

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILÉATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1735

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1735.

Witness

P.J. (Paddy) Kelly,
Castlebar Road,
Westport,
Co. Mayo.

Identity.

O/C., Louisburgh Battalion, I.R.A.

Subject.

Louisburgh Company,
Louisburgh Battalion, I.R.A.
1917 - Truce.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

File No. S. 3042.

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STATEMENT BY P.J. (PADDY) KELLY

Castlebar Road, Westport, Co.
Mayo.

I was born in 1895 and lived 1½ miles outside the town of Westport with my parents, brothers and sisters. When I reached school-going age, I wished to attend the school in Westport. However, my father had a different outlook. He insisted on my attending a country school where a cousin of his - Patrick Joseph Kelly, a namesake of mine - was Principal. From my first day at school this teacher took a very special interest in me. Afterwards, I found out that he was an old Fenian. His teaching was always based on the very highest national lines. My own father also had a strong national outlook. Later, I was most interested listening to him recall the days when he was young to some of his old pals.

When I finished school, I went to serve my time at the carpentry trade. In 1914, I joined the Volunteers. I always regarded Joe Ring as a guiding star; even he was a member of the Board of Éireann. I became a member of the American Alliance. The aim of those two organisations was to free Ireland. Unfortunately, there were disagreements and often I witnessed free fights between the rival parties.

The year 1915 brought me to Leenane to work at the carpentry with P.J. McDonnell, better known as Pete McDonnell, who afterwards became a noted I.R.A. leader. He very soon persuaded me to join the I.R.B. I worked for four years in Leenane. During that time we devoted most of our spare time to the movement in one way or another.

On St. Patrick's Day 1915, we attended a Hibernian parade in Westport. The O'Rahilly was speaking. All the contingents

of Hibernians from the different parishes passed by the platform and paid no attention to his speech, as the idea of physical force did not appeal to them so soon. Our small contingent from Leenane listened attentively to him. That night, some of us met him at a private meeting. We asked him what were the chances of procuring arms. Pulling a Webley from his pocket, he replied: "If you find the money, we will procure the arms". He stated that he regretted very much the fact that the others did not listen to his speech and said that a year from then would make them see things in a different light. His prophecy was all too true. 1916 changed the outlook of those young men. Unfortunately, they did not get a chance to hear him speak again, as he was killed in the insurrection. God rest his soul!

I first met Michael Kilroy when he came to Leenane to see Pete McDonnell. Both of them were going to attend a Volunteer training camp which was to be held in Clare. I was selected as captain of the Leenane Company. We did some training - target practice - with .22 rifles which Pete had bought for us. One evening, as I was taking the rifle out to Glenagimla, I suddenly observed an R.I.C. man coming round the bend of the road. I slipped the rifle in across the wall, believing he had not seen the movement as he was still some distance away. My intention was to proceed as if nothing had happened. On second thought, I decided this would be silly if by any chance I lost the rifle. So I put my foot on the wall and pretended to tie my shoelace. To my surprise, he jumped off his bicycle and said: "Is that a rifle you slipped across the wall?". I replied: "You had better pass on". Luckily, he took my advice and did so.

We did not have any proper guns for rifle practice, so Jack Feehan and I made some rough wooden ones and painted them up nicely. One evening I was taking one of them openly

through Leenane village as I did not consider it an offence to carry such a harmless weapon. As I was crossing the bridge on the Westport Road, two R.I.C. men in a pub spotted me. Thinking they had a big capture, they hopped on their bicycles. One of them passed me and the other came up behind me. They demanded to see the weapon. I passed it to one of them, thinking it would be returned to me as it was of no importance. He said: "I must keep this for further investigation". Regretting I had not smashed the weapon, I made a dash to take it from him. The other man grabbed me by the back and both men tried to take myself and the gun. I struggled and they had to pull me along; eventually they succeeded in taking the gun from me and let me go free. My pals were sorry they had not been on the scene and the R.I.C. would not have got away so easily. However, they teased me by saying that the R.I.C. thought the wooden gun was of more importance than I.

On Easter Sunday 1916, I was sent to Westport by Pete McDonnell with a dispatch. This suited me, as I would have the weekend at home with my family in Westport. On Easter Monday, all kinds of rumours were circulating about the fight having started in Dublin, but, as the week went by, there was nothing definite. The following Saturday night I went to the Hibernian Hall to see if I could get any definite news or if anything was about to be done. Luckily, I met Tom O'Brien of Moyhastin in the Hall and we were informed that all the leading members of A.O.H. had been warned by the R.I.C. that if they held any meetings they were to be arrested. O'Brien was an I.R.B. man. He asked me if I could get a shotgun and come to Carrig Hill the following morning, Sunday. I went there and was amazed to see all the young men under the command of Joseph McBride. The majority of them were I.R.B. men; some of them had shotguns and some rifles. I was placed in the ranks and

we marched into the town. I thought it was the intention to capture the local barracks. We marched round the town; the R.I.C. were trotting alongside taking down names, but we ignored them. Next morning, a number of our men were arrested in their beds. I went back to Leenane to work.

