

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1699

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1699

Witness

William Powell,

Kilbeg, Bandon, Co. Cork.

Identity.

O/C, Crookstown Company, Macroom Battalion,

Cork I. Brigade, I.R.A.

Member, Flying Column, do.

Subject.

Kilmurray Company, Macroom Battalion,

Cork I Brigade, I.R.A., 1915-1921.

Battalion Flying Column, 1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

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BURO STAIRÉ MHEATA: 1913-21

No. W.S. 1699

STATEMENT BY WILLIAM POWELL,Kilbeg, Bandon, Co. Cork.

I was born in Lissarda, Co. Cork, in May, 1892. My parents were farmers. I was educated at Kilmurry National School until I was 18 years of age when I went to serve my time as a carpenter.

When a company of the Irish Volunteers was formed in Kilmurry in November 1915, I joined up. The prime movers in the organisation of the Volunteers in the area were: Patrick O'Leary, John T. Murphy, Tom Neville and Denis J. Long. The company was organised in two sections based on Bealnablath and Dooniskey. The strength of each section was about 20 men. The only officer, as far as I can recollect, was Patrick O'Leary, who was O/C.

Beyond close order foot drill in the fields and occasional route marches, there was no other activity. The drill instruction was given by the O/C. (Patk. O'Leary).

When, on Easter Sunday 1916, the men from Ballinadee and some other companies in West Cork, under Tom Hales, arrived at Kilmurry for 12 o'clock Mass, about a dozen members of Kilmurry Company joined them and marched to Macroom. On the way we were joined by some units from Cork City and other areas. The parade was dismissed on reaching Macroom and there was a general discussion as to what was on foot. After a few hours, the parade re-assembled and we marched back to Crookstown with the Ballinadee men. They billeted in Horgan's publichouse in Crookstown for the night and continued their march back to Ballinadee next day. The members of the Kilmurry unit, who went to Macroom, returned to their homes on Sunday night. Amongst the Kilmurry men who went to Macroom on Easter Sunday 1916, were: Patrick O'Leary, Tom Neville, Denis J. Long, John T. Murphy, William Powell (witness). I cannot recollect the names of the others.

Shortly after Easter Week, Tom Neville and John T. Murphy were arrested and removed to Cork. Tom Neville was released after a short time, but John T. Murphy was sent to Frongoch Internment Camp in Wales where he was detained for some months.

The Volunteer organisation continued to carry on in the area - being driven more or less underground. When the general reorganisation took place in the summer of 1917, there was little difficulty in putting the organisation on a sound footing in the district. In a short time, the strength of Kilmurry company had reached close on 100. The only officer I can ~~not~~ recollect at this period was Patrick O'Leary who was still O/C.

Training went on as usual and there was nothing out of the ordinary until the British threatened to enforce conscription in the spring of 1918. There was now a big increase in membership and the strength of the company reached about 150. Nearly all men of military age in the district joined up. There was now increased activity in training the new recruits, organising the general public, collecting all arms - mainly shotguns - known to be in the area. All arms were surrendered voluntarily to the various Volunteer sections who called for them. At this stage we had about 25/30 shotguns with a small supply of ammunition for each. Selected members of the company were engaged on the manufacture of buckshot, making gunpowder and canister bombs as well as reloading the cartridges already held with buckshot. In addition to the shotguns, we had one Webley revolver which I seized in a raid on Ryecourt House.

Early in 1918, the area was organised on a battalion basis. At this time, there were companies of the Irish Volunteers in Macroom, Kilmurry, Clondrohid, Canavee, Rusheen, Ballinagree, Coolderrihy, Toames, Kilnamartyra, Ballingeary and Ballyvourney. These companies formed the Macroom Battalion, Cork Brigade. The first officers of this battalion were, I think:

O/C. Dan Corkery; Vice O/C. Jack Lynch; Adjutant, Charlie Brown; Q.M. Christy Hartnett.

Training - mainly close-order drill and route marches - continued as usual. Occasionally three or four neighbouring companies would meet together at weekends, and would take part in field manoeuvres under the battalion officers. On these occasions we were trained to advance and retire under cover and to learn to utilise to the best advantage the cover available in the various districts where we assembled.

