in every village attended by bands and banners. Even some of the clergy, but very few I must say, were speaking from these platforms. We had the spectacle of a British colonel, in our own area, advising the youth - in fact, commanding them - to "join up". But the irony of it all was that he himself had never been under fire in his life, and he afterwards took good care not to be involved in the 1914-'18 war either.

I expect the history of Sir Edward Carson's defiance of the British Government, subsequent to the introduction of the Home Rule Bill in the Commons, has already been recorded, and how he organised the Ulster Volunteers and armed them; also his famous or infamous speech "Ulster will fight and Ulster will be right". The Irish National Volunteers had been organised about the same time, but it soon became evident to most of us that they were being trained for the British Army and that it was only a matter of time until there would be a split in the ranks.

In a few months after the start of the war the split came. Young men in the local Company of Moynalty and throughout County Meath ceased to have any connection with the Irish National Volunteers and formed themselves into independent units which became known as 'The Irish Volunteers.' After a short time the Irish National Volunteers ceased to function and eventually ceased to exist. Now I am not blaming those who adhered to Redmond's Party; most of them thought they were right and there were many

honest and patriotic men amongst them. We of the younger generation had been imbued with the ideals of Pearse and Griffith and they could not see our side of the question, but their eyes were to be opened sooner than they expected.

Throughout this period the R.I.C. looked on and attended the recruiting meetings, some of them encouraging the young men to join the British Army: others, with fears of losing their jobs as they thought that some kind of a home militia or home guard would be formed to displace them. But that had passed off with the breaking up of the Irish National Volunteers. In the case of the Irish Volunteers it was a different story. Ninety per cent of the R.I.C. were prepared to accept any slander levelled against the Irish Volunteers, give information or do anything no matter how dirty to bring discredit on those who were preparing to fight for Ireland and only Ireland. In their endeavour to uphold British Government in Ireland and keep their own country in subjection they watched and reported every incident and every meeting. This was the situation as the Irish Volunteers came into instance.

During the first few months of the Great War, a great wave of prosperity came over the country. Farmers were getting fabulous prices for their stock and farm produce, with the result that the workers benefited also which was all to the good. Men could now afford to travel some distance to attend meetings of the G.A.A. and Gaelic League organisations which, in former circumstances, would be impossible. Those two organisations now began to play a very important part in the destiny of the country. Meetings of the G.A.A. were being used to organise the youth into

the Irish Volunteers and to obstruct recruiting for the British Army. The Gaelic League was holding night classes all over the county.

In Moynalty village those of us who severed connection with the Irish National Volunteers numbered about sixteen. We met from time to time but had not yet contacted Volunteer Headquarters in Dublin. Easter Week came, but here we knew nothing of it until it had started. However in the spring of 1917, our Company was reorganised by P. De Burca of Kells, afterwards on the staff of the Irish Independent Newspapers. I became Company Captain; Michael O'Reilly, 1st Lieutenant; Ned Govern, Adjutant, and Michael Govern, Quartermaster. We started off with foot drill and met once a week.

By now the sacrifice of Easter Week, followed by the executions, were now bearing fruit. More and more recruits were joining the ranks of the Volunteers all over the country and the people generally were joining Sinn Féin, a branch of which was established in every parish. From the Sinn Féin clubs, Volunteer Companies and branches of the Cumann na mBan were established in every town and village.

In the month of July a bye-election took place in Cavan. Arthur Griffith was nominated as the Sinn Féin candidate. On the instructions of the Brigade O/C., Seán Boylan, all Companies in North Meath participated, canvassing and doing police duty at the polling booths. We all wore green armlets. Griffith won by a good majority. Returning from the contest, Bartle Reilly, Captain of Kilbeg Company, got a fall from his bicycle and was in hospital for months.

By early 1918, Companies were well established in Drumcondra, Nobber, Kilbeg and Meath Hill, all adjacent to the Moynalty Company. At this period the British Government decided to apply conscription to Ireland. It was vigorously opposed by the Clergy and people generally and, instead of helping the British to secure more recruits for her armies, only succeeded in uniting the Irish nation as never before. Our Company strength increased to about twenty-five at the time.