Things were very quiet for a long time after as most of the leaders were in prison. 1917 was slipping by. We organised dances and concerts for the prisoners' defence, etc. The threat of conscription brought a little bit of activity. The clergymen took up the challenge and spoke from the pulpit advising the young men to prepare and fight if necessary at home, rather than for the oppressor. At that time, I was contemplating going to America, having got my passage from a sister of mine who was living there. Quite a number of young men/^{went}(their parents having paid their fares) to avoid conscription. When I realised the position I decided to stay at home, as I thought it would be cowardly to go, so I returned the fare to my sister.

Pete McDonnell had an old forge attached to the workshop. He got some steel and started to make pikes; Jack Feehan and I helped him. Pete also bought some ash planks and had them sent out to Glenagimla, a village 1½ miles across the hill. He paid for all this himself and never collected a shilling, so we decided to give the only thing we had got, i.e., the labour. We worked all day in the forge and went to the old ~~house~~ in the mountains at night to supervise the making of the shafts. We had a number of fine young men from Glen Letterass - the Wallaces, Joyces, Coynes and Flahertys helping us. We got them hand saws and they actually sawed the ash planks to the desired thickness. It was good fun, but it was a terror to work in the disused old house.

As the soot on all the old timber was falling down, our shirts were not worth washing after working there.

We had a large number of pikes ready in the workshop to be transferred to the house on the hill so that they could be shafted. This particular evening we had been all day polishing and sharpening them on the grindstone. Pete was away in Galway at a meeting. Michael Joyce was in for the day helping Jack Feehan and myself. We sent him to bring some of the boys to ship the pikes across the hill. Around 8 o'clock, two R.I.C. men came along and started to patrol outside the workshop and not going out of sight at all. We were just about to go out to tea; I assumed they intended to raid the workshop and were only keeping it under observation until reinforcements came along. Our main problem now was to shift the weapons, but the two R.I.C. men never went far enough out of sight to allow us to sling the weapons across the road into Michael Gannon's field. We decided to chance and luck was with us; we succeeded in landing the two sacks full of weapons in the field, without being noticed, when their backs were turned. Next we went to our tea, and waited for transport. Our next problem was to get the weapons from where we had left them. We asked Maggie McDonnell (afterwards Mrs. Feehan) if she could think of any excuse to go to the workshop and see if the R.I.C. were still there. She was a courageous girl. "Yes", she said, "I will go over for the dog", which had been tied in the workshop. When she got there, she saw that the R.I.C. men had taken up a position with their backs to the workshop door. They moved to allow her pass into the workshop and she came out with the dog and went on her way to Mrs. Cuffe's, where she was barmaid. The R.I.C. thought this an opportune time to follow her and get a drink; needless to remark, she had no objection; it was just what we wanted. Now was our chance, and we quickly transported the two bags of pikes across the hill to Glengimla.

Padraig Ó'Máille was raided by a large force of R.I.C. and he and his brother, Eamon, beat them off. After that, they were forced to go on the run and we often visited them in their hideout in the mountain. One night, I was going with a dispatch which Pete McDonnell gave me to bring to Kilmilcum. He also gave me a .32 revolver and some ammunition. Needless to remark, I was thrilled to possess the revolver. When I got as far as the top of the hill at Ashmount, I noticed the shiny caps of two R.I.C. men coming along. I left my bicycle against the wall and hopped inside. When they came in line with me they halted, the sergeant having noticed the bike. He said to the other men: "There is a bike here, we had better take it". They made a move to take it, and, as I had only got it on loan, I did not wish to lose it. Coming up from behind the wall, I raised my .32 and dared them leave a hand on it. He immediately stepped back and stood for some time having a consultation with the other fellow. I could not hear what they were saying. Finally they turned and moved away, leaving me alone, and without taking the bicycle.

In the General Election of 1918, Padraig Ó'Máille went as a candidate against William O'Malley, an Irish Party man (or Redmondite). There was very little difficulty in being successful then as, by this time, all the people had given up adherence to Redmond. It was arranged that Padraig (still 'on the run') should go and cast his vote in Leenane booth where there were only two R.I.C. men on guard; it was most unlikely he would be arrested. However, wiser counsel prevailed on him, as the last hunt for Padraig had just quietened down, and if he now showed his face, it would only intensify the hunt moreso again, and make things very difficult for him.

In 1919, we used to mobilise the Volunteers and do a

small bit of drill, dodging the R.I.C. who were intent on getting the names of those who were drilling; or trying to accuse them of some other offence. One Sunday, I was drilling a party of Volunteers just outside where Leenane School now stands, in a quiet part of the road, out of view. Scouts were posted at each end of the road and told to signal if the R.I.C. approached. The signal was given from the Westport end of the road. I saw a lorry load of British soldiers, fully armed, coming round the bend of the road and I immediately gave the order for my men to get inside the fence. The soldiers noticed the movement, as some of the fellows were a bit slow in crossing. They levelled their rifles at us; we kept our heads down and they passed on. I ordered my men out and put them through the same manoeuvre several times, until they all could cross the wall as one man.