The strength of the Volunteers organisation was growing daily and it was decided to organise a new battalion amongst the companies at the western end of the Macroom battalion. The new battalion was based on Ballyvourney and on its formation included, I think, the following companies: Ballingeary, Ballyvourney, Kilnamartyra, Coolea, Reinaree, Inchigeela. Shortly after the establishment of this battalion, a party drawn from some companies in it attacked a patrol of R.I.C. in the area. This attack led to the imposition of Martial Law by the British in the Macroom-Ballyvourney area. There was now increased activity by the enemy military and police forces. The homes of known Volunteers were raided regularly and, as a result, few prominent Volunteers were able to sleep at home. The enemy activities were now forcing us to realise that membership of the Volunteer organisation was a serious business and, as a result, training in all areas was intensified. We were now driven more or less underground, throughout the martial law area, and we began to train hard for the fight which we saw in the offing.

When the General Election was held in December 1918, there was no contest in our area - mid-Cork - as the Sinn Féin candidate for the area was Terence McSwiney - later to die on hungerstrike in Brixton Prison, London, while he was Lord Mayor of Cork City and O/C. Cork Brigade I.R.A. There was no contest

in the majority of the constituencies throughout the country as Sinn Féin held an overwhelming majority. With the exception of the constituencies in Waterford city, Trinity College and those in North East Ulster, Sinn Féin were on top everywhere.

The members of the British Parliament elected at the General Election in December 1918, were now summoned to attend a meeting of the Irish Parliament in Dublin in January 1919. The Sinn Féin representatives, who had contested the election on the question of the non-recognition of the British House of Commons and abstention therefrom now assembled in Dublin and established a government, Dáil Éireann, for the Irish Republic. The Volunteers now agreed to accept the control of the Dáil Department of Defence and were, from the summer of 1919, known as the Irish Republican Army (I.R.A.).

At this time there were about twenty battalions of Volunteers in Cork county and, as this scheme of organisation was rather unwieldy, it was decided to divide the county into three brigades with areas as follow:

Cork City, Mid and East Cork	-	No. 1 Brigade.
North Cork (Fermoy-Kerry border)	-	No. 2 Brigade.
West Cork	- - -	No. 3 Brigade.

Tomas MacCurtain was O/C. No. 1 Brigade. Liam Lynch was O/C. No. 2, and Tom Hales was O/C. No. 3, but I cannot recollect the names of the other brigade officers.

After the reorganisation, training in all areas became intensified. Selected men were trained as scouts, signallers, engineers, intelligence officers, transport officers in each company area. Battalion officers in each of these special services were appointed to train these selected men in their special duties. Weekend manoeuvres in which all companies in the battalion (Macroom) took part were a regular feature of our activities at this period. In addition to our military activities during the Summer of this year, we were engaged in collecting for the first loan floated by Dáil Éireann.

Arms were now becoming more plentiful and we were all becoming more military minded. Intensive training went on throughout the remainder of 1919. At this stage, it was usual to spend Sunday evenings at target practice with miniature rifles. Empty cartridge cases were being collected, re-capped charged with home-manufactured gunpowder and loaded with buckshot. The buckshot was made by pouring white hot lead, heated over kitchen fires in many homes, into moulds which were often made in the local forges. Canister bombs, similar to those made during the conscription period, were now being made in every company area.

About 60 men drawn from a number of companies in Macroom Battalion took part in an attack on Kilmurry R.I.C. Barracks on the night of 3rd January 1920. This was a battalion operation carried out under the Battalion O/C. (Dan Corkery). I did not take part in this operation, and the only members of the Kilmurry Company who took part were engaged on scouting and road-blocking duties. The attack on the barrack was continued for about two hours, but as there was no hope of capturing the building, the I.R.A. party withdrew.

There was intense activity by the enemy following this attack, but there were no arrests until early March 1920, when the Company O/C. (Patrick O'Leary) was arrested. He was taken to Cork and later to Wormwood Scrubbs, where he was detained until May 1920, when he was released with a number of other I.R.A. prisoners following a hungerstrike.

The next operation carried out by Kilmurry Company was the destruction of Farnanes R.I.C. barrack (evacuated) in accordance with the general order issued from G.H.Q. at Easter 1920. The building to be destroyed adjoined a public-house and, before it could be set on fire, it was necessary to cut through the roof between the two houses. Being a carpenter, this job was allocated to me. I was assisted by

Jack Mahoney, Patrick Mahoney and Joe Murphy. When the roof had been cut we set fire to the evacuated enemy post. The majority of Kilmurry Company was engaged in this job mainly on scouting and road-blocking. Charlie Browne (battalion adjutant) was in charge.

