

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1,167

ROINN



COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,167

Witness

Michael O'Leary,  
32 Cahill Park,  
Tralee,  
Co. Kerry.

Identity.

Brigade O/C. Fianna Eireann,  
Tralee, pre 1921.

Subject.

National activities, Tralee, Co. Kerry,  
1915-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. . S. 2464

Form B S M 2

# ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

NO W.S. 1,167

W S 1,167

STATEMENT OF MICHAEL O'LEARY,  
32, Cahill Park, Tralee, Co. Kerry.

I was born in Tralee in the year 1898. I was sent to the local Christian Brothers' School until I was 15 years of age. I then went to work as an apprentice in a solicitor's office in Tralee. I remained there until 1919, when I went to work for P.J. Cahill, a cinema proprietor in Tralee. I worked for him until November Night, 31st October, 1920, when the cinema was burned down by the Black and Tans. I next started work in the year 1934.

The Volunteers were first formed in Tralee in early 1914. I did not become a member, however, until about the summer of 1915. At the time I joined Dan Jeffers was Company Captain, Tom Sharkey was 1st Lieutenant, and Con Coonahan, 2nd Lieutenant, of my company, which was Strand St. or 'B' Company. We drilled and paraded during the year and received instructions in the use of the rifle. There were 30 or 40 rifles in the company at the time. They were mostly Martini Henrys.

Previous to Easter Week I carried dispatches to outlying companies - such as Ardferit and Listowel. These dispatches were usually issued by the Battalion Adjutant at the time. His name was P.J. Cahill, proprietor of the cinema where I worked.

On Saturday night previous to Easter Sunday of Easter Week, 1916, we were mobilised at the Rink and marched through the town and back to the Rink.

There we were held until 12 midnight and ordered to parade at 9 a.m. on Easter Sunday morning.

When I reported on Sunday morning I was put on guard duty at the Rink with several other members of the company. I was on duty all that day and until 8 a.m. on Monday morning. The Rink, I should explain, had been an old skating rink which had been taken over by the Volunteers and was being used as the headquarters of the Volunteers of North Kerry.

I went to work as usual that Monday and each day during Easter Week, but each night we assembled at the Rink for instructions. About a week or ten days after Easter Week all the rifles in the company were collected at the Rink. The Volunteers had been ordered by the Battalion Council to take all arms in the battalion area to the Rink for surrender to the R.I.C. When all the arms had been collected they were broken and then placed on a donkey's cart and taken by a Volunteer named Danny Mullins to the R.I.C. barracks. Apart from my Company, which was Strand St. Company, there were two other companies in the town of Tralee at the time. These companies were known as 'A' and 'D' Companies or Boherbee and Rock St. Companies respectively. The Battalion Council included P.J. Cahill, Dan Healy, a Fr. Breen and others.

After the surrender of the arms all of the Volunteer officers in the battalion were arrested. A state of inactivity then set in which lasted up to the general release about the summer of 1917. The Volunteers, however, did meet occasionally.

After the general release the company met at least three times a week. Drilling, parading and route marching became a regular practice, together with instructions in the use of the rifle. Test mobilisations were held from time to time. These mobilisations often took place after midnight.

About the end of this year or very early in 1918 I was asked by Austin Stack to reorganise the Fianna in the county. They had been in existence previous to 1916 but had become completely disorganised after the rebellion. I got to work at once and succeeded in reorganising in the three I.R.A. brigade areas of Co. Kerry, i.e. Nos. 1, 2 and 3, one of the best organised Fianna brigades in the 32 counties of Ireland.

In Kerry No. 1 Brigade area I organised five battalions, which were named after the chief town in each area. The towns' and battalion officers were: Tralee (P. Daly), Ardfert (George Rice), Listowel (Thomas Pelican), Dingle (Maurice Connell), Castlegregory (Frank Fitzgerald). Each battalion averaged six sluaghs. The total strength of each battalion was around 350. In Kerry No. 2 Brigade area there was one battalion - Castleisland (Maurice Hickey) - which consisted of three sluaghs, the battalion strength being around 500. Kerry No. 3 Brigade area was served by one company only - Cahirciveen (Seán O'Shea) which was made up of one slough of approximately a total membership of 50.

An election then took place to select officers for the Fianna Brigade Staff. I was elected Brigade

L.

O/C. Tom O'Connor (known as "Nuts") and Maurice Kearns became joint Adjutants, Billy Myles, Quartermaster, and Patrick Percy Hanafin became Brigade Intelligence Officer.

Apart from drilling and training during the years 1918 and 1919, the activities of the Fianna included the supply of information on the movements of the R.I.C. to the officers of the Volunteers, particularly when Volunteers or their officers were in imminent danger of being arrested for drilling or other Volunteer activity. The furnishing of this information entailed the placing of relays of scouts from the R.I.C. barracks to the residences of Volunteer officers and men. When the R.I.C. left the barracks all Volunteer officers were alerted. On some occasions the Fianna were not withdrawn from their posts until the following morning.