In 1919, I came to work in Westport and, very soon, was placed in charge of Derry Half Company. Tom Bourke of Doon was company captain. We organised dances, concerts, raffles, etc. to raise funds. There were collections made for railway men who were on strike; all business premises closed for one day in sympathy with them. There were pickets placed on the roads by the I.R.A. to stop people coming to town. I was in charge of a party on Ballinrobe-Westport road, half a mile from Westport. Two R.I.C. men on bicycles and armed ran straight into us and raised their hands in surrender. I did not think it advisable to disarm them, so I explained our position and asked them to go back and they heartily agreed to my terms. I reported this incident immediately to Commandant Tom Derrig, who had headquarters in the Town Hall, as I was not certain if I had done the proper thing. He smiled and said: "If you had disarmed them you would probably be courtmartialled". T.P. Flanagan, who afterwards became

Mayo County Surveyor, was at headquarters with Tom Derrig. There were a series of lectures given by an officer from headquarters, named McMahon, in the house of Tom Connor, one mile from Westport on the Castlebar road.

Around March 1920, I was asked by Tom Derrig if I would go to Louisburgh and organise that area. Pete McDonnell had already asked me to go there and take charge of a workshop he had opened. Taking both propositions into account, I decided to go to Louisburgh. Tom Ketterick introduced me to Tom Fergus of Mullagh, Andrew Harney of Louisburgh, James Sammon of Carramore and James McDonnell of Cross. Louisburgh Company had more or less become dormant as some of its most active members had been arrested or gone away. Jack Feehan came along to help me with the workshop; he also gave most valuable assistance in organising the district. After a short time we had 360 Volunteers enrolled, it was then decided to form this company into a battalion. I was asked to take charge. I declined, as I would much prefer one of the local officers to take command; also I was not very anxious to stay long in this particular area. However, on being prevailed upon, I decided to take command for a while at least. Pete McDonnell kept in touch with us; we always met at weekends, sometimes at my home 1½ miles from Westport, or at Jack Feehan's home in Kilmeena. Needless to remark, we attended concerts and dances all round the country from Newport to Aughagower, our only method of transport being bicycles. One Monday morning, we were coming through the village of Newport; Pete had some business in Kilroy's in Main St. Jack went into the shop with him, I remained outside. I was in the act of pumping my bicycle in the archway when the local sergeant came along. He asked me my name and, needless to say, I gave him a false one. He did not seem

satisfied and proceeded to ask various questions. I realised there was not much hope of bluffing him, so I left down my bicycle, stuck my right hand into my trench-coat pocket and stuck out my thumb, saying "I would advise you to leave me alone and don't ask questions". I knew if he tried to take me I could make sufficient noise to attract the other two in the shop. The sergeant went and left me in peace. Pete and Jack now came on the scene. Suspecting the sergeant had gone for help, we decided to get out of Newport as quickly as possible. In order to do so, we had to go in the same direction as the sergeant to cross the bridge. He met another R.I.C. man and they both took up a position on the bridge. Our only weapon was a .32 revolver which Pete had. He told us to run for it and he would cover us with the .32; however, the R.I.C. seemed to have got cold feet and did not make any effort to hold us up.

On 1st July 1920, which was a fair day in Louisburgh, Jack Feehan and I were working in the workshop until lunch time; then we decided to take the evening off and go to the fair. We had just arrived when we noticed great commotion down the street; some of the Volunteers who happened to be there saw us and waved us to come to them. There was a free fight going on between some countrymen who had a few drinks taken. I blew my whistle and immediately about 80 men (Volunteers) who happened to be at the fair came on the scene quickly. I gave the order to fall-in, left turn, and, just then, I noticed another squabble going on up the street. I saw four R.I.C. hauling a man along to the barracks; he struggled violently, which gave us time to come up in line with them. When the R.I.C. saw the Volunteers coming close they immediately decided to pull the man into an alley-way which led to the back entrance of the barracks. We had to act quickly and intercept them before they got inside the gate. I gave the order to double; we got there just in time

and four of us grabbed the police round the waist and took their revolvers from them. They released the prisoner; incidentally, he was John Sammon from Carramore, and the Sammon families had been raided long before this by the R.I.C. for their activities. The thought flashed across my mind as to whether we should go the whole way and take possession of the barracks, which was a comparatively easy job, as there were only three other policemen there at that time and the front door was wide open. However, we had no permission from headquarters to start operations; afterwards we regretted the fact that we did not take the chance, because all of us who were identified had to go 'on the run' as a result of this episode. Some of the I.R.A. men were arrested in their beds. The R.I.C. garrison in the barracks was strongly reinforced by men from other barracks which had been evacuated and also by some Black and Tans.

There was a friendly R.I.C. man in the barracks who always tipped us off whenever any arrests were contemplated. They got suspicious of him and, as he was in great danger, he thought it safer to resign. We were raided for several times at night, but we took the precaution of not sleeping at home.

One evening, I was alone in the workshop when a lorry load of military came from Westport, picked up some R.I.C. at the local barracks and made a dash to surround the workshop. I had been tipped off by Anthony O'Toole who had been working in a field nearby and saw the lorry approaching the town. I just succeeded in getting away safely and decided not to go back to work any more, which gave me more time for the organisation.

One day, Jack Feehan and I were cycling from Westport and we called to Jim Fair's house at Glosh, Lecanvey, where

we were always welcome. We were just in the house when a lorry of military passed and we noticed an R.I.C. man named McGovern, who was stationed in Louisburgh, in it, and who could identify us if we were caught. They did not stop at the barracks in Louisburgh, but made straight for the workshop where they were again disappointed, as it was empty.