Following Sinn Féin victories at bye-elections in Clare, Longford, Cavan, Kilkenny and Roscommon, Sinn Féin swept the country at the General Election in December, 1918. Up to this there was no great need for secrecy on behalf of the Volunteers who met and drilled in the open, while I.R.B. meetings were held under the guise of the G.A.A. or Gaelic League.

A couple of months prior to the General Election, a flu epidemic had swept the country, which retarded the Movement to a great extent. In North Meath, the victims who died in the morning were buried in the evening. Among a great many young people who died were two brothers who died on the same day. No shops were open in the village of Moynalty for over a month.

Following the meeting of the First Dáil in January 1919, and on instructions from the Sinn Féin Executive, all fox and stag hunting was prohibited all over the County Meath. The Volunteers enforced the decree. Later during the hunger strike in Mountjoy jail, fairs about to be held at Mullagh and other towns were prohibited by the Sinn Féin Executive also.

In this year the Volunteers came under the control of the Dáil. The oath of allegiance was administered to each Volunteer. All Companies in County Meath were formed into Battalions and later into a Brigade. Six Battalions were formed in the county and we became known as the 'Meath Brigade'. The six Battalions were 1st, Dunboyne; 2nd, Trim; 3rd, Delvin; 4th, Kells; 5th Oldcastle and 6th, Navan. The Brigade staff appointed were :- Seán Boylan, O/C.; Seán Hayes, Vice O/C; Seamus Finn, Adjutant; Seamus O'Higgins, Quartermaster, and Eamonn Cullen, Engineer.

The 4th or Kells Battalion Officers appointed were - Patrick Farrelly, O/C; Thomas O'Reilly, Vice O/C; Michael Cahill, Adjutant, and Thomas Govern, Quartermaster. Moynalty Company, of which I was Captain, became attached to the 4th Battalion. The other Companies comprising this Battalion were Kells, Newcastle, Nobber, Milltown, Mullagh, Meath Hill and Drumcondra.

The R.I.C. were now boycotted by the people everywhere, with the exception of certain members of the population of the pro-British type. This pro-British element continued their sneering and jibes and referred to us as "The new brave army who were going to beat the British garrison with their knuckles and ashplants". After a few warnings here and there they fell silent and gave no further trouble. That is not to say that they ceased to be friends with the R.I.C. or that many of them did not keep the R.I.C. well informed. It was during this boycott that I refused an invitation by a Sergeant Sullivan, R.I.C., to have a drink with him in a public-house. He struck me down with the butt of a revolver; my head, face and hand were gashed. I was taken to the barracks and placed in a cell. After an hour or so

a Constable looked in and found the cell full of blood. He sent for a doctor who put three stitches in my head, two in my face and two in my hand. Pat Smyth of Market Square, Navan, was a witness to the assault. After receiving the stitches I was released.

In the month of April, 1920, a young farmer named Clinton while ploughing with two horses was shot dead at Rosemount. His two horses were also shot. There was a land dispute in the area at the time. All those involved - they numbered eleven - were arrested by the I.R.A. in charge of the Brigade O/C. They were detained for some months in different Company areas called "Unknown destinations" until they were tried by an I.R.A. Military Court. The man who did the actual killing was executed; his name was Gordon. The others were deported. While awaiting trial the prisoners were guarded day and night by the I.R.A. which involved a great strain on each Company, as they were moved from one area to another.

By early 1920, the Cumann na mBan were well established in Moynalty. They gave great service running ceillis to raise money for I.R.A. funds. Around this time the Volunteers collected about £50 for the White Cross Fund in the Company area. In about the month of June a Sinn Féin Court was established in Moynalty. Michael Govern, who by this time had replaced Thomas Govern as Battalion Quartermaster, was appointed one of three Parish Justices. The Volunteers carried out all decrees of the Court. One of the first decrees carried out by the Volunteers was to arrest two men from Bailieboro' who had refused to pay a fine imposed by the Court. They were arrested on a Sunday evening

at Loughan, Moynalty. We seized their new motor cycle which we handed over to H. B. O'Donoghue of Virginia, who was Battalion O/C. of the 3rd Battalion, Cavan Brigade. In the same year all Volunteers took an active part collecting funds for the Dáil Éireann Loan.

