

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 656

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 656

Witness

Richard O'Connell,
Cameron Lodge,
Coolock,
Co. Dublin.

Identity.

Member of Caherconlish Irish Volunteers 1914 - ;
Adjutant, 3rd Battalion }
O/C. 5th Battalion } Mid-Limerick Brigade.
O/C. Brigade Flying Column }

Subject.

Activities of Irish Volunteers, Co. Limerick,
1914-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

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Statement of Richard O'Connell.

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STATEMENT OF MR. RICHARD O'CONNELL,

Cameron Lodge, Coolock, Co. Dublin.

(Late of Caherconlish, Co. Limerick).

I was born in 1892 in Caherconlish, Co. Limerick. My father owned a publichouse and a farm in Caherconlish. I was educated at the local National School. Then I went to the Jesuits' Crescent College in Limerick, and I was there until 1911. I stood for an examination in Dublin into the College of Surgeons in 1911, but failed the prelim. into the College of Surgeons and never went back there. I think the first of whatever bit of nationality was in me came from an old Jesuit at The Crescent in Limerick - Fr. Michael McGrath. He died only last year in Milltown, Co. Dublin. A peculiar thing I remember was that although there was something like thirty stood for the examination when I stood for it, I was the only one of that crowd that took Irish as a subject. That was all through Fr. McGrath. That examination was in 1910. He said to me in Limerick: "Dick, you had better take Irish because a day will come in this country when no job will be got without a knowledge of Irish".

I went then to an uncle of mine at Nenagh who had a big farm and who was a great man for horses. He used breed horses, and I was very fond of horses. When I was going to The Crescent in Limerick, I was never a day absent from school except when there was a horse fair in Limerick. The Rector in the College sent for my father one time and he said, "I don't know what happens this fellow but when there is a horse fair in Limerick, he is never in school". I used always ride the horses for fellows I knew at the fair. I remained six months with

my uncle in Nenagh, breaking horses. Then I came back home and remained at home.

In 1914, Jim Leydon of Limerick and Mick Brennan and Jack Dalton came to our house in Caherconlish, and they started the Volunteers. That was my first experience of, or introduction to the Volunteers. Then the Redmond Volunteers and the Split period came. I was at the Redmond review of the Volunteers in Limerick. I was in charge of Caherconlish Company at that. Then the split came and burst up the whole thing. The Limerick City Volunteers got burst up. A good share of the Volunteers in Limerick sided with Redmond and as we did not agree with the Redmondite view we got out then. The Redmondites had control of whatever rifles and stuff that were in the Battalion. Caherconlish Company, which was my Company, was part of the Limerick City Volunteer Battalion. We were only about seven miles from the city of Limerick. Afterwards when the re-organisation came in 1917, all our area around into Castleconnell and out into Grooms on the Adare side, Adare, Patrickswell and all along there, became the Mid-Limerick Battalion area.

We did nothing until 1916 came. As all the arms and such like were controlled by the Limerick City Volunteers, that is, the Battalion to which we were attached and which had gone Redmondite, our Company just fizzled out.

After 1916, Peadar McMahon, Peadar Dunne and Bobby Byrne, (the latter who was shot afterwards in the Limerick Union - Byrne was a cousin of Alfie Byrne, T.D., late Lord Mayor of Dublin -), came out to Caherconlish to me and they asked me to re-organise the Volunteers. I told them I would, and we called a meeting of the Caherconlish Volunteers. There were very few attended. I think about

ten would be the number that turned up. At that time, the 1st Battalion was still in control in Limerick. I would say that would be the end of 1916 or maybe the beginning of 1917. At any rate the 1st Battalion was still in control at that time.

Then I attended a meeting in Limerick. Seán Carroll came in from Castleconnell, and a lad named Mick Conway, from the other end of the County. He is now living at Rathkeale. Just before that meeting, the 2nd Battalion had been formed in Limerick. Peadar Dunne was made Commandant of the 2nd Battalion; Peadar McMahon was Adjutant, and Martin Barry of Limerick city was the Quartermaster. It had been formed before they came out to me. At that meeting that we attended they formed the 3rd Battalion. Seán Carroll of Castleconnell was elected Commandant of the 3rd Battalion, and I was elected Adjutant. The 3rd Battalion embraced the rest of the mid-Limerick part of the County Limerick outside Limerick city.

In the meantime, I was in Caherconlish, drilling the Volunteers, and the police were attending these parades. The D. I. from Pallas, a man named McGetterick, sent word to me that he would meet my lads any time, with the same amount of police, and that we would have a fight. (That was just after the 3rd Battalion being formed, 1918) with the result that we went out to Pallas one Sunday morning and took his car. That was the car, D. I. 303, that Seán Forde (Tomás Malone) had. It was I captured the car and I gave it to Forde afterwards.

The Barracks in Caherconlish was about five hundred yards from our house. One night, while I was in bed, a lad threw gravel up at the window and he said, "Any amount of strange police have gone into the Barrack tonight. 'God,

it looks like as if they are looking for you". I got up, put on my clothes and went out. I called the other lads that were near me, the Lynch's, who were also Volunteers. We got out into a back field and we remained there. The next thing we saw was the house being surrounded. We were just outside the cordon and we watched the performance until it was all over. The Lynch's went into another house and I went into the house of a schoolteacher by the name of Buckley and slept with him that night. Next day there was a fair in a place called Ballybruid, about two miles away. When the people were going home from the fair in the morning, there was a man by the name of Tom Watters, a brother of Dickie's, who was up to lately an army dental officer. Tom was a farmer. I sat up on the car with him and he dropped me at his own house. I got up on another car at his house and I went on towards Limerick. Just as we were passing the Creamery at Beary's Cross, I hopped off the car and went into the Creamery. While I was inside speaking to the Manager, I saw my brother and he cycling like hell down the road. The next thing I saw was four policemen and they cycling after him. He went on to a place called Killonan, where he went into the railway station there and then turned back. The police went searching around the station for him. When he came back to where I was, I met him on the road and said, "What's up?". "Oh!", he said, "They are looking for you". I left him and he went away back home. I went across the fields and got away. So that was the first experience I had with the police. It would be about June, 1918.