Andy Harney, who was battalion adjutant, brought Jack and me to the house of John O'Dowd whom we had not met before. He was clerk of the Petty Sessions and so was not publicly identified with the movement; he was also an I.R.B. man. He informed us he was going to resign his job as he felt he could not bluff his way any longer. We advised him to hold on a little longer, but he said he could not see his way to do so. To our surprise and delight, he presented us with two rifles and one short Webley, and told us he had got these from his cousin, Major John McBride, some years back. Those were the first rifles we ever got and we were indeed very grateful for the gift. Now for a place to store them. Andy informed us that everything was fixed. He brought us about two miles across country, tapped at the window of a farmer's cottage, and a most beautiful lady put out her head. Andy introduced us to Miss Fergus who afterwards became Mrs. Harney. She took our prize and put them under her mattress. Next, she gave us a fine currant cake. I said to Andy: "I hope the girl I pick will be as loyal". He replied: "She will, and I know a nice little girl who has a great liking for you; she also comes from very good stock".

I had met Kathleen O'Reilly some time previously at a dance in Louisburgh and Andy enjoyed teasing me about her. I was not anxious to get attached to anyone in particular on account of the uncertainty that prevailed. I went to Leenane on business and was asked by Pete McDonnell to

to accompany him on a bodyguard to Padraig Ó Máille, who was going to Dublin to attend a meeting of the Dáil. Patrick Joyce of Bayview volunteered to drive us; we went through Cong and Headford; we called at the house of Rev. Fr. Ford in Clarren, where we were most graciously received in the early hours of the morning. On our return journey, we were held up by a party of men in a motor car. Who did they happen to be but Jack Feehan, Brod Malone and Tom Ketterick with a prisoner who had refused to obey the ruling of a Sinn Féin court in Louisburgh, and sought protection from the R.I.C.; so Jack promptly arrested him. We took the prisoner from them and had him put under guard so that he could not escape. He was lodged at John Bernard Walshe's of Mount Govnagh, Kilmilcum. Next night, we got Tommie O'Malley to drive both us and the prisoner to Currafin to a family named Daly who were cousins of Tommie. The Volunteers took charge of him and he was put working on Daly's farm. He never made any attempt to escape and, a fortnight later, was released after giving an undertaking to comply with the ruling of the Sinn Féin Court.

I came back again to Louisburgh area and Jack Feehan went to Leenane. I missed him a lot, as we were very good friends. Andrew Harney got married and his young bride started a small shop in the town. She came to us occasionally and brought us some supplies. I asked her if she would bring Kathleen O'Reilly out with her some night and, shortly after, they both came out to visit us. I think I never felt happier than on that night meeting Kathleen again. I did not want to admit to myself, much less to her, that I cared very much, and I knew that something had happened to me. I met her several times afterwards by appointment. She is now my wife, and no truer wife or sweetheart ever lived!

We transported the two rifles to Leenane, as Jack said he had a safe place to keep them for us. I was called to Leenane one night; it was to arrest some farmers' sons and search for furniture which had been stolen from Kylemore Castle (now a Benedictine Convent). To my surprise, I discovered that Jack's hiding place for the rifles was the Parish Priest's house. After our job was finished, we went back to the P.P.'s. house and tapped on the window and Father Cunningham opened it and we handed in the stuff. It gave us great confidence to have the priest on our side.

We had raised money as a result of dances, concerts &c. and gave it to Tom Ketterick, who was brigade Q.M. He sent me a dispatch to come to Westport with a car. I asked Joe Heneghan if he would drive James Sammon and myself to Westport and he agreed. He asked us did we mind if he brought his cousin, Miss Walsh, along also; we said we had no objection. We met Tom Ketterick outside the town and Miss Walsh went into Westport to visit her sister who lived there. Tom brought us out the country to Owenwee, about three miles from the town, where we met Peter Joyce and his father who were in charge of the dump. They handed us over six Lee Enfields and two Peter the Painters. Tom loaded the pistols and showed us how to use them, as we expected we might be held up at Belclare where there usually was an outpost of military. We placed the rifles under the back seat, picked up Miss Walsh, and gave the driver instructions. Miss Walsh never realised the position until we came to Culleen crossroads where we were met by Captain Fergus, E/Company, to whom we handed over the rifles for safe keeping.

I used to go to Westport area to attend Brigade Councils etc. Tom Derrig was down with me at my father's home on a

Sunday evening. He left me to go and visit his mother who lived in High St., and was arrested next morning by R.I.C. I called to see Ned Moane at his home next day; he was preparing to leave it as it was not safe to delay any longer. He decided to come with me to the Louisburgh area to arrange some lines of communication across the mountains, as we felt we could no longer use the roads in safety. Ned decided to take Tom Heavy, a next-door neighbour, with him. He said to me it would be a mistake to leave this fine young lad after us, as he would most likely be arrested. Ned arranged for his young wife, who was expecting a baby, to go into the District Hospital, and ~~we~~ went across the hills to Durliss in the Louisburgh area. A week later Ned was the proud father of a young son. He asked Tom Heavy and me if we would escort him in to see his wife and baby and we gladly agreed. It was pretty risky as, if the R.I.C. had got any word of the birth, they probably would be waiting for Ned to come. Ned sent Heavy ahead to scout the approach to the hospital; it was not long until we got the signal all clear. Heavy and I waited until Ned came out from visiting his wife and baby.