By the spring of 1920, several R.I.C. barracks had been evacuated in County Meath. The R.I.C. had more or less gone on strike and didn't seem to care what crime was committed in the county. In fact, the more crime committed the better they liked it, as it all tended to bring discredit on the I.R.A. *This resulted in the I.R.A.* taking over all police duties in the county. Robberies became very prevalent. In nearly every case the culprits were traced, arrested and brought before the Sinn Féin Courts. On the instructions of the Brigade O/C., Seán Boylan, the local Company burned down the vacated R.I.C. barracks in Moynalty on the 12th May, 1920. Mullagh R.I.C. barracks, also vacated, was burned down on the same night by members of Mullagh and Newcastle Companies. On the 23rd May, Drumconrath vacated R.I.C. barracks was burned down by members of the Moynalty Company, assisted by members of Newcastle Company.

On the 21st July, Seamus Cogan, Battalion O/C. of the 5th or Stonefield Battalion, was shot dead near Oldcastle while taking a prisoner in a commandeered motor car to an "unknown destination". It appears that Cogan, who was accompanied by Owen Clarke, Jimmie O'Neill, Harry Sheridan and Tom Lynch, ran into a military patrol on the way. They were called on to halt but refused to do so. The military opened fire. Cogan was killed

and two of his companions, as well as the prisoner, were wounded. Next day the military found his body in a nearby house and took it to Kells where an inquest was held. The funeral from Kells to Ballinlough graveyard on the following Sunday was more than three miles long. It was one of the wettest days we ever had in the County Meath.

In August, 1920, we took part in a general raid for arms which was most successfully carried out. In this month, I was ordered by the Battalion O/C to raid the Northern Bank, Kells, for two revolvers, which we knew were there. The raid had to be carried out in daylight. I arranged with Bob Mullen, Captain of Kells Company, to meet me in the town at 10.30 a.m. When I met Bob at the appointed time I went into the Bank and asked for a private interview with the Manager - Mr. Johnson. I wore no disguise. I was shown into a private cubicle. When Mr. Johnson came in I stated my business and showed him my authority in the shape of a .45 revolver. I warned him that if he tried to play false or get me arrested our men would deal with him that night. At the request of Mr. Johnson the keys of his desk were brought in by a Mr. Finnegan - another official. The guns plus several rounds of ammunition were handed over to me. I took them out into an archway and handed the lot to Bob Mullen. I mounted my bike and in less than an hour was working on my farm. Mr. Finnegan is now the owner of a public-house between Drogheda and Dundalk. At the latter end of August we again raided several houses for arms which had not been collected in the previous raid.

By now the great mass of the population were on the side of Sinn Féin. Following the County Council and Rural District Council elections held earlier in the year, Sinn Féin candidates had control of Meath County Council, and local administration was

now in their hands. One of their first actions was to cancel allegiance to British Local Government and to pledge support to the newly established Ministry of Local Government of which Mr. Liam Cosgrave had been appointed Minister. Those newly elected members of the County Council, many of whom were I.R.A. men, ran great risks and became the special target of the R.I.C. In fact, by their actions they were running more risks than the I.R.A. The whole civilian population were great and were prepared to make any sacrifice necessary to uphold Sinn Féin now in control.

In September, 1920, with other Battalion officers in the Brigade, I attended a course of lectures in Dublin, given by the late Dick McKee and others. I was married on the 30th September, 1920, and, before a week had passed, the late Paddy Mooney, Trim, came to stay with me. He was 'on the run' at the time subsequent to the attack and capture of Trim R.I.C. barracks. Paddy did great service while in the area, training our men in the art of guerilla warfare. The late Commissioner Cullen also stayed with me for some time. He was also 'on the run' and, while in the area, gave us lessons on engineering and the manufacture of bombs and land mines.

At the October fair, in the town of Mullagh, with other Volunteers I helped to arrest two suspected spies. They were detained until after the Truce. About the same time the local Company at Kells seized the mails at the Post Office and, having censored them, returned them to the Post Office. In the same month the Moynalty Company held up the mail car from Bailieboro' and censored the mails. By the end of the month plans had been made for an attack on Nobber R.I.C. barracks. Several members of Moynalty and other Companies assembled in Nobber at midnight

in preparation for the attack, but things went wrong, and it was called off.