Having got away from the police that day, I lay low for a while then. I used go back at night and train the Volunteers. I had to go to Castleconnell and the other Companies, on account of being Adjutant of the 3rd

Battalion. There were then only the two active Battalions in Mid-Limerick. No one took any notice of the 1st, only of the 2nd and 3rd.

While I was "on the run", the Sinn Féin Clubs started. I got word that a Sinn Féin Club was to be started in Inch, St. Laurence's after Mass. This was the Parish Church for Caherconlish. I went there on the Sunday morning, and Fr. O'Carroll of St. John's in Limerick was there, also Jim Dalton, who was afterwards shot in Limerick, John Joe Quilty and Jim Leydon. I presided at the meeting and the police were there watching me. When the meeting was over, Fr. James Carroll said to me, "I have a terrible headache. Is there any place where I would get a cup of tea?". I said, "If I am able to get into the car without the police taking me, we will go on to Caherconlish and I'll get a cup of tea for you there". I got out across the wall. The others were already in the car. I hopped into the car just as it was going, and got out past the two policemen who were there, a Sergeant and a policeman. We got into Caherconlish where I took Father Carroll into my own place and my mother made tea for him.

When the tea was over we found that there were four policemen outside the house, waiting. I said to John Joe Quilty, who owned and was driving the car, "You had better go out now and start the car. When you have it running and the rest of them in it, I'll jump on to it". We were going on to another place at Caherline to start another Club. Quilty started the car, and the Sergeant was outside the car and these three policemen. When the car was started, the hall-door was opened and I made a rush out. I jumped into the car on my own side and threw myself into it. The Sergeant jumped on the running-board on the other side and caught me with his two hands by the collar of

the coat. I was thrown across the seat and my feet were up against him. He was lying in over me and I was trying to work my boot to get him off the car. The car kept going. He asked Quilty to pull up the car and Quilty would not. I was struggling with the Sergeant all the time until we had travelled about a mile outside Caherconlish where we succeeded in throwing the Sergeant off the car.

The Sergeant, going back towards Caherconlish, met another policeman, and the two of them on their way back into the town, met with a number of Volunteers who were going out hurling carrying their hurley sticks. The Sergeant and the policeman attacked the Volunteers, but the Volunteers beat up the two of them, with the result that two Lynch's and a lad by the name of David Ryan were arrested the following day. They were tried and got six months for assaulting the police.

I was then "on the run", and it was while I was "on the run" that the 4th Battalion was formed. I attended a meeting at which it was decided to form two new Battalions, the 4th and 5th. The 3rd Battalion then comprised Castleconnell, Murroe, Cappamore and Aghane. The 4th Battalion when it was formed embraced Adare, Patrickswell, Pallaskenry and another place, the name of which I cannot remember for the moment. Carroll was put in charge of the 3rd and Mick Conway was in charge of the 4th. I was put in charge of the 5th Battalion when it was formed. The 5th Battalion embraced Caherconlish, Ballybricken, Fedamore, Groom and Boher. The Battalion and Company officers all belonged to their own respective areas.

I was "on the run" when the 1918 elections came on, but as there was a sort of unofficial truce for these things during the election period, I went back to act as a

personating agent at Caherconlish for the Sinn Féin candidate, Dr. Dick Hayes. I went into Limerick City with the ballot boxes and remained there for, I think, two nights as one of the officers in charge of the ballot boxes, before the count.

On thinking over the sequence of events I believe the re-organisation of the Battalions, which I have already mentioned, took place immediately following the elections.

I was "on the run" until about May, 1919, when I was arrested. I got six months and I was out in October or November, 1919. While I was in jail, the rescue at Knocklong took place. That was the 13th May, 1919.

I remember that because the Knocklong prisoners were in cells near me in Limerick Prison. They were the Shannon's, Foley and a fellow named Spud Murphy. I was only a short time in jail before the Knocklong prisoners came in there, so that my arrest must have been early in May. The first night they came in I heard them talking to each other through the windows. I knew that the British would have someone there listening to them, so I slipped out a note in the morning to one of the Knocklong prisoners, telling them not to be talking to one another from their cells, and I stopped all that.

I had been charged with illegal drilling and received a sentence of six months. My trial took place in Adare Courthouse. It was sometime in October or November of 1919 when I was released. When I was coming out of jail, I asked the Governor to let me out early in the morning. I was let out at eight o'clock in the morning and at nine o'clock the police were up at the jail gate looking for me again, but I was gone. I had to go "on the run" immediately then.

After my release I started re-organising the Battalion. Things were getting a bit hot. East Limerick, I think, had a Column formed then. I was still "on the run". I don't think there was any volunteer activity in Mid-Limerick area. At the time Dunne was in charge of the 2nd Battalion and Peadar McMahon was Adjutant of that Battalion. Colivet was commanding the 1st Battalion and the first and second Battalions worked independently of each other. There was very little co-operation between them from the time the 2nd Battalion was formed in 1917. This situation dragged on until about May 1918, when as a result, I believe, of representations made by Colivet to G.H.Q. they sent someone from Dublin down to Limerick to enquire into the situation. This was not the Knocklong enquiry I refer to. That was concerned with the situation in the Galtee Brigade, but this was another enquiry held somewhere about the same time, to examine the situation existing in Limerick city between the 1st and 2nd Battalions. Immediately following the Knocklong enquiry, Michael De Lacy had been appointed to command the Galtee Brigade, and it may have been a couple of months later when, as a result of the Limerick enquiry, de Lacy was released from the Galtee Brigade and appointed to command the Mid-Limerick Brigade which at the time was composed of only the 1st and 2nd Battalions of Limerick City.