During the Dáil Éireann bond drive in 1919 the Fianna were on night duty for the I.R.A. while engaged in stencilling slogans and posting posters on walls and hoardings calling on the people to support the loan. On one occasion at about 3 a.m. the I.R.A. informed me that they had finished for the night. I withdrew the Fianna and was on my way home when I beheld the outline of some I.R.A. men, as I thought, still engaged sticking up bills. I approached with the intention of informing them of the withdrawal of the I.R.A., when I found to my surprise four R.I.C. men tearing down the posters. Earlier that evening I had been given a .320 bulldog revolver, which I carried in my hip pocket wrapped in a new roll book

which I had also got the same evening to fill in the names of the members of the Tralee sluaighs.

After receiving some rough handling from the R.I.C. they searched me and pulled out the roll book from my hip pocket. They did not take the revolver and did not discover it was there. About a week later I was to regret very much that the R.I.C. did not take that gun. The day after my encounter with the R.I.C. I gave the gun to a Fianna boy to keep in a dump which he had made at his home. His father got hold of the gun and subsequently got five years' imprisonment for shooting dead his mother with the same gun.

Previous to the attack on Camp R.I.C. barracks on the 19th February, 1920, by the I.R.A. in charge of Dan Jeffers, Captain of 'B' Company, Tralee Battalion, and Tadhg Brosnan, Battalion C/C Castlegregory Battalion, I was instructed by Paddy Cahill, Brigade O/C, to take delivery of five rifles from Francis Barnett, I/O of Ardfert Battalion. The rifles were required for the attack on Camp barracks. Having collected the rifles I placed them on the canopy of the railway station at the Basin, Tralee, where my father was stationmaster. On the day previous to the attack they were collected by James O'Shea of Tonavane, Tralee, who later gave them to the attacking party.

During the actual attack a relay of Fianna were extended from Ballymullen military barracks right through the town of Tralee to the Basin, and from there along the canal to Blennerville Bridge, a distance of three miles. Blennerville Bridge was about six miles from Camp village. A number of carbide lights

surrounded the canal to Blennerville Bridge, and these could be observed at Derrymore, three miles from Camp. An independent switch or tap controlled these lights at the Basin. Our instructions were to switch out the lights should enemy forces approach going in the direction of Camp. As it happened, no enemy forces went to the assistance of the R.I.C. during the attack. We were on duty until 5 a.m., when we were informed that the attack was over.

The evening of the attack on Fenit R.I.C. barracks on the 2nd June, 1920, the R.I.C. proceeded to the "Green", now the Town Park, Tralee, and started to light up the sky with Verey lights. The Brigade C/C, Paddy Cahill, instructed me to investigate their actions. As far as I could see, they appeared to be only at practice. On my way back to report to Cahill I met an I.R.A. Company Captain, who informed me that he had it on good authority that the R.I.C. were aware of the impending attack on Fenit barracks. He requested me to inform the C/C to this effect. I did not do so as I did not believe his information was correct, assuming at the same time that the Company Captain would have gone direct to the C/C himself if this information was really genuine.

On the evening of the attack the Fianna were fully mobilised and assisted in laying road blocks at all exits from the town. They kept enemy occupied buildings under observation and carried dispatches for the occasion.

I then proceeded with the attacking party to Fenit where John Crowley, C/C of the local slough,

had mobilised the Fianna and placed them at strategic points in and around the village, after which Crowley and I participated in the attack. The attack had been planned by the Brigade Staff. Paddy Paul Fitzgerald, Company Captain of Fenit, was in charge. With a section of twelve men under David Walsh, Company Quartermaster of 'B' Company, Tralee, I was located in a field opposite the barracks. A second section of ten or twelve men under P.P. Fitzgerald occupied a position north east of the barracks. A third section of four or five men in charge of Eugene Hogan occupied a house nextdoor to the barracks, while a fourth section of about 10 men took up positions at the end of the pier to prevent a party of Marines located in a sloop at the other end from coming to the assistance of the R.I.C. This section was in charge of Paddy Sheehan, Company Captain, of Ardfert. A short time previous to the opening of the attack a man named James King of 'B' Company, Tralee, was detailed to cover the near portion of the pier with a quantity of straw and to saturate the straw and pier with petrol and parafin oil which had already been procured for the job. As soon as King, with the help of members of the local company, had the pier covered with straw, petrol and parafin, Paddy Paul Fitzgerald sent word to Eugene Hogan to proceed with his instructions. The majority of the attacking party were armed with shotguns. A few had rifles or revolvers.

Eugene Hogan, assisted by the men with him, immediately broke through the roof of the house and got on to the roof of the barracks. In a short time

they threw bottles of petrol and paraffin oil followed by lighted waste. Fitzgerald called on the garrison to surrender. They refused. He then ordered "open fire". Our men located around the barracks opened fire on the spot, while James King and members of the local company set fire to the straw on the pier. Unfortunately the straw failed to set fire to the wooden pier and the blaze died down in a short while.