We afterwards attended a Brigade Council meeting which was held in Moyhasten. Michael Kilroy presided. It was decided to form a flying column and take the field against the enemy as quickly as possible. There was much preliminary work to be done. Tom Ketterick and I were to go to Westport for some supplies. Tom was Brigade Q.M. and I was asked to go with him and get some wire cutters and tools which might be useful; so we decided to go in on the following night. We went in to Shanley's drapery shop and, going in, we noticed two soldiers outside. Tom warned me to keep my eye on the door while he went to the far end of the shop to

attend to his business. I was taken by surprise to hear a revolver shot and, on looking around, saw Tom hopping on one leg. I went to his assistance and, as there was no back exit, we had to come through the front door, and the two soldiers had fled. I got him into a laneway which connected Bridge St. with James's St., just opposite the R.I.C. Bks. There was a very friendly family named Conway at the other end of the lane on the main street. Tom said: "If you can get me there I will be all right". We met John Bourke who owned the garage on Bridge St. and he gave me great assistance to get Tom to Conway's. I sent a message to Brod Malone who got a doctor and afterwards a car and bodyguard to take Tom out the country. What really happened was: Tom was describing some incident that happened on the previous night, to the draper in the shop. He had his hand on his automatic on account of the soldiers being outside and it went off accidentally; the bullet passed under his kneecap and out in the side of his shin. Afterwards I went to Mulloy's, Ironmongers, to get the wire-cutter. I was chatting to the assistant, John Glynn, when, suddenly, I recognised an R.I.C. man named McGovern, who had been transferred from Louisburgh, coming in the door. He was the tout who had been going around with the military and who had gone with them previously to arrest me in Louisburgh. He had been known to beat up prisoners after arrest. I did not wish to fall into his hands, so I immediately drew my revolver and covered him off, at the same time, stepping behind a stack of paint tins which were in the shop. This gave me cover from any fire which might be directed from the door. He turned round quickly and said something to the assistant, went towards the door and disappeared. I think it was not for love of me he did so. I was tipped on the shoulder by a friendly young assistant

and led through the private house into the adjoining yard, from where I made my way to the open country. I was informed afterwards that the R.I.C. man said to the assistant: "That is one of the boys, but I did not see him at all".

This was in the month of October 1920. In November 1920, the military became very active, raiding day and night in the area. Most of the officers had to go on the run permanently. Some farmers gave their shotguns voluntarily. We had good fun raiding two loyalist houses. The occupants barred all doors, so that we had to improvise a battering ram to force the door of one, and another, who lived very near and in sight of the R.I.C. barracks, would not admit us. A ladder was procured and entry made through a window when, after a swift search, his gun was collected.

It was decided by Brigade, about March 1st, to take the field against the enemy. We had planned and waited long enough for an attack on the enemy post, which had been strongly reinforced by this time. About 10th March, Brigade O/C. Michael Kilroy and Vice O/C. Ned Moane visited the area and it was decided that the first blow would be struck in Louisburgh where 18 to 20 of the enemy had the barracks well protected with barbed wire entanglements, steel shutters a good supply of armament, bombs, grenades, etc. to stand a very prolonged siege, if attacked. They had two or three Crossley tenders in which Tans and Auxiliaries carried out nightly raids, bayonetting and ill-treating civilians when their quarry had eluded them. After he had made due reconnaissance and inspection of suitable ambush sites on the Louisburgh-Westport road for the position of riflemen to intercept the enemy from Westport while the attack was in progress, Michael Kilroy looked down from a hill overlooking

the town at dawn and said: "Louisburgh, fare thee well for the moment 'till we come again to bring thee freedom".

A week later, Brigadier Kilroy and about 30 men arrived in Culleen and went to Mickey O'Malley's house where they were always welcome. E. Company - our unit - mobilised in Tully Lodge, kindly given us by the owner, Mr. John O'Dowd, himself being sent into Westport to carry out intelligence work. I, being the battalion commandant, riding a horse, crossed from one camp to another two or three times that day. March 16th 1921.

At a Council of officers, taking all the factors into account, Brigadier Kilroy decided instead to move the men to an ambush point at Glos, Lecanvey. Brigadier Kilroy instructed me to take four men along and go into Louisburgh to shoot two Black and Tans who were paying nightly visits to supporters of ours and threatening them. Having gone in on three successive nights, we failed to make contact, as the police were aware of armed men in the district and, consequently, did not show out. On the third night, however Martin O'Reilly and John P. Harney, who had previously scouted the town, observed two Tans enter a publichouse in Bridge St. and reported to the officers waiting at the bridge at the end of the street. Immediately, Joseph Baker and I hurried up to the place indicated, where the Tans had entered, and, when half way up the street, we saw two figures leaving the said publichouse. Notwithstanding hastening our pace, the two Tans ran and dived into the barracks before we could get within range with our revolvers. In addition, the following men were placed at strategic points at the entrance to the town: Andrew Harney, the late Seamus McEville (killed afterwards in Kilmeena ambush, May 1921) and Jim Harney.

Michael Kilroy and his column remained all night in an ambush position in Glospatrick and had only withdrawn from the position at dawn when a lorry load of Tans proceeded along the road to Louisburgh. The column rushed down to their position and waited all day for the Tans to return. However, they waited in vain. Obviously the Tans had been tipped off and returned by the Leenane-Westport road.