De Lacey, who was a Wexford man, came to live outside Limerick, just between Patrickswell and Limerick, and we used hold the Brigade meetings in his house. After a time Mid-Limerick was re-organised again, and Dunne was made Brigadier. The 1st Battalion was ignored by the Brigade. Peadar Dunne was a Dublin man and a 1916 man. He was working in Guinness's before he went to Limerick, and then he was working in Daly's in Limerick. He was driving a bread-van, and Peadar McMahon was in the office there. The Brigade was organised then as

follows:- The 2nd Battalion remained the 2nd; then the 3rd, the 4th, and we were the 5th Battalion. That was what comprised the Mid-Limerick Brigade. The 1st Battalion was inactive, and therefore was ignored by the other units of the Brigade; but it still constituted the 1st Battalion, although we tried to make the 2nd Battalion the 1st, with a corresponding change in the other numbers. It did not materialise just then, however, and the inactive 1st Battalion held its numerical identity.

The first engagement we had was the attack planned on Murroe Barrack. This was January 1920. Bill Wall, who was an artesian well borer and held all the machinery for artesian well boring, made a mine for the attack. We went to Murroe Barrack and had this mine. I was on the outskirts with five or six lads, and we had a pony and trap to take Bill Wall away when the attack would be over, but it was an abortive attack. The bomb or mine blew out instead of blowing in, doing little damage to the Barracks. There were only a few shots fired at the Barrack and we had to retreat from it. I know it was the winter time because it was a desperate night. I think myself it was one of the first barrack attacks because there was no official order for it at all. We just thought of doing this, and we did it.

On the general evacuation of the R. I. C. Barracks, in 1920, Murroe Barracks was evacuated. In my area there were Caherconlish Barracks, Ballyneety Barracks, Ballysimon Barracks, Croom Barracks and Fedamore Barracks. These were all the R. I. C. Barracks in my area. My father was the landlord of Caherconlish Barracks, and for fear that anything would go wrong I took charge of the destruction of that particular Barracks. I put other officers in charge of the destruction of the other Barracks. I wanted to remain

at the Caherconlish Barracks because, if anything went wrong, it would be said that I did not want to burn our own property. We burned it down.

On the night Caherconlish Barracks was burned the Sergeant's wife, Mrs. Healy, was in the Barracks. She was after having a baby about a week before. As luck should have it, on the night of the burning, the Sergeant was there as well. When we got into the Barrack, the wife was in a room and she had the baby in her arms. I think it was three other children she had, and they were all in a cluster around her. When I went in, I saw her looking up and I thought there was someone up in the roof. She was looking up towards the trap door in the ceiling leading to the roof. I looked up and I saw the trap door. I said to her, "Is the Sergeant up there?". She said nothing. I said, "I will give you a guarantee that nothing will happen to him if he comes down". She called him. He went to put down his legs and I said to him, "Pull them up, and hand down first whatever arms you have". He handed down a Colt automatic revolver and, I think, four bombs. He came down then and I put three lads in charge of him. When taking him out, one of the lads in charge of him, John Power, turned back and said to me, "I think Stephen Lynch will do in the Sergeant". Lynch was one of the men who had been arrested and convicted in connection with the incident already related where these fellows had beaten up the Sergeant and Constable who had tried to arrest me. Sergeant Healy, whom we were now concerned with, was the same Sergeant who had been responsible for the arrest and conviction of Lynch and the others. I had not noticed that Stephen Lynch had a drop of drink taken that night. It was when they had taken the Sergeant out I heard that Stephen wanted to plug him, so when John Power came back and told me this I rushed out and brought in the Sergeant

again. I took the child that the wife had, and I put the child into the Sergeant's arms. I said to John Power, "Now, you can take him out". So that saved his life. We got the children out then and put them into the house next door, that of a man by the name of Creagh. We then set fire to the Barrack.

All the rest of the Barracks in the area except Groom and Fedamore were burned the same night. Groom Barracks was occupied, and the Groom Volunteers, instead of burning the Barrack that night, burned the courthouse. Two Volunteers were trapped in the burning of the courthouse and were burned to death. That was the only incident that happened at that time. That would be up to the beginning of 1920.

Major General Lucas had been captured by the Cork Volunteers in June, 1920, and they had passed him on for safe keeping to the fellows in Clare. It was some time later still that the Clare men - Mick Brennan, Paddy Brennan and Mick Hehir - handed him over to us. I put them up at Dr. Corboy's house in Caherconlish. Dr. Corboy was at the time on holidays in Kilkee but he allowed us the use of his house for this purpose. We remained there for, I think, three days. Then it was rumoured that the British authorities knew of Lucas' presence there. We were afraid of a raid, so we arranged to have him moved to another place.

An amusing incident happened while he was there. We used take him for a walk each day. This day Mick Brennan and I took him out. We went out to the back of Dr. Corboy's and got into a field belonging to a man by the name of Ryan. When we were in the middle of the field, a big three-year-old bull attacked us, and we had to run for the ditch, the three of us. Lucas, who was a very lively man, got up on the ditch first and we followed. While we

were on the ditch, Mick Brennan pulled his gun, and the bull was underneath us. Mick was going to shoot the bull, and I said, "Stop! That bull won't be paid for if he is shot. It is better to leave the bull alive and we will get away some other way". We had terrible trouble in getting away from the bull. Lucas wrote a description of it afterwards to his wife, which we read as we censored all his letters. It was very amusing. He said, "Imagine! Two officers of the Irish Army and a British General! A bull frightened us!"

Lucas was a very decent man and he proved that afterwards. While he was in custody with us, I went into the room to him one day and I saw on the mantelpiece a letter with Dr. Corboy's name and address on it. He was, therefore, aware of the place he was held in and the name of the person that owned it, but he never gave that away afterwards. He knew us well and he never gave any of us away.

We took him then to a place called Cahercorney between Herbertstown and Bruff, and we were only there about three nights when he escaped. In the room he was in, the window was barred with ordinary bars that you would see in a farmhouse, but one of the bars was missing. The McCarthy's in their young days had taken one of the bars out to enable them to get in and out the window when they were out late. It was through that window Lucas escaped. When he was gone, there was very little made about his going. No one was very sorry about his escape. He was a nice fellow and we liked him. Besides that, the business of holding him prisoner was a considerable lot of trouble. After Lucas escaping, we had to be very quiet and keep away from the police who were very active around our area that time. We kept quiet.