The garrison immediately replied to our fire, at the same time sending up a number of Verey lights. Some minutes later the sloop at the end of the pier fired one shell, apparently out to sea. The force of the explosion shook and surprised us with its intensity. This, with the intense light caused by the Verey lights, which most of our men had never heard of or seen before, left us a bit bewildered for a while. After firing the shell the sloop fired a number of rockets at intervals. These contributed to light up the scene while the attack lasted. These rockets have been referred to as shells ever since by the men taking part.

Firing lasted from 12 midnight until about 5 a.m., when, apparently, a signal was given to retire. The majority of the attacking party heard the signal and retired. I, with three other men, heard no signal. We remained in our positions and after a while discovered that the shooting had ceased. I sent two of the men with me to find out the positions. They discovered that the attack had been called off, after which they proceeded to follow the men who had already

left. Eventually at dawn the man with me, whose name was Ned Horan (now Chairman of Tralee Urban District Council) and I rejoined our comrades on their way back to Tralee. As we were leaving our positions the garrison fired several shots at us but we dashed for cover and succeeded in escaping. As we left, the barracks was a mass of flames. As we proceeded to Tralee I called off the Fianna. They had been placed at strategic points on the way to Fenit and had been on duty from the night before. The garrison of Fenit arrived in Tralee around 9 o'clock the same morning. It was the end of the R.I.C. at Fenit.

About two weeks previous to the capture by the I.R.A. of a military outpost at North Kerry railway station on the 20th July, 1920, I was ordered by Paddy Cahill, Brigade O/C, to furnish full particulars as to the number of enemy personnel at the post, their habits and other details. I instructed Paddy Connor of 'D' Sluagh to fraternise with the occupants of the outpost. This he succeeded in doing with the aid of a very childish appearance and a pack of cards. He supplied every detail of the movements and dispositions of the outpost occupants. His information contributed largely to the complete success of the operation, in which the garrison was overpowered and eleven rifles captured after a party of I.R.A. had boarded a train a short distance from the station, taking the enemy by complete surprise when the train halted at the station.

The Fianna officers of 'D' Sluagh - Jim Connor and D. Horgan, were captured on their way back after

'scouting for the I.R.A. party, who had subsequently proceeded to the open country with the captured rifles. The two scouts were sentenced to a period of imprisonment in Cork Jail, from which they were released after undergoing a hunger-strike. During this operation I, with Thomas O'Connor, Brigade Adjutant, and Billy Myles, Battalion Vice O/C, took control of all telephone installations in the railway station. We were armed with revolvers.

One day in the autumn of 1920 a Fianna boy named Billy Conway who was serving his time to the tailoring trade, was handed a man's coat to press. In the inside pocket he discovered some papers which, through curiosity, he proceeded to read. Having read them, he hid them on his person and later turned them over to me. This correspondence was a reply to an application for membership of the Auxiliaries which had been made by an ex-British Army officer named Murphy living in Tralee.

The following day, with Tommy O'Connor, the Brigade Adjutant, and an I.R.A. man, I removed Murphy from the Golf links to a place about a mile outside the town. We then informed the Brigade Vice O/C I.R.A., Joe Melinn, of Murphy's intention to join the Auxiliaries and asked for instructions as to his disposal. We were ordered to tar and feather him and tie him to a gate or pillar on the public road. This we refused to do but offered to shoot him instead. We were then ordered to hand him over to the Company Officer I.R.A. of the area - Tom Sheehy of Oakpark Company. After we handed over our prisoner a very good job was done with the tar bucket, but this did not prevent Murphy

becoming a very efficient Auxiliary later.

One day early in October, 1920, a member of the Fianna informed me that two R.I.C. from Listowel had brought a motor car to Fenner's garage, Tralee, for repairs and that they were returning that evening to collect it. With Billy Myles and an I.R.A. man I decided to disarm the R.I.C. men and collect the car ourselves. We entered the garage as they were about to leave, held them up and discovered that they were not armed. We then took the car away. Between myself and one of the R.I.C. there was mutual recognition. His father, an R.I.C. pensioner, had been stationed in Tralee at one time. I reported the matter to Paddy Cahill. He ordered me to leave Tralee for a time. This I did, but after a week, when no attempt had been made to raid my home for me, I returned to Tralee. That night I was arrested by the military. I expected to be charged with the hold-up in the garage, but the cause of my arrest was of a different nature.

About this time I had started arming the Fianna by buying rifles, revolvers and ammunition from British soldiers in Ballymullen barracks and raiding private houses in and around Tralee for arms. The I.R.A. officers objected to this and demanded that all arms in the possession of the Fianna be handed over to the I.R.A. This I refused to do. They then reported the matter to our G.H.Q. in Dublin. I subsequently received a letter from Countess Markievicz instructing me to cease arming the Fianna and to carry out the orders of the I.R.A. At the same time she instructed

me to acknowledge receipt of her communication to Eamon Martin (I forget street address), Dublin. This I did by merely writing "yours of such a date to hand, contents noted", to which I put my signature and posted it to Martin in the ordinary way.