On 21st March, on receipt of a dispatch from the Brigadier, myself, Joe Baker, Seamus McEville, Andrew Harney, James Harney and Tom Fergus crossed Laughta Mountain and were met by two guides - Peter McGloughlin, Oughty, and another man sent by Michael Kilroy to bring us direct to where the brigade A.S.U. were billeted in the Drummin area. On sighting Drummin Barracks, Verey lights were sent up from same. We failed to contact the brigade A.S.U. as it had withdrawn after the encounter with the four R.I.C. at Derry Killew that evening, where two of the enemy were killed.

We again returned to Louisburgh area on 22nd March and had arranged to go in that night to Louisburgh, as we were anxious to get something done in that area before again joining up with the brigade A.S.U. Unfortunately, a revolver was discharged accidentally, the bullet passing through A. Harney's stomach and lodging in my arm. Dr. O'Grady was sent for and came promptly and dressed the wounds, which he also did on a number of occasions afterwards. A week or so later, on receipt of a dispatch from the brigade, Joe Baker and Seamus McEville left to join up with the brigade A.S.U. We sent two extra files with them, being unable to travel ourselves. This was the last time we saw Seamus. He was killed in Kilmeena shortly afterwards.

At the end of April, a Party of Volunteers, under Captain

D. Sammon, were billeted in an untenanted house in the village of Askelan, two miles from Louisburgh. They were suddenly surprised by a party of Black and Tans and, while making a sortie from the house, the enemy opened fire on them at close range. Only scant cover was available, and the men, being unarmed except for two revolvers, returned the fire while the bullets of the enemy pierced the ground around them. Three of the party were captured, one being slightly wounded; the other two succeeded in making good their escape. The men who took part in this were: Dan Sammon, Patk. McNamara, James Sammon, Tom Sammon, Joseph Fergus and John P. Sammon. One of the Volunteers died and was buried in Kilgeever graveyard. Andy Harney and I crossed the Kilgeever Hill and, when the grave was just closed, we walked over and fired three revolver shots. We could not delay as it was in sight of the barracks.

Next Sunday, I made an appointment to meet Kathleen, as I expected I would soon be leaving that area to join the brigade A.S.U. It was a nice sunny day and she cycled out to the crossroads at Kilgeever. We were sitting on the fence facing the road, which was only about 100 yards away. We saw about 12 R.I.C. coming along the road which was running parallel to the fence. I realised it would be fatal for us to move as we were on the wrong side of the fence. I had two revolvers at the ready; Kathleen asked me to let her have one. I knew they would not come across the open field to where we were, but there was a branch road which came up on our left, almost 10 yards away. I decided not to open fire if they did not turn that way; they passed on and, needless to say, we both drew a sigh of relief. She was a great girl; I kissed her goodbye, thinking to myself I might never meet her again, and vowing inwardly, if I do, when we have our freedom, I will tell her there is no other girl in the world for me.

I had Tom Fergus and Jim Harney with me as a bodyguard; they had our position covered. We went that evening and collected Captain Dan Sammon and Pat McNamara and decided we would make it unpleasant for those gents to take exercise. I was informed by our Intelligence that the enemy did short patrols around the town (a mile or so distant), taking different routes on each occasion. I decided the only way to contact them was by billeting in houses adjacent to the town, namely, William Ward's, Mooneen; Owen O'Malley's, Coolacoon; John McEvelly's, Bunowen and John O'Malley's, Cahir. When staying in Owen O'Malley's, we observed R.I.C. coming in our direction. We took up positions and watched for them and, again, were doomed to disappointment, as, coming within 500 yards, they turned face about and gave us the slip once more.

At the end of May, I received a dispatch from O/C. Brigade, to link up with brigade unit. We decided to make a call on the Harney family, Tooreen. On approaching the house, we observed a patrol of Black and Tans and R.I.C. proceeding along the road to Kilgeever. We took up positions to intercept them on their return; unfortunately, they did not return. We discovered afterwards they took a short cut across the fields returning to barracks. We proceeded that night to the village of Owenwee, leaving Andrew Harney, who was not fully recovered from his wound, in charge of communications. On arrival, Peter Joyce, Owenwee, informed us that the brigade unit had moved off to Claddy, having left word for us to follow. We arrived there a few hours later. This was the morning of 2nd June 1921, on which the famous Carrowkennedy ambush took place.

We met Brigadier Kilroy and his column and told him we had been travelling all through the night. He told us to go and have a sleep in one of the houses they were billeted in. We were not long in bed when we were informed that