Then the formation of the Mid-Limerick Column started. The East Limerick Column had been formed earlier. It would be about September, 1920, when the Mid-Limerick Column was formed. Brigadier Dunne came out to me. There were about ten of us "on the run" at the time and there was a share of lads from Limerick city who were "on the run" also. He suggested that the Column would be formed. We formed the Column. I was appointed Column Commander by Dunne and given the power to act on my own initiative whenever I thought it necessary to do so without reference to him.

At that time another move was made to link up the 1st Battalion. A meeting was held at a place called Drombane, attended by Colivet and Liam Forde from the 1st Battalion, and the rest of the Battalions were represented at it. At that time we were making arrangements to have an attack on a police car that used go from Bruff to Limerick City, and Colivet did not like the idea. He went away without making any arrangements.

The Column had been staying at the back of this place where the meeting was held - at the Four Elms. We were staying in farmers' houses at the back of it. Next morning the scouts rushed in to us and said that the place was surrounded but there was one point at which the cordon had not been completed. We got through at that point. They searched all that area for us all day but we had got through. So the ambush did not come off at Drombane.

Liam Forde was the only one out of the 1st Battalion that was anxious to fight. He came to the Column and he said, "I want to remain with the Column". He remained with us then.

An ambush was brought off then. We planned this ambush at a place between Shane's Cross and Ballyneety. Fr. Joe Garroll, who was then Curate in Fedamore, was with us. He was appointed Chaplain to the Column. He was there that night and heard all the lads' confessions before the ambush. At nine o'clock each morning a car used pass. We had arranged that on this particular morning a hay-bogey would be rushed out across the road when the car would be coming and would block it. When word came to us from the scouts that the car was coming, we pushed the bogey out. Just as we pushed the car out, a pony and trap came along by the side of the car. The lads stopped to let the pony and trap pass, but the police lorry, following closely, got past also. They got clean away. At that time an order was in force that we were not to fire on any enemy forces without giving them the option of surrendering, by calling on them to surrender. This order was issued by the Brigade. We got away then from that place. Ballynagar was the name of the place where the abortive ambush was.

The next engagement we were in was with the East Limerick Column at Grange. It was a combined operation between the East and Mid Limerick Columns. We met the East Limerick Column at Grange by arrangement with them. We manned one side. We planned that operation at Bob Ryan's house at Lough Gur. Ryan was T.D. for Limerick. I met Hannigan, Seán Forde (Tomás Malone) and two or three more of the East Limerick Brigade there, and it was planned there. We were to go into positions at a certain time in the morning.

We got into our positions. Instead of the one lorry we expected, a convoy came. I could not see the lorries

from the position I was in, but from what I heard at the time I think there were about ten lorries in it. They were coming from Kilmallock. That was in the direction they were expected. We heard shots. Apparently, fire had been opened by some of our men before the lorries came into the ambush position. I am quite clear in my mind on the point that the lorries came from Kilmallock, heading towards Limerick, because we had the lower part of Grange manned, nearer to Limerick than to Grange, and I had to get out on the road, when Hannigan blew his whistle for retreat, and rush down about three or four hundred yards to a cottage to get four or five of my men out of it.

Referring to the copy of the six-inch map of Grange, my remembrance of the positions held are as follows:

The East Limerick Column, with O'Hannigan and Tomás Malone, were along the inside of the wall on the west side of the Limerick-Killmallock road, and manned the position, roughly, from a point near the river to the estate avenue some two or three hundred yards north of that.

Our fellows, that is, the Mid-Limerick Column, were in a similar position on the east side of the road, that is, facing the East Limerick men and extending about the same distance.

The local Volunteer Unit, that is, Jed Dwyer's Battalion, were occupying the high ground south of the bend, overlooking the point where the lorries stopped before they came around the bend. Of course, these men, being armed only with shotguns, could do very little when the action began.

I think the approximate time we mobilised there was nine o'clock. The date of the action is as was given by

some other people concerned, 10th November, 1920. It was about midday when the lorries came or when the action began.

When we arrived, Hannigan gave us the positions we were to occupy, which were as I have shown on the map, running from O'Neill's house northwards towards Limerick, along that east side of the road, while they, the East Limerick men, would man the other side.

There was a very high wall at Mr. O'Neill's house and there was ivy on the wall. Some of my lads got on that. We had bombs there and, when the first lorry came, there were three grenades thrown into the lorry.

Only two lorries came around the bend into the beginning of the ambush position. The remainder pulled up at the other side of the bend, not coming into our view when the firing began. It was just when these two lorries were coming around the bend that a single shot was fired by somebody, and this shot served to alarm the others, so that they stopped where they were. Immediately the two lorries were attacked, fire was opened on all sides by our own fellows on to the lorries and from the military in the other lorries around the bend, which we could not see. Hannigan, realising that we were outnumbered, decided to retire and blew his whistle as a signal for this. We retreated and, when we had gone back a bit, it just dawned on me that I had five men in a cottage down the road and that they would not have known about the retreat. That would be on the Limerick side of me. I went down, got them out of the cottage and we retreated out eastwards. This cottage that I speak of was almost opposite the lodge-gate on the other side of the road. It was known as Sheahan's cottage. We retreated to Longford Bridge.

On Hannigan's blast, sounding the retreat, the Mid-Limerick Column retired on its own and did not again make contact with the East Limerick Column that day. We went back to our own area in Mid Limerick, while the East Limerick fellows remained in East Limerick. We sent back the Volunteers, who were not "on the run" or not belonging to the Column and who had been with us that day, back to their own homes.

The Column went on to a place called Bohermore, where we had a house belonging to the Bennett's, that is, the late Senator Westropp Bennett. We had beds and things there. We always kept the Column there. Bennett knew all about this and allowed us the free use of the place. Then we found that we had all the East Limerick ammunition with us, which we had got at O'Neill's house. I got in contact with Hannigan again. He sent a girl by the name of Maggie Maloney to recover it, and she took the ammunition back to him. This bag of ammunition had been left by Hannigan or some of his Column in O'Neill's house, which adjoined the position we had occupied during the fight. When we began to retire, this O'Neill girl - Bishop O'Neill's sister - ran after us, asking us to remove this ammunition which had been left there and apparently forgotten in the excitement. We took it with us. It was all .303 stuff.