My arrest was the result of that signature to the acknowledgement. I was paraded before the O/C of the military. He placed before me my letter and asked me did I write it. I told him I wasn't answering any questions, adding "supposing I did write it, what is the idea in dragging myself and my brother (they had brought him along too) out of bed at two o'clock in the morning". He replied "read what is on the back of the letter". I turned the letter over and was I flabbergasted! There, written in my own hand-writing, was a memorandum to the effect that the assassination of the Assistant Under Secretary for Ireland was under consideration and that I would forward the plan, together with details, under separate cover within a few days.

The officer must have seen the astonishment in my face, for all he said when I looked up at him was: "Clever, isn't it, but they had a right to confine your plotting abilities to some smaller fry in the County of Kerry. I don't think the "Shinners" in Dublin require assistance from anybody here in Kerry to do their plotting for them". He then informed me that as he believed the letter to be a forgery, he would release me. This he did, with the advice that if I was a member of any revolutionary movement never sign my name to anything. This advice I took.

I even went one better; I never wrote to G.H.Q. again until the Truce. It appears that the letters on this occasion were censored by the authorities when my letter was discovered.

We did not hand over the arms as some of them were not easily acquired. For instance, in one case we contacted a British soldier who agreed to hand us over one rifle for £4. He was one of a party guarding the military stores of his regiment at the railway station where regimental equipment had been placed in readiness for the regiment's departure to Cork the following morning. He was to take over duty at the entrance to the station at 12 o'clock that night. We were to approach him at 12.30 a.m. when he would halt us. He would then deliver to us the rifle and we would part with the money.

Pat Daly, Battalion O/C Fianna, and myself kept the appointment, when the exchange was made, the soldier fingering the edges of the notes to ensure he had four. When dawn came he must have discovered we hadn't played his jolly old game of cricket, as between two real notes we had placed two sheets of butter paper, each cut to the size of a £1 note.

On the occasion of a visit by Sergeant Sullivan, K.C., (one of Casement's Defence Counsels) to the Kerry Circuit Court sitting in Tralee around this time, I was instructed by the Brigade O/C I.R.A. to go to the Courthouse and get his description and having done so to place two good scouts on him, with instructions to report his whereabouts to Canill between the hours of 8 and 10 p.m. that night. I got his description all right, which was very easy to detail to the two scouts -

Gerald Ryle and Christy Teehan - as he was wearing a beard. They picked up a man with a beard as he left the Courthouse, but, to my consternation, about two hours before zero I discovered they had picked the wrong man - Judge Dromgoole, who was also wearing a beard. However, we located the whereabouts of Sullivan by the appointed time, thereby saving Judge Dromgoole from a very rough handling at the hands of the I.R.A. I believe the manhandling of Sullivan was a reprisal on Sullivan for some scurrilous letters written by him to the press concerning the patriot Bishop C'Dwyer of Limerick.

Large scale operations against British forces were planned by the I.R.A. for November Night, 1920. The full strength of the Tralee Battalion I.R.A. was mobilised and took up strategic positions in the town that night. Moyderwell, or 'A' Company I.R.A. as it was known, had recently formed a section of I.R.A. scouts and had elected to use these scouts in the proposed attack. All other positions on that night were served by Fianna scouts, thereby causing a certain lack of co-ordination in the scouting arrangements. The other members of Moyderwell Company took up a strong position at Moyderwell Cross, where they awaited the hour fixed for the general attack throughout the town, which was 10 p.m. The Pans usually left their barracks around 9.30 p.m., after which they split into groups and patrolled different parts of the town.

Sometime previous to 9.30 an I.R.A. scout, on the approach of a drunken Marine towards the position at Moyderwell, mistook him for a Pan and reported there that the picket were approaching. The I.R.A. immediately

opened fire and wounded the Marine. The picket, who were about to leave the barracks, remained there until some time later, when a large force of military turned out of their barracks at Ballymullen and occupied various positions in the town. In the meantime one of the Fianna scouts - Patrick Daly, Battalion O/C, discovered two Black and Tans in a side street in conversation with two women. These two were placed under arrest by the I.R.A. and were shot dead on the following morning and afterwards buried in slob land near the beach at Blennerville. Another Fianna officer, Thomas Hussey, on duty at Rock St. reported a Tan leaving a publichouse in the neighbourhood. This policeman was fired on by the I.R.A. section located in the vicinity. He was wounded but managed to run for the barracks. Some short time after this attack the I.R.A. and Fianna scouts were withdrawn. We had been on duty for four hours.

The following day the police burned down the Town Hall and several shops in the town. For about a week after the people of the town were subjected to a reign of terror, looting, shooting and ill-treatment. One civilian was shot dead and several were wounded.