In the first week of December, we blew up Moynalty Bridge and dismantled Moynalty Courthouse. In the following week we blew up Carnalstown and Mahonstown bridges. We were assisted by members of Newcastle and Mullagh Companies at the blowing up of these two bridges. About this time we arrested a suspected spy. He was tried by members of the Battalion Staff. The evidence against him was proved by local Volunteers. After being warned of the consequences if he persisted in giving information to the police he was released. Within a few days we had no alternative but to arrest him again. This time he was tried by officers of the Dublin Brigade sent down from G.H.Q. He was found guilty and sentenced to be shot. The execution was duly carried out.

During this period several robberies took place in our and adjoining areas. Several persons had been arrested for those offences all over the county. It was a big strain on our men guarding and feeding those prisoners while awaiting trial and, at the same time keeping their whereabouts unknown. Here again our men were very faithful and had to make great sacrifices. They were almost on continuous duty, training and keeping lines of communication open, as all communications had to be carried by hand.

The Cumann na mBan were also doing great work at this time, looking after the men 'on the run', making bandages, carrying arms to different places and doing duty at meetings of the Battalion staff. The Fianna, which had been started in Moynalty in September, 1920, were now giving invaluable service carrying dispatches and reporting the movements of the R.I.C.

In January, 1921, the Moynalty Company were ordered by the Battalion O/C. to collect a consignment of tonite and gelignite from Martry Company. A horse and cart were commandeered. T. King, Thomas Smith, Michael Govern, Michael Reilly and Pat Sheridan went to Martry where they collected the stuff from John Mitchell, J. Bennett and John Murtagh, and took it to Moynalty. It was placed in a house at Salford owned by the late Peter Lynch who resided at Mullagh at the time. The explosives, together with a number of guns, were carefully packed in a box and buried under the kitchen floor, which was of mud. On the following Sunday, the owner visited the house with a friend - a most unusual thing for him to do. They noticed the fresh clay and thought someone had been buried there. While in a public-house that evening in Mullagh, the owner remarked to his friend that he would never live in the house again, unaware that an informer of the British Government was paying great attention to his conversation. We were not aware of this informer at the time. He was not a native of Mullagh and was then living in Longford. We discovered his identity after the Truce. When Kells R.I.C. barracks were taken over by our men, we found his file left behind by the R.I.C. which showed that he was in the pay of the British Government. His normal occupation took him to different parts of the country.

After listening to the conversation the informer communicated with the Tans in Kells and on the following Sunday, the 23rd January, 1921, District Inspector Rowland with five other police and Tans arrived at Salford at 10.30 a.m. They stopped the people going to second Mass and commandeered some of them,

including five I.R.A. men to assist them to dig up the box of explosives and guns. One of our men, Ned Reilly, who lived across the road, seeing what was going on, sent his sister out by the back door on the pretence of going to my house for milk: she was only eleven years of age. When she arrived at my place in the village she told me what was happening. I had to act quickly. I got my gun. I had been to first Mass and it was now almost 11 o'clock at which time second Mass started. I met my brother Mick, (R.I.P) and told him what was happening, saying that we were going to rescue our explosives and guns. I asked him to go to the Chapel and get whatever help he could. Pat Farrelly of Carnaross Company was there and came up. I gave him a .45 revolver. Before that I had contacted Michael Govern and James Curran. They had two shotguns. We went up the Salford road and tied a strand of line across it with the intention of delaying their car if it came that way before we could locate them.

We crossed a ditch and proceeded under cover until we came to a hill overlooking the vacant house. We saw that some of the police had gone to another vacant house a couple of hundred yards to the left. Of course we did not know their strength at this time. However, we decided to attack them while their forces were divided and with the hope that more of our comrades would soon arrive, especially Frank Clarke who had a rifle in his custody. We crept along behind the ditch until we were opposite the police on the road and discovered that some of the people whom they had commandeered now stood between us. There were three police on the road armed with rifles. The other three were returning from

the other vacant house and were only fifty yards distant. We opened fire over the heads of the people who immediately dropped to the ground. The battle then started in deadly earnest. Each of us took the best cover we could, which was not much. After about ten minutes, I saw Frank Clarke, Pat Sheridan, Ned Govern and Mick Reilly arrive. I shouted to Frank to open fire with the rifle, which he did. Gradually the police fire became less frequent and finally ceased. We crossed the ditch and proceeded to their car which they had abandoned on the roadside. The car was partly loaded with our guns and explosives. James Curran, one of our men, turned it around on the road. We were lucky that he was able to drive, as very few of us could do so at the time. We completed the job of loading it with the rest of our stuff. They had left three revolvers and their overcoats behind which was a Godsend to us. We then proceeded to the Newcastle Company area where we dumped all our stuff.