We had no contact for a good while with East Limerick until the Drumkeen ambush. Drumkeen was in February 1921. I had an Intelligence Officer by the name of John Purcell at Caherconlish. He was a creamery manager's son. This I. O. sent me word that on the first Thursday of every month two lorry loads of Black and Tans and R. I. C. left Pallas Barrack for Fedamore to pay the Tans and police in Fedamore Barracks. Pallas Barrack was a big station where the D. I.

and all the Tans and police were, and the only outlying Barrack they had in my area was Fedamore. I sent a despatch rider by the name of Stephen Lynch to contact Hannigan in East Limerick and gave him this information. Then I went and had a look at this place at Drumkeen. We drove there one night, three or four of us, in a pony and trap, looked at the positions there, sized them up and decided it would be an ideal place for an ambush.

Hannigan sent word to meet him on a certain day at Kilttealy in David Guerin's house. Our Column was then in Murroe. I was in charge and Seán Carroll was next in command. Carroll and I left Murroe and went across the fields to Cappamore. Jimmy Humphreys of Glenstal, Murroe, was to meet us at the hotel in Drumkeen with a horse and trap and take us on to Kilttealy, to Guerin's house.

When we came on to the Cappamore road after crossing the fields, I saw a man on a bicycle that I knew, a man by the name of Tim Wixted, and I stopped him. He said to me, "Oh! There was terrible work yesterday in Caherconlish. The Tans got into Inch St. Laurence graveyard and got all your guns". There was a vault in Inch St. Laurence graveyard belonging to a man from Cappawhite, and we got the key of the vault through Packie Ryan of Doon. All the shotguns and stuff that we did not need we dumped into the vault. When the Column would be anywhere around there, we used go there, clean all the guns and fix them up. We had a big box there which contained our stuff. Tim Wixted explained, "The Tans got all your stuff in Inch St. Laurence graveyard yesterday. When they came through Caherconlish, they pulled up at your house. They went in and told them inside, 'Oh! Dick is finished now. We have all his guns got to-day'. Then they went outside and they fired shots out of the guns they had captured, over the house."

I said, "That is bad". I was very worried because I thought it might be information they had got. After the Truce, however, when we took over Pallas Barrack from the Tans, I enquired of Sergeant Healy, the man that we saved that night, and he said, "Ah! No! There was a Tan going around. There was an air slit in the wall of the vault and he saw the box in there, through the slit. They burst in the iron door then and got them".

After leaving Wixted, Carroll and I went on anyway to Drumkeen, and we called into the hotel. Just as we were in the hotel, having a drink, a man by the name of English, a farmer who lived just at the very cross-roads where the contemplated ambush was to take place, was in the bar. He said, "Dick, you're the very man I wanted to see. I have not slept for the last week. I heard there was a crowd around my place a week ago, looking around there, and I was told there was going to be an ambush". This alarmed me somewhat, as it was beginning to appear as if our plans were public property. I said, "John, that is foolish because Drumkeen is in my area and, if there was going to be an ambush there, I would know about it". He said, "Could you give me a guarantee that there is not going to be an ambush there?". I said, "As far as I know, there is not, and you can sleep sound from this on". So I re-assured him, and Carroll and I went out. I was not feeling too comfortable after this information. We met Jimmy Humphreys just outside the hotel, and we drove on to Guerin's in Kiltalea. Hannigan was there and also Bill Hayes, I think Jack McCarthy and David Guerin.

We had arranged at that time to attack them in the morning when they were going from Pallas to Fedamore. I suggested to Hannigan, however, that we would attack them

in the evening, that we would throw out scouts in the morning to see if they passed out to Fedamore and, when they had passed out, to see if there were any military operations around the area and that, if there were not, we would attack them coming back. Hannigan agreed to my suggestion and we decided to carry out the attack on the following Thursday and that on Wednesday night we would move in to East Limerick, near Killealy, and their Column would meet us there.

We left Murroe on the Wednesday night, We travelled all night and got into an old shed, incidentally, also belonging to the Bennett's in another farm they had at Cloverfield. We waited there, having thrown out scouts before morning. Then word came back that they had passed at about nine o'clock and everything was clear. At about ten or eleven o'clock we marched down into Drumkeen. It was the Thursday before the First Friday of the month and all the people around there were going to confession. The Curate of Killealy was a Fr. Nolan and he was hearing confessions. We brought him down with us to English's house. Just as we were passing down towards English's, who was walking up but this John English I had been speaking to a couple of days before? I ordered one of my lads, "Arrest that man and bring him back to his own house, and keep him there". His house was on the very cross at Drumkeen. We marched him back. Any straggling civilians we found about, we put them all into English's house, to keep them out of harm's way. The priest was also there.

We got into positions. Hannigan was at one part of the road at the left-hand side, facing towards Fedamore, and all my lads were on the right-hand side, inside the big wall of a place belonging to a fellow by the name of

de Burg of Drumkeen. Just at the top of the road at the graveyard in Drumkeen, where there is a bend, there is a farmhouse belonging to de Burg at the very corner, and David Guerin was in that house with five or six others. Bill Hayes and some more of the East Limerick Column were in the graveyard. The lorries had to come down the hill, for about three or four hundred yards, and at the bottom one road branched off for the chapel in Drumkeen and the other road branched off for the hotel in Drumkeen. We blocked both these roads. The arrangement was that the first lorry would be let go the whole length down until it hit the barricade when our fellows would open fire on both of them.