During the week all prominent I.R.A. in the town left and went on 'the run'. On the advice of Paddy Cahill I remained at my digs in Nelson St., now called Ashe St. One night a few days later while Billy Myles and I were standing on the corner of Nelson St., armed with a revolver each, a party of Black and Tans, led by a Sergeant Barnes R.I.C., approached on the opposite side of the street and at the corner of Denny St. halted a man named James Stack, brother of Austin Stack.

They beat him severely, then made him go on his knees and swear he would be loyal to the British Crown. We were going to fire but thought it better not to do so until they left Stack alone. After a while they did so and proceeded further along the street. We went through a back street to get them from the corner of another side street. As we came to the corner of this side street we saw the Black and Tans this time beating up a British soldier who was in uniform. He was Dick Doolin, a native of Tralee, who in 1914 was our drill instructor and was then on the British Army reserve. As they were beating Doolin a group of soldiers of the Lancashire Regiment came on the scene, set about them and took Doolin away with them. The scrap between the police and soldiers was good to watch and lasted about 20 minutes. The police retreated back the way they had come. We returned to our original corner and fired three or four shots at them, wounding Sergeant Barnes. They were under the impression that the military had fired on them. Next morning it was generally believed in the town that the Tans and military were shooting at one another.

About three weeks later, in the month of December, the R.I.C. raided my digs for me. I was upstairs. My landlady - Mrs. Parker - engaged them in conversation while I got out on to the roof, from which I jumped on to the roof of a lower building. From this building I jumped to the ground, striking a clothes' line as I did so, sustaining a sprained ankle and split forehead. I was later taken in a pony's trap to Rea's of Keele, Castlemaine, where I remained out of action for about four weeks.

While I was located at Rea's, which was a large country mansion, Paddy Cahill formed an Active Service

Unit, which later became the Flying Column. The Rea's had placed their house at the disposal of the I.R.A. Cahill and most of the I.R.A. who had to leave Tralee after November Night, stayed there from time to time. As well as the large country mansion, Mrs. Rea owned a large business premises, flourmills and hotel at Boolteens, where she and her family resided.

One day Cahill with another officer - Billy Myles - had just left Rea's for the purpose of finding a site for a wooden hut which he proposed to erect in a remote part of the area as a headquarters of the Kerry No. 1 Brigade Flying Column, when the Brigade Adjutant of the Fianna - Tommy O'Connor - called with a dispatch from G.H.Q. Dublin for the Brigade O/C. This dispatch, with another, was lying on a table in the kitchen. About fifteen minutes after O'Connor's arrival, a party of R.I.C. under a Sergeant McCarthy arrived at Rea's from Killorglin. All of the I.R.A. happened to have left the house on this particular day. I had just made tea for O'Connor when I observed the R.I.C. approach. O'Connor was prepared to await the return of the Brigade O/C. I seized the two dispatches and threw them into the fire as the R.I.C. were trooping into the hall. When they saw me they ordered "hands up", after which they questioned me. I gave my name as Daly and explained that I was caretaker of the house for Mrs. Rea of Boolteens, which is only half a mile away, and that I held the post for the past three months and that O'Connor was a cousin of mine, having just arrived with a message from my mother.

Sergeant McCarthy then informed me that I would

have to proceed with them to Boolteens, where, if Mrs. Rea identified me as her caretaker, he would release me. He told O'Connor to clear off as he did not require him. O'Connor complied at once, going straight to Mrs. Rea at Boolteens, to whom he related the conversation between Sergeant McCarthy and myself. When I arrived at Boolteens Mrs. Rea identified me at once as her caretaker, after which the R.I.C. immediately released me. It seems that McCarthy was at one time stationed in Boolteens and during the period had developed a close friendship with the Reas. I expect his action in manoeuvring my release through sending O'Connor away was to avoid any trouble with his old friends. After this I left Rea's and went to stay in a cottage in Keel.

While I was located in the cottage at Keel I received word one night from one of the Fianna boys in Tralee that a Mrs. Walpole had been found shot dead that morning at Ballyea, Tralee, with a label on her body marked "spy". The matter was investigated by the I.R.A. with the help of the Fianna. I knew, and so did the I.R.A., that the woman was not a spy. She had a large house and some land. Our investigations led to the belief that the woman's relatives wanted the house and land and that she was shot by one of them. The matter was pursued for some time by Cahill but when the Truce came it was dropped.

Early in March the erection of the hut had been completed at Keel and occupied by Paddy Cahill, Paddy Paul Fitzgerald, Eugene Hogan, Dan Sullivan, Dan Jeffers, Jerry Myles, Michael McMahon, Mick Dunig, Tadhg Brosnan, myself and others. A very short time later Patrick Daly,

Battalion O/C Fianna, arrived at the hut one day with a letter he had received from an I.R.A. officer named Dan Hickey who had received it from a postman named Collins, an ex-British Army man. It appears that Collins while on his round one day, had for delivery a copy of the "Irish Independent" which was addressed to a Major McKinnon, officer in charge of the Auxiliaries in Tralee. Collins thought it strange that McKinnon should be receiving a copy of the "Independent" by post, so he retained the paper, which he opened when he got home. Inside the paper he found a letter giving the exact position of the "hut", names of the occupants and the number of arms in the column. The letter was anonymous.