When Carrigdrohid R.I.C. Barracks was attacked on the night of 9th June 1920, every available man in the company (Kilmurry) was engaged in blocking all roads in the area leading from Bandon and Ballincollig. Armed guards were posted at all road-blocks; the men were armed with shotguns. Prior to this operation, I was instructed by the O/C. (Patrick O'Leary) to report to the vicinity of Carrigadrohid R.I.C. barracks at 11 p.m. on 9th June 1920. When I arrived at the meeting place I met Dan Corkery (O/C. Macroom Battalion), Sean Hegarty (Cork I Brigade staff), Dan (Sandow) Donovan (O/C. 1st Battalion, Cork I Brigade) and, I think, Mick Murphy (O/C. 2nd Battalion, Cork I Brigade). Charlie Browne (Adjutant, Macroom Battalion) was also present. Sections had already been placed in position at the front and rear of the building to cover off the line of retreat of the garrison should we succeed in our plan to set the building on fire.

The barrack and Post Office were under one roof with a dividing wall. We planned to get into the Post Office and, breaking through the roof of same, to get on to the roof of the R.I.C. Barrack. We entered the Post Office through a window in the gable end, taking with us a barrel of paraffin oil, a pump to pump the oil into the barrack and tools to smash through the roof in each building. Having taken over the Post Office, we removed the occupants to safety through the gable window. We then proceeded to break through the ceiling and roof of the Post Office. Having smashed a hole in the roof, we got on to the outside and broke a hole in the roof of the R.I.C. Barrack. Immediately the garrison heard the sounds of

the roof smashing they opened fire through all windows and loopholes. This fire was replied to by the sections of our men at the front and rear of the building.

When the roof of the barrack had been holed, we pumped some of the paraffin oil from the barrel into the barrack through the opening and set it on fire. As the fire was not making much progress, we soaked some blankets in the remainder of the paraffin and pushed them through the opening. This helped to get the fire going in the upper floor of the barrack; the garrison was called on to surrender, but did not reply. As daylight was now approaching, the men from Cork City - Sean Hegarty, Dan (Sandow) Donovan and Mick Murphy - had to move away for their home area. They left orders with the Battalion O/C. (Dan Corkery) to hold on as long as possible in the hope that the garrison would be forced to evacuate by the fire.

Shooting by the garrison had now died down and the members had apparently retreated to the other end of the building where a tailor's shop adjoined it. At this stage, somebody mentioned that there was a secret passage connecting the tailor's shop with the barrack. It was now breaking day and the Battalion O/C. (Dan Corkery) called a hurried council with some of his officers. It was now decided to call off the engagement in view of the grave danger of the early arrival of enemy reinforcements from Macroom - about four miles away - despite our series of roadblocks. Some short time following our withdrawal, the garrison evacuated the barrack and went on to Macroom. The local I.R.A. men completed the destruction of the building by fire on the following evening.

Several raids on the mails - both local and district - were carried out about this time. The mail train from Cork was held up at Crookstown and Dooniskey railway stations in July and August 1920. All mails were removed and, after

examination by members of the battalion staff, were re-posted in the local post offices. They were endorsed "Censored by I.R.A.". As far as I can recollect, no information of military value was obtained in these raids. These raids were carried out by men from Kilmurry company.

Normal parades and training continued as usual at this period. All members of the I.R.A. were watching and reporting on the movements of enemy forces in their areas. These reports were usually transmitted through the Company Intelligence officer to Battalion H.Q. where a composite picture of enemy movements in the battalion was compiled. These reports were later used in deciding on the times and locations of ambushes.

In the course of my movements in the area at this time I noticed that two lorries of military passed through the area each day for about a week on the way from Bandon to Macroom. I reported their movements to the Battalion O/C. (Dan Corkery) and suggested that they could be attacked at Lisarda. Instructions were issued to attempt the job, so, on the morning of 21st August 1920, about 35 men from Kilmurry Company were mobilised. We took up a position at Lisarda on the Cork-Macroom road about six miles from Macroom. All were armed with shotguns. In addition to this armed unit, a number (15/20), members of the company, were acting as scouts and on outpost duty.