three lorry loads of military had gone towards Leenane and the column were preparing to attack them on their return journey. We immediately jumped out of bed, dressed, and caught up with the column who were already on their way across the fields, led by Broddie Malone. I caught up with Brigadier Kilroy and Joe Ring, who had travelled down the boreen. Michael said to me: "I am sorry Paddy you had not a longer rest, but I am sure you would not wish to miss this opportunity of getting some more, much-needed, rifles and ammunition". He outlined his plans to me briefly, positions to be taken, etc., and said: "You take your four men to that rock you see in the centre of the bog". This clump rock stood about 500 yards away from the Nos. 1 and 2 positions and had a command of the Leenane road for about half a mile. He said he would open fire first. The reason he placed me in that position was, in case one of the lorries would be a long distance behind, or there might be reinforcements coming that way. I did not like the idea of going so far away from the main body, but an order is an order. We were only halfway across the bog to the position when we got the signal from No. 2 on the hill - enemy approaching. We lay flat and let them pass; then two of the lorries had rounded the bend out of our sight when fire was opened. We had just time to get a volley into the third before it got out of sight. We then proceeded to the clump of rock and waited there. The operation started about 3 p.m. and continued till sunset, when the R.I.C. surrendered 23 rifles, 25 revolvers, 1 Lewis gun, 60 Mills bombs and 5,000 rounds of .303. Three lorries were captured and burned. The column mobilised in Claddy where we had some well-earned refreshments, and afterwards proceeded to Drummin and arrived at Moumacasser at daylight. We observed an aeroplane scouting the position at Carrowkennedy and, not till it signalled all clear did the enemy forces venture into that area.

Next day, the brigade unit arrived in E/Company area - Culleen - resting and enjoying the hospitality of the local people whose homes were always available, namely: Edward Kelly's, Durless (Culeen), Red Patrick Joyce's, Durless, Black Patrick Joyce's, Durless, Brian Scahill, Culeen, and Thomas Fergus, do., and a number of other houses in the area. They stayed for a well-earned rest here in the staunch freedom-loving nationalist homes for two days after the famous and victorious Carrowkennedy ambush, Captain T. Fergus and A. Harney taking turns in charge of outposts, sending local men wearing bawneens with dog and stick (pretending to be looking for sheep) to locate any possible enemy movement. The unit then moved to the village of Grogganbawn, 8 or 9 miles across country, where they were well received and protected by the O'Grady's, J. Tiernan, Kilcoyne's, Wallaces and others. The next march was to Killeen area. Captain T. McGuire was not slow to provide billets and outposts, as this was a bad area for strategic reasons, as any concentrated movement by the enemy in an attempt to flush out the column might have effect, as this portion of country was bounded by Clew Bay and Killary Harbour, leaving only one way out towards the east as fighting terrain. But, owing to the efficient Intelligence Service from the battalion centre, Louisburgh (which was also the enemy stronghold), the chain of Scouts, Cumann na mBan and Volunteers, in charge of John P. Harney and Martin O'Reilly, who were in close touch with the column, ensured their safety. It was decided, nevertheless, not to wait too long, so the next move was to the rugged though picturesque area of Glendamuic near Drummin. Commandant Peter McDonnell paid us a visit while here, accompanied by one of the Wallace brothers of the famed West Connemara column. We were glad to get an account from Pete of his successful activities against the enemy in his own area, that all his men

were fighting fit, most of whom we knew personally. Next day we were on the move again; leaving the Louisaburgh battalion area, we marched to the Erriff Valley and thence to Aughagower, Shraheen Company which was at this time in the South Mayo Brigade area.

After resting for one night, we crossed through the parish of Killawalla, Islandeady, and rested in the village of Ballina-correga, where I had the pleasure of meeting many of my old school-going pals. I asked permission of Brigade O/C. to allow me pay a visit to my home which was only two miles away. He did so gladly and warned me to be careful, telling me when he next intended to move in case of any mishap. My dear Father and Mother were very pleased as were my brothers and sisters and all the old kind neighbours.

The next move was to Gleenaur in the Newport area and then through Derryloughan, 12th June was spent in Coolnabinna and the 13th in Derrymartin at the foot of the Nephin mountains, where the now famous photograph of the West Mayo Flying Column was taken, by Jack Leonard of Laherdan. This picture included all the men who took part in the Carrowkennedy Battle, eleven days earlier, with the exception of Paddy Duffy, Joe Baker and John Berry who were on sentry duty while it was being taken.

We moved next to Shanvalley, a little village at the top of Barna Gaoha, the following night we went through the Windy Gap into Crimlin, following in the footsteps of Humbert and his army, 123 years previous. Captain Staunton of the Crimlin Company was responsible for security, while the Column were resting next day we observed a force of Military proceeding along the road towards the village. We took up positions but when they came within a quarter of a mile from us they turned about and went back towards Crimlin.

We got information that strong forces of Military had arrived in Castlebar and we decided to move further towards the mountains, to the villages of Langan and Gort. Apparently the Military had information as to our whereabouts by this time, as we had not long retired to bed, which was about 3 o'clock in the morning, when the

sentries spotted the enemy movements. The Column had barely time to get out, as some men were ill and had to be helped. Four of us who were billeted in one house, were getting out as fast as possible, pulling up our socks and strapping our equipment, we met our Column comrade, Brigadier Michael Kilroy, in full battle array, at the back of the garden fence. Apparently he had not turned in at all that morning, having anticipated this round-up. He directed the other three men viz, Comm. Dan Sammon, Capt. Pat McNamara and Lieut. Jim Harney to join the other men who were taking up a position on the hill and asked me to remain with him.