Shortly afterwards the column at the "hut" received word that a lorry load of R.I.C. and Tans with a private car in front, travelled occasionally from Dingle towards Annascaul and back. Cahill and staff, after visiting the area and selecting a suitable ambush position at a place called Lispole, midway between Dingle and Annascaul, decided to ambush the party. We left the hut in a body on the evening of the 18th March, 1921, and travelled the 9 miles to Lispole area and billeted there for the night. We were met in Lispole by members of the Dingle, Castlegregory and Killorglin Battalions. We were armed with rifles, while the other men had either rifles or shotguns and a punt gun.

At 10 a.m. on the morning of the 19th we took up our allocated positions. I was in a section of eleven men under Paddy Paul Fitzgerald who were allocated a position about 250 yards off the road on the right-hand side as one proceeds to Dingle from

Annascaul. We were in an old boreen near a railway siding. Another section, under Michael Duhig, occupied a cottage on the roadside near a bend, the cottage being on the same side of the road as we were. Opposite the cottage on the other side of the road was an old schoolhouse occupied by another section under Dan Mulvihill. Behind the schoolhouse was a boreen which ran nearly parallel to the road in which the main body of the attacking party held positions in extended formation under Paddy Cahill, who was in charge. The punt gun was placed outside the schoolhouse and directed on to the road facing Dingle. The ground where we were located was very much lower than the road, but the ground on the other side sloped upwards and was much higher. From our positions we could not see the main body while under cover. We could see them occasionally if they left their positions.

A short time after taking up our positions there was a terrific bang. Somebody, it appears, had accidentally discharged the punt gun. However, everything became calm again and we settled down to wait. We remained in positions until 6 p.m., when we got the order to retire for the night.

We were in our positions again at 10 a.m. the next morning but no enemy forces appeared during the day, and again we retired at 6 p.m. Next morning, 22nd March, shortly after taking up positions at 10 a.m. a shotgun was accidentally discharged in the position of the main body. I subsequently heard that one of the men in this position was badly wounded by the discharge.

Around 3 p.m. we, to our surprise, heard a burst of rifle fire and discovered that the main body on the high ground were being subjected to fire from a party of Black and Tans who were endeavouring to surround them from a still higher position. It appears that the enemy instead of driving into the ambush position pulled up their lorry or lorries within a mile of it, after which they proceeded up the high ground on the left-hand side of the road, apparently with the intention of surrounding the old schoolhouse, when, to their surprise, they observed our men in the breen behind a bank of earth which ran alongside. Almost simultaneously a machine gun opened fire behind our positions. Owing to a number of ditches and raised banks of earth behind us, we could not see the party using the gun, who were located about 300 yards to our back. Their fire was concentrated on the schoolhouse. They were, apparently, unaware of our presence. Paddy Paul Fitzgerald after a short while sent me to an isolated farm-house about thirty yards behind to our right, with instructions to go upstairs to ascertain where the machine gun was located. I arrived at the house and was about to enter the open door, when two women of the house refused to let me in, saying they did not want their house burned. I could do nothing but report back to Fitzgerald. He instructed me not to mind the women but to go to the back of the house to see if I could locate the machine gun from there. When I had gone about twenty yards to the back of the house I fired about six rounds in the direction of the spot where I thought the machine gun was located. I could not see the gun or men manning it. They, however,

continued to concentrate on the schoolhouse. This situation continued for perhaps forty-five minutes, when it appears our men, either in the schoolhouse or boreen on the other side of the road, thought fit to engage the enemy on that side of the road. Shooting became more intense and continued for about an hour and a half. All at once the machine gun ceased firing. After some minutes we observed the gun, manned by three or four Black and Tans, on the road about 200 yards from the schoolhouse.

When Fitzgerald discovered that the gun crew behind us had returned to the road, he withdrew his section some distance to the back with the intention of engaging the enemy on the road. As he did so the enemy decided to withdraw, taking with them three or four dead or wounded Tans. We then returned to our original positions, after which Fitzgerald sent me to contact Paddy Cahill. Cahill instructed us to retire to a little village about a mile from the scene. We left there that night and proceeded to Ballynanunt where Cahill, Mullins, Tommy O'Connor and I stayed with people by the name of Landers. We stayed there for the night. Next morning Dr. Ferris of Castlegregory and Dr. Shanahan of Tralee arrived at the house and were taken to a couple of houses in the neighbourhood where three of our men wounded the previous day were located. We returned to the hut, where we arrived at 2 next morning. The three wounded men were James Daly, a man named Ashe and a man named Hawley. Ashe died that night, Hawley lived for about six weeks and Daly recovered.