We moved into the selected position at daybreak. About 25 men were in position south of the road. They were on high ground overlooking the road and under cover of a fence and some loose rocks. The remainder of the party were on the northern side of the road - some were behind the roadside fence while I was responsible for pushing out a cart to block the road behind the enemy party when they entered the eastern end of the ambush position. This was to prevent any possibility of their transport reversing out of the position. I was in the gateway of an avenue leading to a house on the northern side. There was another man (Denis O'Mahoney) in a similar position about

100 yards to the west. He was to push out a cart to block the road in front of the enemy lorries which would now be caught between two roadblocks approximately 100 yards apart. They would then come under direct fire from the men north and south of the road who were extended over the intervening 100 yards. We remained in position until about 8 p.m., but the enemy convoy did not travel, so we withdrew to our homes. Some members of the company (Kilmurry) who were present on this occasion were:- Patrick O'Leary, Denis O'Mahoney, Con Murphy, Dan O'Leary, Mick Galvin, Patrick Long, Con O'Mahony, Jim Murphy, Niall Murphy, Dick Browne, Tadhg Murphy, John Carroll, Jim Donovan, John Dineen, Maurice Hennigan, Jim Kelleher, Jerh. O'Mahoney, Denis O'Keefe, Jerh. O'Leary, William Leahy, Tom Taylor, Jack Taylor, Dan O'Leary, Patrick O'Brien, Din Connors, Denis O'Mahoney and William Powell (witness). Having withdrawn from the position, it was agreed to reassemble there about the middle of the following week should it be confirmed that the enemy convoy resumed its normal procedure.

However, events moved more quickly than we expected, as the shooting of a member of the R.I.C. in Inchigeela area on the night of 21st August 1920 - the day on which we lay in ambush at Lisarda - created an early opportunity for attempting another ambush. On the morning of Sunday, 22nd August 1920, I observed a lorry load of R.I.C. and Tans passing through Lisarda on their way to Macroom. It was then about 11 a.m. and I sent word to Macroom that I would try to mobilise an ambush party at Lisarda, where we had been on the previous day, to engage the enemy party on the return journey. It was not possible to mobilise the members of the company (Kilmurry) until after Mass, about 12.30 p.m. Eash man had then to return to his home, collect his gun and

ammunition and make his way to the assembly point at Lisarda. The men were arriving in ones and twos and it was close on 2.30 p.m. before the majority had reached the position. The men were allocated to positions as they arrived, but all positions had not been manned when the approach of the enemy lorry was signalled by our scouts to the west.

On this occasion it was planned to block the road by pushing out two carts from the avenue gateways on the northern side of the road as on the previous day. The only men north of the road when the approach of the lorry was signalled were Din Connors, Maurice Hennigan and myself. I was responsible for pushing out the cart at the eastern gateway to block the road in face of the oncoming lorry while my two colleagues covered me off. As the lorry approached I pushed the cart into the roadway which was now blocked, and retired into the avenue gateway to join my colleagues. The lorry halted about 25 yards from us and about the centre of the position occupied by our men on the south side.

The occupants were called on to surrender by somebody on the south side of the road, but, instead of replying, they immediately opened fire. At the same time, they jumped from the lorry and threw themselves over the fence at our side (north) of the road where they fell into a deep dyke.

The opening burst of fire was replied to by the I.R.A. sections south of the road, as well as by my colleagues and myself on the opposite side. In an interchange of fire which lasted about half an hour the enemy had one man killed and two wounded, while our party south of the road had one man killed (Mick Galvin) and one wounded (Dan O'Leary). The latter was wounded when a home-made bomb exploded just as he threw it into the enemy lorry. There was now a lull in the firing and the enemy party were all under cover of the roadside fence at our side of the road (north) as there was ^{No} shooting by our

colleagues on the south side we (Din Connors, Maurice Hennigan and William Powell) began to wonder what had happened. We could hear the Tans talking in the ditch underneath our position at the avenue gateway, but we could not get even a snapshot at them without exposing ourselves. We remained at least two hours in our position, as did the enemy party in theirs but they made no move to leave cover.