The first lorry hit the wall, We found out afterwards that D. I. Sanson was in that lorry, and the driver was sitting alongside of him. Both of those were in civilian clothes. When the lorry hit the wall, they were thrown clear and, running along by the hedge, nobody saw them for a while. Then, being in civvies, when they were seen by our fellows, they took them to be casual passers-by, so that they escaped. There were eleven more police divided between the lorries. There were thirteen altogether, and eleven were killed. The police in the lorries were all killed by the fire of our men, except the D. I. and the driver who escaped. The second lorry was attacked midway on the hill. After it had been fired on for a time, the occupants seemed to have been all killed, except one R. I. C. man who got out and lay by the front wheel. He kept firing all the time on us, and it took a long time for him to be got at. He was lying down on the ground with his rifle, and he blazing away. Seán Carroll of Castleconnell and a man by the name of Johnny Vaughan jumped out over the wall where I was. Johnny Vaughan got down on one knee and got him.

Then we got out on the road and the two Columns assembled by the side of the graveyard. We took all the rifles and ammunition the police had and put them into a field. Hannigan said to me, "We had better walk down through the police to see if any of them might be still alive and if they want any attention." As we were coming down along the road in the middle of the hill, two Tans, who had been shamming death, started to get up and run. Hannigan and I captured the two of them, marched them back and left them with the lads. We then continued on down the road. When we went into English's yard, we found that English had taken in two Tans off the road and had them inside in the kitchen. We looked at the two of them and saw that there was nothing could be done for them. John English, who was in the yard when I walked in, said to me, "I beg your pardon, sir! Can I give a drink of water to this man that is inside dying?". "Oh!", I said, "John, you can give him what you like". John did not pretend that he knew me, and the poor man never spoke to me afterwards until he died. He must have considered that I had played him a dirty trick by assuring him that there would be no ambush there when I had spoken to him a few days before. Hannigan and I went back to rejoin the Columns when we had found everything was alright.

The two Tans that we had made prisoner were courtmartialled and sentenced to death in compliance with an order on the matter from G. H. Q. which Hannigan produced at the courtmartial. We appointed Maurice Meade to carry out the executions on the spot. Maurice put one Tan behind the other and shot the two of them with one bullet, because, he said, there was no use wasting ammunition on them. Hannigan was Chairman of the courtmartial. Seán Stapleton, David Guerin, I think, and myself were the officers that

court-martialled them. We charged them with being enemies of the country, coming into this country to fight against us. These fellows were not wounded at all. They lay down and were merely shamming, thinking that when we had moved on, they could clear off.

When it was all over we found that Bill Hayes had been hit and he was bleeding a lot from his hand. He was hit on the thumb from cross fire. I don't think it was from the lorries. I think it was probably cross fire from some of our own fellows. We retreated across the country and we got into a place called Ballybruid. We sent word to Dr. Corboy in Caherconlish. He came out and fixed up Bill Hayes. We found then that Davy Barry (afterwards Secretary of the Tourist Development Association), who was with us also, had sprained his ankle. So we had two casualties in the engagement, and we had to get cars to get them away with us. We marched through the night - the two Columns - and we got in near Kilfinane in East Limerick by morning. We remained there for three or four days before we separated from the East Limerick Column and came back into Mid-Limerick again.

Regarding the number of Volunteers concerned in the Drumkeen ambush, I would say there would be a hundred men altogether, between the two Columns, that is, between scouts and outposts and all.

Having come back to Mid-Limerick again, we stayed quiet for a while. Liam Forde had not been at Drumkeen ambush, but he came immediately after it and joined up with the Column.

Sometime later, some of the officers of the North Tipperary Brigade came to Castleconnell and met Carroll and

myself. They said they were very inactive in North Tipperary and wanted us to help them to start something. They asked us would we go down and give them a hand to attack Portroe Barracks, so we went into North Tipperary. Liam Forde came with us. At that time he was just an ordinary member of the 1st Battalion who had come out to us to join our Column. We went out through Cappamore, all through the hills there, the Sliabh Felim mountains into Keeper Hill and down into Ballywilliam, on the road between Nenagh and Limerick. Having arrived there we were billeted around in farmers' houses. There were about twenty-five men of the Mid-Limerick Column in the party.

On the following Sunday, Liam Hoolan, who commanded the North Tipperary Brigade, and another officer of his Brigade named Ned O'Leary, came out to us at Ballywilliam. They asked me who invited us down to North Tipperary. I said we were invited down. He replied that he did not want us there and that we would have to leave his area. I told him we would not leave. We had a bit of an argument and some sharp words about it and, after some time, they went away.

That Sunday evening, Forde and I were up at McDonnell's of Pallas. They took us over to see Portroe Barracks which we proposed to attack. We saw the Barracks and it was late when we got back that night, so Forde and I stayed at McDonnell's. When we woke in the morning we found that the place was surrounded by the police, and Forde and I were arrested. All the available men around the area were arrested, but, luckily enough, the other men of the Column were not arrested as they were at the other side of the road.

We were taken to Killaloe Barracks, and Forde bluffed his way out that night. When we had seen the police coming to arrest us, we both had knee-breeches on us, and we

pulled out two old trousers belonging to a man in the house, putting them on over our own breeches. Forde's were alright, but the seat was out of the pair I had got and they spotted the other pants inside it. When we got into Killaloe Barracks, Forde went to the lavatory and removed his own breeches, which he dumped there. He was released that night but I was held. I was kept a fortnight in Killaloe Barracks, but nobody there was able to identify me.

I was then brought into Limerick, and in Limerick an old R.I.C. man that was in Caherconlish, a Protestant, identified me. I got a bit of a doing there. My eyes were blackened. Then I was sent on for interment to Spike Island and from that to Bere Island. That would be about March or April, 1921.

A peculiar coincidence happened while in the Barracks in William Street, Limerick. Sanson, the D.I. who had escaped from the ambush at Drumkeen, had got it into his head that we had allowed him to escape and did not want to get him so when they found out who I was in the Barracks in William Street, Limerick, they sent for Sanson, but he refused to come in to identify me. I was then shifted to the Ordnance Barracks in Limerick where I remained until I was shifted to Cork.