In Tralee at this time was a Major McKinnon,

officer in charge of the Auxiliaries. He, some time earlier, had been responsible for the deaths of two I.R.A. men at Ballymacelligott. The Brigade Staff I.R.A. issued instructions that McKinnon was to be shot as early as possible. After several weeks' trailing by the Fianna he was shot dead on the golf links on the 15th April, 1921, by four I.R.A. named Con Healy, Paddy Kelly, Denis Donoghue and Patrick O'Connor. A fifth I.R.A. man named John O'Riordan was with the others but he took no part in the shooting.

On the day of the shooting three members of the Fianna had charge of the scouting arrangements which eventually led to McKinnon's death. Their names were: Percy Hanafin, Jimmy O'Connor and a youth named Mullally. Mullally was in the pavilion on the golf links. As McKinnon left to start a round of golf Mullally signalled to O'Connor who was located in a tree on the course. When O'Connor got McKinnon under observation he signalled to Hanafin who was about ten yards from the position taken up by the I.R.A. Having got the signal Hanafin moved over to the ambush position and informed the I.R.A.

When the shooting was over the three scouts came together, met the I.R.A. and collected their arms - one rifle, three shotguns and one revolver, which they concealed in a nearby hedge, afterwards returning to town with O'Riordan, who played a mouth-organ on the way.

Instructions from the Brigade Staff I.R.A. around the time of McKinnon's death included an order to shoot another man - a native of Strand St., Tralee, named Shea, who was known as Dingle Shea. Shea

a short time before had joined the Black and Tans. He was seldom seen on his own and, consequently, was not easy to shoot. He knew most of the members of the I.R.A. in the town and was regarded as a dangerous individual when he was in the company of the R.I.C. and Black and Tans while raiding homes of I.R.A. men.

At last, one Sunday morning, two I.R.A. men named Dan Sullivan and Joe Sugrue while returning from Mass saw Dingle Shea outside the "Munster Warehouse", Tralee. He was walking towards them. They decided to arrest him and take him outside the town, where they intended to shoot him. Neither of the I.R.A. men had a gun on them. Sugrue, however, had a Mills bomb in his pocket. As Shea came abreast of them they seized him and forced him into a pony's trap standing in the street. In the trap Shea began to struggle with his two captors, with the result that the bottom fell out of the trap. A third I.R.A. man named Looney then came to the assistance of the other two. Looney pulled out a razor, saying "we'll cut his throat". After a moment or two Sugrue said "No, we'll give him a run for it", pulling the bomb out of his pocket at the same time. He told Shea to run. Shea ran up Blackpool - the entrance to the market. When he had gone about twenty yards Sugrue threw the bomb. As it struck the ground Shea fell flat on his face. When it had exploded Shea jumped to his feet and ran away unscathed. Next day Shea left the town and was never seen since.

Shortly after this an incident occurred in Tralee which resulted in a man dropping dead and a woman being wounded. Among the Auxiliaries and Tans marked out for

special attention by the I.R.A. at this time in Tralee was a Sergeant Quinlan, R.I.C. The Fianna had him under cover for some time, when eventually one evening after Devotions one of them - Gerald Ryan - signalled to Patrick Daly, Battalion C/C Fianna, and Denis Keane, 2nd Lieutenant of 'B' Company I.R.A., that Quinlan was in a private car located in a side street. With Quinlan was a Sergeant Connell and two other R.I.C. As the car turned the corner where Daly and Keane were standing, one of them fired a Mills bomb at the open window of the car. The bomb rebounded on to the road, where it exploded. A man dropped dead from shock and a woman named Mrs. Horgan was wounded. Next morning the I.R.A. spread the story that it was the R.I.C. who had thrown the bomb out of the window of the car. The story was generally believed by the people.

Early in April 1921 the column, which was located at the nut, received information that a party of military located at a post in Glenbeigh travelled once a week by train from Glenbeigh to Tralee and returned to Glenbeigh in the evening. As Glenbeigh was situated in Kerry No. 3 Brigade area, Paddy Cahill, though anxious to capture the party, had no first-hand information as to the enemy dispositions in the area. I informed him that Paddy O'Connor, who had proved his scouting abilities in the capture of the rifles from the military at Tralee railway station, had relations in Glenbeigh. A day or two later "Peak", as Paddy O'Connor was called, proceeded to Glenbeigh for a fortnight's holiday. The information furnished by "Peak" as to the strength and details of the military party enabled the column to swing with clock-like precision into position on the morning of the attack -

26th April, 1921. That the attack was not the complete surprise intended was no fault of his.

Early on the morning of the 26th April the column, under Cahill, left the hut and proceeded to Inch strand, where we obtained two boats and crossed the bay to a place called Crumaun strand. From there we proceeded to Glenbeigh. On the way we were joined by Dan Mulvihill with about thirty of his men. Nearing Glenbeigh the men were halted while Paddy Cahill, Paddy Paul Fitzgerald, myself and others proceeded to the railway station, where "Peak" was waiting for us. A couple of us called on the stationmaster, told him what was going to take place and asked him to open up the office - where a phone was located - the waiting-room and the signal cabin. This he did at once. I then instructed him to carry on his duties as usual, after which I placed one man in charge of the phone, another in the signal cabin and one in the waiting room. With two others I then took up position behind a ditch opposite a little gate, through which the military would have to enter to reach the platform. The main body then arrived and took up positions behind the same ditch or bank of earth. One or two of them, however, were sent into the waiting-room with the man already there.