As the three of us (Din Connors, Mce. Hennigan and myself) had not been reinforced by this time, we had more or less decided to withdraw. We were discussing our line of retreat when the whistle signalling the order to withdraw sounded on the southern side of the road. We then withdrew to the east, crossed the Cork-Macroom road and rejoined our colleagues on the southern side of the road. It was only then we learned that Mick Galvin had been killed and Dan O'Leary wounded early in the fight.

Amongst the members of Kilmurry Company who took part in this engagement were: Patrick O'Leary, O/C., who was in charge; Patrick Sheehan, Con O'Mahoney, Sean Galvin, Mick Galvin (killed), Con Murphy, Tom Powell, Matt Murphy, Din Riordan, Din Connors, Mce. Hennigan, Denis J. Long, Tadhg Murphy, Joseph Murphy, Denis O'Mahoney, Jerh. O'Mahoney, Jack O'Mahoney, Denis O'Keefe, John Lynch, Denis O'Brien, Patrick Long, William Powell (witness) and Dan O'Leary (wounded).

Our casualties had now to be attended to and it was important that we should conceal from the enemy the fact that we had any fatal casualties. Our wounded man was escorted by, I think, Jack O'Mahoney, to Dr. Murphy at Lisarda, where his wound was attended to. He was later billeted at the home of Con O'Leary, Coolduve. The body of our dead comrade (Mick Galvin) was anointed by Fr. Cotter, C.C., and was later buried secretly in Kilmurry Churchyard where it lay for about six weeks before being buried in the family burial ground at Kilmurry.

About this time Kilmurry Company was divided into two companies - Crookstown and Kilmurry. I was appointed O/C. of the new company (Crookstown). The officers of the companies now were:

<u>Crookstown</u>	<u>Kilmurry</u>
O/C. William Powell (witness)	Patrick O'Leary
1st Lt. Denis J. Long	Jack O'Connell
2nd Lt. Con Murphy	Denis O'Mahoney

It was now decided to establish a number of full-time active service units, as there were a number of men on the run throughout the brigade. In order to equip these 'flying columns' it was decided to impose a levy on all property owners. The collection of this levy - called the Arms Fund Levy - was the responsibility of the officers in the various companies. Every shopkeeper and farmer in the area had to be visited and the amount assessed as due by them collected. The amount of the levy in the case of farmers was generally based on the number of stock carried on the farm. In the case of shopkeepers, the amount was generally assessed on the estimated turnover of the business. Everybody in the area on whom a levy was made paid up. The collection of the levy occupied the attention of selected men in the company during the months of October and November 1920.

One Sunday early in December 1920, a Battalion Council meeting was called for Toames. When I arrived at the meeting place, I learned that, owing to the sudden appearance of two lorries of Auxiliaries in the area, the venue of the meeting had been changed to Desure, near Kilmichael. I had in my possession dispatches from Dublin, local and Macroom areas, as well as about £200 of Arms Fund Levy. When I reached the new meeting place (Desure) I found that the venue of the meeting had again been changed to Toames. I now met two representatives from the Macroom companies who were on their

way to the meeting in a pony and trap. I got a lift from them. We had only just started on our way when, around a bend in the road, came two lorries of Auxiliaries. I could not take the chance of being held up and searched, so I jumped from the trap, crossed the roadside fence and dashed across a field. Before I had reached the cover of the fence at the opposite side of the field, I came under fire from the party of Auxiliaries, but managed to reach the cover of the fence where I dropped into a bog on the far side. I immediately dumped my dispatches and cash and made my way under cover of the fence in a westerly direction.

Before I had gone very far, some of the "Auxies" had reached the fence under cover of which I was moving. I again came under fire and was called on to halt. As I had now hidden my dispatches and money, I felt reasonably safe, so I put up my hands. I was interrogated on the spot at the point of the gun, getting an odd kick to ensure that I answered all questions without delay. I gave my correct name and trade (carpenter) saying that I was working for farmers in the area. At this stage some more of the enemy party arrived and amongst them was an ex-British soldier from ^{BALLINEEN} ~~Ballineen~~ who had joined the 'Tans', who recognised me. He called me by my name and said: "I suppose you are in the swim also". However, the fact that he knew me saved me from further punishment at the moment. I was then taken back to the road where my colleagues from Macroom were still detained and asked to account for them. I said that I did not know them at all and that I had only got a 'lift' from them a short distance back the road. Apparently they had told the same story as they were allowed to go on their way. I was, however, taken into Macroom where I was held for a week in Macroom Castle with a Tan and a tramp - evidently two spies - as cell mates. During the week in Macroom I was interrogated daily, but I was eventually released, having

given a satisfactory account of myself. Immediately following my release, I collected my dumped dispatches and Arms Fund Levy and handed them over to Battalion H.Q.