Having secured our arms and explosives we collected five Volunteers of the Newcastle Company, who were all armed, and brought them back with us to try and locate the police. But after some hours we had to give up the hunt when we were unable to find them. We discovered later that five of them had gone across country and taken refuge in the home of a Colonel Farrell. The sixth man had hidden under a bridge and made his way to Kells that night. In the encounter one R.I.C. man was wounded. None of our men was wounded. After taking some valuable parts from the car, we burned it near Bailieboro'.

That night Matt Tevlin, Battalion Engineer of the 5th or Stonefield Battalion with members of the Carnaross Company, arrived in Moynalty to give a hand if necessary. By this time the R.I.C., with the help of Colonel Farrell, had contacted a British military post at Whiteswood, Nobber. They were now in Farrell's to escort the R.I.C. to Kells. We decided to ambush them on their way but, through a misunderstanding, the Moynalty Volunteers reported at a camp which we had recently set up in a disused house at the lower end of the parish, with the result that the attack did not take place.

That Sunday night my house was raided and looted of everything of any value. Floors and articles of furniture were smashed. In all it was raided fifty-eight times following the attack on the police. The raids took place at all times of the day and night. The final raid was on the night of the Truce at 7.30 p.m. by masked and armed drunken men who fired several shots in the village. On this occasion they ripped up one of the beds and put my wife (who became a mother seven days later) against a wall, while they pointed a revolver at her while questioning her as to my whereabouts. I had, in fact, only left the house. This raid was reported to the commanding officer in Kells by a Major Farrell and the late Reverend Fr. W. Swan, who later became P.P. of Kilbeg. The officer replied that he could do nothing about the matter, with the result that I had to stay with friends in the early period of the Truce.

For several Sundays following the attack, the congregation returning from Mass were held up by the R.I.C. and Tans while they were questioned and insulted; but the people were now defiant

and could not be intimidated. One of our greatest friends around this time was the Revd. Fr. Swan (R.I.P), who was Chaplain to the I.R.A. during the period. He was the comforter of the wives and mothers of those 'on the run' and in prison; the confessor and adviser of all I.R.A. men. It was he who rendered spiritual aid to the two spies executed in this Battalion area. It was in this period that Volunteers James Curran, Tom Govern, Tom Russell and John Reilly were arrested. They were interned until December, 1921.

Previous to the attack on the R.I.C. that Sunday morning, all Volunteers in the Battalion, who were 'on the run' had met in a disused house at the lower end of the parish for the purpose of setting up a camp and starting a Flying Column. Only those whose services at home were not absolutely necessary were retained. We had only one rifle, a number of shotguns and a few revolvers. On Saturday, the 29th January, while most of our men had gone to confession or to their homes for a change of clothing, we received word that a carload of police had arrived in Mullagh from Virginia. Those of us in the disused house or camp decided to attack the party of police at the Mullagh lake on their way back.

With John Lynch, Newcastle, T. Sheridan, Pat Feddis, J. Carolan, Mullagh; P. Flanagan, Kilbeg, and T. Morris, Moynalty, I took up an ambush position on one side of the road. I was in charge. When the car came within range, I ordered "Open fire". To our astonishment the shotgun cartridges failed to explode; they were damp. The one rifle and one revolver in our possession were the only weapons which responded. Fresh cartridges were tried with better results. The police car got

through the ambuskade and pulled up. They got out and returned our fire with rifles. They had taken cover behind the car and peppered the hedge and ditch, behind which we were situated, with rifle bullets. I ordered our men to retreat. As they did so, John Lynch and I fought a rearguard action with the rifle and revolver. All hands retreated safely: none of us received a scratch. One policeman was wounded.