We both took up a position where we could observe the movements of the Military, raiding the houses. He warned me not to open fire unless they came right up to us. I admired him ever afterwards for his bravery and deep concern for his men, as he insisted on waiting until he got word from above that all the men had taken up their positions, with the exception of two, Paddy Duffy and William Joyce who were billeted in an isolated house and were not called. Every house in the townlands of Crimlin, Lurgan, Gort and Greenauns were searched with the exception of Rowlands where Duffy and Joyce slept peacefully and after a good rest joined the Column in the defence position about 10 a.m. As far as I remember this was the 23rd June the longest day in the year. Personally I found it the longest day in my life as we had to wait until darkness fell before we could move. The Military had camped all round preparing for a comb out of the mountains next day. All the young men in the district were rounded up and put through third degree, in order to extract information from them, but all to no avail, as the people were 100% loyal to us and would gladly have given their lives before giving information. They sent us much needed refreshments, as soon as they found it safe to do so. When darkness fell, we again slipped through the lines and after a long march arrived in the townland of Shunnagh and Parke Coy. was responsible for security.

We again left our own Brigade area and moved to Carracastle, near Bohola, where two days were spent and a very enjoyable dance was arranged by the boys and girls in that area. Military movements were

again reported near us and word was received that the Shunnagh district in which we had spent the night before was thoroughly combed.

From Carracastle we proceeded to Prison, near Balla, where another dance was arranged for us in the village hall. Carracastle was surrounded that day.

Back again to West Mayo, spending a night in Cloonshunnagh, between Belcarra and Ballyneane. Ballyheane Coy gave us ample protection and Errew Monastery was visited by many of the A.S.U.

Next move brought us to Devlish in the Rillawalla Coy area. Here again word was received that strong forces of military were close behind always searching a day behind us.

On the night of Saturday, July 2nd., the Column was billeted in Tonlodgee in the Aughagower Coy. area. A visit from I.O. L. Sheridan brought information of big concentration of troops closing in behind us. A military camp was being established in Killawalla a few miles away. We immediately moved to Lanmore where further intelligence revealed information of a huge trap closing around. A military camp was being established at Ballydonlon, about two miles away.

We moved in the grey dawn to Owenwee, where the Column had left 29 days before, two days before Carrowkennedy. All day Sunday was spent in Owenwee every man on the alert. O/C. called all column together that night and explained the situation to them. It was impossible with about 40 men to engage a highly armed and trained force of about 4,000 troops. Accordingly, column was to disband into twos and threes and infiltrate through the enemy lines. The column disbanded and from dawn on Monday, July 4th., every house and village in the Westport and Louisburg Batt. areas was combed by the strong forces of military. The pressure was kept up for four days but not one of the much-wanted column was captured.

The adventures and hair-breath escapes of the different groups who left Owenwee on that night are well worth recording.

Four of us, with four or five men from Newport, headed west for our own battalion area. We were received and protected by the reliable Cullen people, the Hynes, Gavins, Foys, O'Malleys, Kellys, Joyces and Ryders. This latter family was one of the visits we looked forward to. Old Thomas Ryder and his wife and their neighbours Thomas Fergus and his sister (now Mrs. Andrew Harney, Louisburgh) were exceptionally hospitable and helpful. Having been in bed only half an hour and being much in need of a rest, we were aroused by a Volunteer named Gavin from Lecanvey, who informed us that thousands of troops, Tans etc. had gone from Westport to Louisburgh. We left the house without delay and went up on the crest of a hill where we could observe the enemy movement and where good cover was available in the deep ravines, cut by the torrents from Patrick's Holy Mountain. An aeroplane scouting came right over us and low along the ravine, as if it had spotted something. This was an anxious moment for us, but, luckily, the plane continued on its flight.

There was a Land Commission Ganger named Pat Maguire working Glam farm. We asked him to release his men, most of whom were Volunteers and send them to the hills, pretending to be looking for sheep. In this way, we were aware of how the round-up was proceeding. We were informed by one who had gone into Louisburgh on some pretext that Andrew Harney and his brothers, John P. and Larry, were arrested at dawn, when they were sleeping in an unoccupied house in Legan farm. A large number of young men were rounded up that day around Louisburgh. The military camped in Oldhead. We decided, if we could succeed in getting into the area which they had combed out, we would feel safe; so, when night fell, we made straight in that direction. It was difficult, as the searchlights were being thrown in from the Bay by a gunboat at intervals of every ten minutes. We got as far as Tooreen and called to see the Harney family, who were much upset after the events of the day. We decided, however, not to

wait, as it was possible the enemy might return. We called on Dr. O'Grady, a friend of ours across the road, who was not suspected by the enemy. We were well received and slept comfortably in a good bed, awakening at intervals listening to the rumble of enemy lorries passing outside during the following day.

This was 9th July 1921. Our reliable Intelligence Officer, Martin O'Reilly, made contact with us and confided as to our next move. He suggested his own father's house as it had been raided that day and being situated in the town at the end of Chapel St., it would not be considered we would dare to enter it. The way was previously scouted by his sister, Kathleen, now my wife, and Miss Julia Harney, now Mrs. Con Ryan; both were members of Cumann na mBan. We were welcomed by Simon O'Reilly, an old Fenian, and his wife who put us completely at our ease.

Next day, by the arrangement of two mirrors, we could observe the movements of the military and Black and Tans on the street and square which was in the vicinity of the barracks.

Next night, 10th July, we moved, at 12 o'clock, to O'Malley's, Cahir.

The following day, 11th July, we emerged into the daylight of freedom and walked up to the Main Street in hobnailed boots, leggings and riding breeches to be welcomed by our numerous friends.

Signed: Patrick Kelly

Date: 21/5/58

Witness: Martin O'Reilly

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