It was now approaching Christmas and there was very little activity in the area. There was, however, some talk that 'flying columns' would soon be established in each battalion area. This was borne out when, about the Christmas holidays, about a dozen men from Crookstown and Kilmurry companies accompanied the Battalion Adjutant (Charlie Browne) to the vicinity of Cork City to collect about a dozen rifles from the city battalions. The rifles were collected near Bishopstown and taken along the Cork-Macroom railway line to Lisarda where they were dumped. Amongst those who took part in this operation were: Charlie Browne (Battalion Adjutant), Dan Sweeney, Con Murphy, Dan O'Leary, Denis D. Long, Jim Murphy, Dan Donovan, Denis J. Long, Tadhg Murphy, Patrick O'Leary, Jack O'Connell and William Powell (witness).

Early in January 1921, a flying column was formed in Macroom Battalion. It was composed of representatives from all companies in the battalion to the number of about forty. The Battalion O/C. (Dan Corkery) was in charge. The column assembled in Ballinagree area where it underwent a course of training in the care and use of rifle, use of cover, selection of ambush sites and other aspects of military affairs for about three weeks. All members of the column were armed with rifles. At the end of the course of training all men returned to their home areas.

About the middle of February 1921, I received instructions from Battalion H.Q. to take four men from my company to a district south of Poul nabro - about six miles west of Macroom - where the column was being re-assembled. I sent word to Tim Murphy, Con Murphy, Denis Long and Dan O'Leary - all members of Crookstown Company - to proceed to the mobilisation

point while I proceeded to make my way there with a supply of ammunition. About three mornings after my arrival, the column moved into a position at Poulnábro - about six miles from Macroom on the Ballyvourney road. The column was acting in co-operation with the brigade column under 'Sandow' Donovan and the Ballyvourney battalion column. The Brigade O/C. (Sean Hegarty) was in charge of the combined force. Our column (Macroom) was under Dan Corkery and was about 27 strong.

The Brigade and Ballyvourney battalion columns, with four or five members of our column (Macroom) took up positions north of the road. They were under cover of large rocks and walls of loose stones, and were extended over a distance of about 400 yards. In addition to being armed with rifles, this party included two machine-gun sections - one on each flank. The Macroom column, under Dan Corkery, were under somewhat similar cover south of the road and at distances varying from 20 yards at the eastern end to 50 yards at the western end from the roadway. All were armed with rifles. We were extended over about 100 yards. All positions were occupied about 7 a.m. and we remained until darkness set in, but there was no appearance by an enemy force. The same position was occupied on the two succeeding days with like result.

The whole force then withdrew from the area - each section moving to separate billets - for about a week. The old positions were again occupied about the middle of the following week. We were again in position each morning about 7 a.m. and for two days our wait was in vain. However, on the third morning, before all sections were in their places, I observed a lorry of men on the eastern horizon travelling towards the ambush site. Before the lorry reached the eastern flank it halted and the occupants jumped on to the roadway. They then moved into the rocky ground on the northern side of the road.

At this stage, as they were some 400/500 yards away from my position on the western flank at the southern side of the road, we thought they were some of our own men. However, they had not advanced very far through the rocks when fire was opened on them by the men on the eastern flank at the north side. This was the opening of the engagement. All sections of our forces now opened fire on any enemy forces to be seen. By this time, two or three additional lorries of the enemy had reached the eastern flank. The engagement continued for about two hours with intermittent lulls in the shooting. At this stage, firing ceased on all sides and our O/C. (Dan Corkery) sent one of our men ('Yank' O'Leary) to the northern side of the road to find out what was happening there. This scout returned after some time and reported that the positions at the opposite side of the road had been evacuated by the I.R.A. columns. We had no option but to withdraw, so we moved a short distance to the west and then crossed to the northern side where we found no trace of the brigade or Ballyvourney columns. We continued our withdrawal in a northerly direction and returned to Ballinagree area. The column was then disbanded after a day or two and the members returned with their arms to their home areas.