While I was in the Ordnance Barrack in Limerick, I was taken out as a hostage to Pallas, where the eleven police that were killed at Drumkeen came from. I was taken off the lorry there and was being taken into the Barracks when I got a stroke from a big tall Tan and I was knocked on the road. They kicked me. Everyone of them that could get a kick at me, did so. They kept kicking me. There was a Head Constable there. What his name is, I could not tell you. He picked me up and he saved me. He pulled me into a

cell, locked me up and kept the key. He said to me, "They'll kill you if you are left here long, because they think you are responsible for Drumkeen". "Oh!", I said, "That is moonshine to be talking that way". The party of Tans that brought me out went on to Tipperary, and they picked me up going back again. I got a few more cracks on the way back.

When I went back into the Ordnance Barracks in Limerick, the lad said to me, "You had better go to bed and report this". I went to bed. A Jewman, who was an officer in the Ordnance Barracks, came in to me and said, "What is wrong with you?" I said, "I am after being beaten up". My two eyes were closed and I could not see anything. I said, "I want a doctor". He said, "You will get no doctor".

Then the Intelligence Officer for Limerick came in. He was a Captain Haddick and belonged to the Leinster Regiment. He said to me, "Well, you saved my life once. I will save yours now". I had never met the man before and I was surprised at that. I said, "I don't know. I don't think I ever met you before". "You did", he said. He then told me an incident that happened. Himself and another British officer were out at the Four Elms publichouse one night, and I had the Column up at the back of the Four Elms at the time. An account had come up to me that there were two British officers down in the pub and it would be easy to get them. Carroll and I went down there, where we saw the two officers. They were in mufti. They did not seem to have any guns or anything on them. I said to Carroll, "What the hell do we want plugging these fellows? They don't seem to be doing any harm and they have no arms. They are doing nothing". The officer had apparently

learned of this incident, and he said to me, "You saved my life that time and I will save yours now. This is no place for you to be. I will get you shifted to Cork. They believe you were in Drumkeen and, if you are left here in Limerick, they will revenge it on you". I said, "Alright". The following day he shifted me to Cork with five or six others, and we were lodged in Cork Jail.

When we got to Cork Jail, Professor O'Rahilly was there, also Charlie Culhane of Thurles and a good share of lads that I knew. After about a week, one night in the middle of the night a drunken officer came into the cell to me and said, "Come on! You are going out". He took me out. Then I saw the crowd of our fellows and they all lined up. It was raining very hard. He made us get into the lorry. We were standing up in the lorry and he said, "Sit down". We had nowhere to sit, and we had to sit down on the wet floor of the lorry. Poor Charlie Culhane, being an old man, did not want to sit down in the wet, but the officer gave him a prod of his gun, ordering him roughly to sit down and calling him an ugly name, and Charlie had to sit down. We were driven down to the Quay in Cork. The next thing was we were put on a tender and we found ourselves on Spike Island.

We were on Spike Island for a good while - I would say a couple of months - when an incident happened there. We were allowed to play hurley out on the compound. In Spike Island the huts were on one side; in front of these was a gravel path and then the barbed wire entanglement fence and outside that was the compound where we used play. We had hurleys. We were out this day hurling and the ball went into the wire. Paddy White of Meelick, Co. Clare, rushed over to pull the ball out with the hurley. If he

got through that wire, it would have been into his own hut, which had nothing to do with escaping from the place.

The next thing was the soldier on sentry duty put up his rifle and shot White dead. Someone - I think it was the old Camp Commandant - roared at us then, "Get back from the wire". The sentry had re-loaded as if to fire again. No one moved. Then the Governor of the Island - the old Commandant - came up and he disarmed the soldier. We went over, knelt down and said a prayer for Paddy while he was dying. He died within a minute. We took him in then. The soldiers started mocking us while we were praying over White. These soldiers were the Essex Regiment. We did not know at the time that there had been an ambush in Cork and that five or six of this Regiment had been killed. This was their revenge. White was taken out, and five or six of us were let take him down on our shoulders to the boat. We put him on the boat and he was sent back to Clare.

Three or four weeks later, an order came that certain men were being shifted to Bere Island. Seán Collins, Mick Collins' brother, was interned there with us. He had a bad hand at the time and the doctor in the Camp was attending to it. His name was among the batch for removal to Bere Island, but he was very anxious to remain in Spike on account of his hand. I volunteered to go in his place and I was allowed to go. We were put down into the hold of an old boat, which contained old tar ropes, and taken from Spike Island to Bere Island. Every one of us was sick on the trip. The Scottish Borderers were escorting us. A little Sergeant used come down to us every half hour, pull a revolver and say, "If any one of you tries to escape, you will get this", indicating the gun in his hand. We landed in the morning at Bere. We were marched up into the Camp and put into different sheds there.

I suppose there were three or four hundred men altogether in Bere Island Camp. We were not long there when Canon O'Kennedy of Ennis was interned also with us. He used say Mass in the Camp.

There was an ex-R. I. C. man living in a house on Bere Island, near the Camp. He worked in the Camp. After a time we found out that he was friendly, and about seven of us decided that we would make an effort to work him and try to make an escape from the place.

We were in Bere Island when the Truce came on, 11th July, 1921. Dr. Jim Ryan was one of those interned with us. He was, of course, a T. D. at that time and he was taken out when the Truce came.

Our plan for escaping occurred immediately after the Truce. We contacted this ex-R. I. C. man and he said he would do anything he could for us. There were two compounds in Bere Island, an inner compound and an outer compound. At that time we were sleeping in huts something like Nissen huts but rather like hay barns. They were very big, made of corrugated iron and sheeted down the sides. The huts were enclosed by barbed wire, in a sort of inner compound, while some distance outside that was another barbed wire fence enclosing an outer compound between that and the wire around the inner compound. In the morning, we would be paraded in the inner compound and then let out to the outer compound. Guards would be placed around the wire enclosing the outer compound. At four o'clock in the evening, a whistle would go and we would be taken from the outer compound to the inner compound, all the guards being then withdrawn from the outer wire to the inner wire.