In or about the month of April, County Meath and adjoining counties were reorganised into the 1st Eastern Division. The six Battalions comprising the Meath Brigade, with Battalions in the bordering counties of Cavan and Westmeath, were formed into four Brigades. We ceased to be the 4th Battalion and instead became the 1st Battalion of No. 3. Brigade. The officers appointed were Thomas O'Reilly, O/C; I became Vice O/C.; Michael Cahill, Adjutant; Michael Govern remained Quartermaster, and Peter O'Reilly, Police Officer.

Up to February of 1921, the weather was very bad, wild, wet and stormy. But in February there came a great change. It was a lovely mild month, followed by one of the loveliest summers for years. The cold harsh winds of the previous few months would remind one of the seven terrible centuries through which our country had passed and now the glorious weather seemed to portend the dawning of a new era.

In May, 1921, with a Volunteer named Frank Clarke and two Volunteers from Wexford, who were 'on the run' in our area, I raided Moynalty Post Office to seize the telephone equipment there. The Post Office was situated in the corner of a public-house.

While we were inside a boy scout, whom we had placed outside to warn us of the likely approach of the police, came in for cigarettes. While he was inside a lorry load of Tans noiselessly approached and stopped outside the pub. The Tans came in for a drink. The owner rushed to the Post Office end of the shop and warned us that our only means of escape was through the kitchen already occupied by four Tans. We staggered into the kitchen, called for a drink for the Tans and then excused ourselves saying we wanted to go to the lavatory. When we got outside we went through a back garden, crossed a wall at the end and got away. It was a narrow shave. We heard later that an R.I.C. man named Farrell, who knew Frank Clarke and I well, was standing in the bar at the time.

Later in the months of May and June ambushes had been prepared for Moynalty and other places, but for one reason or another they never took place. In the Moynalty case we spent two nights in succession in positions in an old graveyard but the expected patrol never turned up.

On the instructions of the Brigade O/C., we were ordered to attack a party of Tans on the morning of the Truce, the 11th July, 1921. The party numbered four or five. They came each morning in a lorry with barrels to carry water for a nearby camp, which they filled at Maudlin's Bridge. We took up positions at 4 a.m. We had two rifles and about sixteen shotguns. With the exception of six men, all of the Moynalty Company were present. Our strength was twenty men. While waiting we had some trouble with people coming to bathe at this particular spot, as we had to place them under arrest which entailed the placing of some of our best men on guard over them.

When the Tans arrived at 9.30 a.m., they halted well out of range of our shotguns, and not at the spot usually selected by them over which we had taken up positions. We had to leave our positions to attack them. They, therefore, were not taken by surprise. We opened fire with the two rifles. They hurriedly left the scene with two of their members wounded, one of whom we were informed died later. We had intended to seize the lorry and take it away. We were almost within sight of the police barracks and the military camp. We retreated through the river, across some flat land and up an incline towards Cherryhill. By the time we got there, two lorries with machine-guns mounted, had appeared on the road. We were sprayed with machine-gun fire; we scattered but still managed to keep contact, taking every bit of available shelter. Our training now stood to us. One of the lorries proceeded around a back road and a third one appeared. We felt that we would soon be surrounded. We lay quietly in a cavity until the lorry had travelled some distance along the back road. We then took a chance and made for a ditch which ran down to the Kells to Carnalstown road. When we saw that the road was clear we crossed over and proceeded across country to Moynalty. Four of our men were guarding the prisoners that morning and could not take part; two others, James Curran and Thomas Govern, were in jail, which meant that the sixteen men available took part.

In the Moynalty Company, one man was as good as another, all anxious to do their bit. We worked as a great team. Every man in the Battalion, whose name I have mentioned, was always willing and ready to make any sacrifice, no matter how great, to serve the cause. I have not mentioned several incidents which

occurred in other Company areas, many of whose members were arrested, or 'on the run' in Flying Columns or on police work.

The general population and local press - "The Meath Chronicle" - were great during the period. The people, in particular, were vying with each other to help in the struggle. The more pressure put on by the British the better the population responded.

SIGNED:

Peter H. Kelly

DATE:

16th July, 1967

WITNESS:

John J. Walsh

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