There was considerable activity in all company areas at this time. All members were engaged in demolishing bridges, digging trenches and blocking roads. Each party engaged on this work operated under an armed guard. As O/C. Crookstown Company, I was responsible for ensuring that all roads in the area were kept closed at all times. In addition to these activities, I was engaged in training every available man in the company in the use of the rifle and serving with the column as and when required. The members of the column in the company area took turns at sniping the enemy posts in the area.

At this period, Cork III Brigade column retired into the

Kilmurry-Crookstown area at Gurraneigh after the fight at Crossbarry on 19th March 1921.. They also returned to the area after the attack on Roscarbery at the end of March. The presence of this column in the area necessitated the provision of constant guards, scouts and outposts throughout the area, so that every available man was on duty for a period during each consecutive 24 hours.

When the General Order to shoot enemy troops on sight as a reprisal for the execution of I.R.A. prisoners in Cork was issued, arrangements were made to invest Macroom. For this purpose, the Brigade column, the Donoughmore Battalion column and our own (Macroom) column, as well as every available man in the companies surrounding Macroom were mobilised. The columns took up ambush positions on the roads leading from Macroom, and arrangements were made to set fire to the home of a British loyalist in the vicinity of the town in the hope that the enemy garrison would come out to investigate. All units were in position about 9.30 p.m. on 15th May 1921 (I think) when the operation was called off by the Brigade O/C. (Sean Hegarty). On this occasion I was in position with the Macroom column under Dan Corkery on the Macroom-Gougane Barra road.

A large enemy force, including Major Percival's column, took part in a big round-up in the Macroom-Ballyvourney area early in June. I learned that the Brigade O/C. (Sean Hegarty), the Battalion O/C. (Dan Corkery) and the Battalion Adjutant (Charlie Brown) had gone to billets in Gurraneigh. As the enemy forces were based on Toames and appeared to be closing in on Bandon, it was obvious that the area in which these officers were billeted would come within the encircling ring.

In order to warn them of the danger I travelled through the night to Joe Sullivan's, Gurraneigh, where I found the party of officers. I had only arrived when I discovered that the

enemy raiding force was already closing in. They had been reinforced by a fresh force moving out from Dunmanway. - While endeavouring to lead the officers outside the enemy lines, I ran into a party of military who were moving across country. At the time, I was accompanied by Charlie Browne (Battalion Adjutant). The Brigade O/C. (Sean Hegarty) and Battalion O/C. (Dan Corkery) were moving along about 100 yards behind us. The Battalion Adjutant and myself were arrested, but the other officers were alerted by the voices of the enemy party who held us up. They immediately took cover and managed to escape. Charlie Browne (Adjutant) and I were now taken on to Bandon and later to Kinsale and the Detention Barracks, Cork, where we were detained for some days before being released.

On my return to the home area I rejoined the column and, between mid-June and the Truce, we took up ambush positions on several occasions but failed to make contact with the enemy.

My rank at the Truce was: O/C. Crookstown Company, Macroom Battalion, Cork I Brigade.

The strength of the company at the Truce was about 120.

After the Truce on 11th July 1921, I attended a Brigade Training Camp at Gougane Barra. Representatives from all battalions in Cork I Brigade were present at this camp which continued for about a fortnight. On completion of the course of training at this camp, I returned to the home area and put all members of the local company (Crookstown) through a similar course.

I continued to train the members of my company throughout 1921. During this period, several roads in the area and all bridges were mined in anticipation of the possible resumption of the fight with the British, should the negotiations for a treaty break down. I carried on with these as normal activities

up to the outbreak of the civil war in June 1922. I did not leave my own area to engage in any activities against the Free State forces, but when the latter entered Macroom area I took part in several engagements including the capture of the Free State army H.Q. in Ballineen on 4th November 1922. I continued these activities, taking part in several engagements - up to the cease fire order in May 1923.

Some days after the cease fire I was taken prisoner by a raiding party from the Free State post in Crookstown and was removed to Cork Gaol where I was detained until 15th August 1923, when I escaped with "Sandow" Donovan, Mick Murphy, Sean Culhane and Tim Sullivan. After my escape I returned to Crookstown area where I moved around until things quietened down.

Signed: William Powell.

Date: 30th November 1954.

Witness: P. Donnell

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