In the outer compound there were trenches which had

been used by the military for rifle practice. Every day when we would go down there, we used go into one of the trenches and start digging a hole with spoons. When evening would come, we would start a sham battle by firing the clay at the lads above. This was a means of disposing of the fresh clay we had dug during the day. That procedure went on for a while until we had made a fairly good hole. The lads above used dig sods with their heels and throw them at us. We used these sods to cover the hole every night. The result was that, at the end of about three weeks, we had the hole well dug. What we were actually doing was gradually extending the end of the trench towards the wire and keeping the extended part covered on top each day, so as to conceal the fact that it was being extended. We had a bag with grass sewed on to it, which we used as a cover.

When we had room enough for the seven of us, we fitted ourselves in the hole and found we had room enough inside of it. We had made arrangements through the ex-R.I.C. man that a boat would meet us out on the Island and row us across to the mainland at the side of Hungry Hill. The gable end of the ex-policeman's house was looking into the compound. I think Harrington was his name. He said that, when the guards on the outer wire would be withdrawn, he would put a light on the gable end window, and, if we saw that there, we would know that the guards were withdrawn.

The day came anyway - it was on a Saturday - when we decided to go. We went into the hole, but before I went in, Canon O'Kennedy called me and I walked round the compound with him. He said, "Dick, don't go into it. It is a death-trap. If you are caught in it, you will be all shot". I said, "Canon, it is this way: I am now nearly seven months in jail, between Limerick, Spike Island and Bere Island; I am getting

out anyway, even if it is in a box, I am going out". He said, "Alright". He blessed us. We went into the hole and the lads covered it over. When the bugle sounded the warning to return to the inner compound, a Sergeant of the military would come out and go around the outer compound to see that everyone was clear of that place. They would not count us, however, until we were in our huts. When the rest of the lads had covered us up in the hole, I was on top. When the Sergeant was going on his rounds, I felt him walking on top of my back, but apparently he did not notice what was under him.

We waited for a while. We had an arrangement with one of our lads, a Waterford man, who had Highland Pipes, that when all was quiet and clear in the inner compound, he would blow his pipes as a signal to us that all was well on that side. When I heard the music, I put my head out of the hole and saw the light on the gable end window. I said, "Lads, it's time for us to be making a move". The ex-policeman had previously brought us in a pliers. I crept down to the wire and tried to cut it with the pliers, but it would not cut it. I crept back to the lads and said there was no chance of cutting it. However, there was some wire, which was a little less dense, where the road was. There was a road through the compound and the wire was a little thin where it crossed the road. The seven of us crept down and tore ourselves out underneath the wire. Peadar Dunne was one of the group and he said to me, "We will keep creeping down until we get outside the ditch". "No", I said, "The road is close by now and there will be surely military on it. We will stand up and we will walk boldly along. If we meet any military, we will just salute them sharply and walk on. They will either think we are belonging to the Island or soldiers going out

on pass". Just as we stood up to walk across the road, didn't two soldiers come on walking up from the pier. They said, "Good-night". We said, "Good-night". We walked on, and they walked on.

We went down to the pier, and here was a boat waiting for us, with two men in it. The seven of us got into this small boat. That was nine in the boat altogether. There was a big destroyer out in Bantry Bay, throwing searchlight beams around. When the beam was off us, our lads would row like the divil, and when the beam came towards us again, they would drop their oars and stay quiet. We kept going that way until we got to the foot of Hungry Hill.

Two sidecars met us at this point, and we were taken on into a place called Caolchuill. We were in Caolchuill on a Sunday morning and we went to Mass there. We got into a house then in Caolchuill and went to bed there. The following night we were shifted in near Bandon by one of the Lordan's. Then Seán Hegarty got in touch with us and sent out a motor from Cork to get us shifted. A motor car came out to Bandon and we were taken from there on to Fermoy. We were put into Fermoy Union, which was occupied by the local Volunteers at that time, and we slept the night there. Next morning we all broke up to go our own different ways. There were only two of us from Limerick, Dunne and myself, and we were taken on to Limerick. I suppose it would be about the end of September.

I found out afterwards what happened on Bere Island when we got out of the Camp. They generally counted us in the beds and we had left our spare clothes after us. When they went counting the prisoners that night, the lads had stuffed our pyjamas, laid them on the beds and covered them. The soldier, coming along with his flashlamp, took the

figures in the beds to be us and, having got his count correct, there was no more about it that night. The next day was Sunday, and it was a wet day. The prisoners could not get out and they were counted again in the huts. When the first hut was counted, seven fellows slipped from the first hut to the last hut, and so they got the correct count again. They did not find out until Monday morning, when the lads were counted as they were going out the gate, that seven were missing. We had got out on Saturday and our escape was not discovered, therefore, until Monday morning. There was a fair in Castletownbere on Monday. They rushed out for the fair and beat up everyone around, but they did not get us. We were a long way away then. We were at home.

Concerning my connection with the I.R.B., it was Liam Forde enrolled me into the I.R.B. just before the shooting of Jim Dalton of the 1st Battalion. Liam Forde, who also belonged to the 1st Battalion, was at that time one of the heads of the I.R.B. When Dalton was shot, the I.R.B. were doing their best to trace the person or persons who had done the shooting. Certain members of the 2nd Battalion, the Q.M., Martin Barry, in particular, was suspected of the shooting, as far as I know. Barry was a very hard man to get at the time and they decided that I was the only one that would get him. I went into Limerick city and contacted Martin Barry after Forde telling me what to do. I took him out to Castleconnell and he was put under arrest there by the I.R.B. It was the I.R.B. that arrested Martin Barry for the shooting of Dalton. He was kept at Castleconnell at Anthony Mackey's, out in the eelweir for about a week and then he was released. The whole thing fizzled out, however, as no clear evidence could be brought to sustain the charge against Barry.

So far as I know, the I.R.B. had very little influence

in Limerick. Most of its members in Limerick City belonged to the 1st Battalion. We did not look with high favour on the members of the 1st Battalion, and the I.R.B. being identified with the 1st Battalion, we did not bother much about it either. This arrest of Barry was the only incident that I had any connection with, that the I.R.B. were interested in.

SIGNED

Richard O'Connell
RICHARD O'CONNELL

DATE

13th March 1952

WITNESS

J. Daniels Col.

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