As we are all set for the arrival of the military, passengers began to arrive, including a woman with a hamper of cockles. As she entered the waiting-room she observed the armed men, whereupon she dashed on to the platform followed by two of our men, who tried to remove her by force into the waiting-room for her safety. This was the scene that met the British officer's eyes as he and his men swung into the station. This officer

dashed about in retreat and collided with his machine-gunner, who dropped his Lewis gun and pan of ammunition.

Our O/C then ordered us who were in the main position opposite the entrance to open fire. Our fire was hampered by the arrival of a young girl who was standing in a dazed condition in front of the military, quite oblivious to the fatherly shouts of an I.R.A. officer to "lie down girl". However, some soldiers seem to have fallen wounded at the entrance, and the remainder, to facilitate their retreat, dropped their rifles. Our men left the waiting-room and collected the machine gun, pan of ammunition and about nine rifles. We returned to the hut with our booty. Among the men with me in the main position was Tommy O'Connor, Brigade Adjutant, Fianna.

"Peak" went to Castlemaine that evening by train. Three of the military wounded that morning were on the same train on their way to Tralee for treatment.

With the object of snooting certain officers of the Auxiliaries and R.I.C., a general attack on enemy forces was planned by the Battalion Staff, Tralee, for the 14th May, 1921. At the time John Joe Sheehy was acting Battalion O/C and was also O/C of a Battalion Active Service Unit which had been formed a couple of months earlier. On this particular morning the Active Service Unit took up positions in different parts of the town with John Joe Sheehy in charge. A Fianna scout named Jack Carmody was posted at the corner of Pembroke St. with instructions to walk down Pembroke St. towards a gateway when he saw a Head Constable Benson of the R.I.C. approach on his way to lunch, which he usually had around 1 p.m. In the gateway, fifteen yards from the corner, three I.R.A. named Dinny Pa. Mulcahy, Tom Healy and

Peter Connell took up positions armed with revolvers. As Benson approached the corner he was spotted by Carmody, who proceeded to walk towards the gateway. As Carmody came in line with the gateway the three I.R.A. left and crossed the street towards Benson. Healy and Connell opened fire. Benson fell to the ground. To ensure he was dead, Mulcahy fired another couple of shots into his body as he lay on the ground. After the shooting the other members of the Active Service Unit and Fianna on duty in the town were dismissed.

It was market day in the town that day. People fled in all directions when the news of the shooting spread. Everyone expected that the town would be burned down. As it happened, there were no reprisals, though several I.R.A. and civilians were arrested.

About the end of May Tom O'Connor, O/C Killorglin Battalion, requested the help of the column to ambush a cycle party of Tans who travelled about once a week from Killorglin via Castlemaine to Tralee, returning in the afternoon. Tadng Brosnan, who was now acting O/C of the column, decided to give all the assistance he could.

On the morning of the 1st June, 1921, the column received word from Tom O'Connor that the cycle party had once again travelled to Tralee. Brosnan and the column met O'Connor and his men a few hours later about a mile outside the village of Castlemaine. A discussion took place as to the ambush position. It was decided to take up positions on one side of the road in extended formation on the Killorglin side of Castlemaine. In all we numbered 45 men, Tom O'Connor being in charge. The attacking party had 20 rifles and 25 shotguns.

About an hour and a half later we were informed by the local scouts that the cycle party had arrived back in the village of Castleraine, where they spent approximately thirty minutes in a local publichouse.

O'Connor placed me as end man of the extended formation, that is, the last man of the attacking party. My instructions were to open fire as soon as the head of the cycle party reached my position, thereby giving our party a good attacking advantage along the 500 yards in which we were extended. As we were waiting, a man driving a horse and cart came into the ambush position. Behind him I saw the cycle party. The driver lashed his horse and was soon out of the ambush position but not before he had delayed the cycle patrol, who by this time had closed up in close formation a short distance behind him. As the head of the cycle party came within range I opened fire. The attacking party opened fire almost at the same time. It was sudden and all over in a matter of minutes. Of the ten men who made up the cycle patrol, seven were shot dead, three escaped. We came out on the road and collected seven rifles, five revolvers and several important documents on a Sergeant Coleary, including a sum of £150 in notes which he had collected that day in Tralee to pay the members of the police stationed in Killorglin. With this £150 I, who at the time was regarded unofficially as Quartermaster of the column, paid Mrs. Rea £80 in respect of food and shelter afforded to the column, together with a number of small bills. The balance subsequently paid part of the expenses of myself and six other Fianna officers at a training camp at Shankill, near Dublin, during the Truce.

From then to the Truce, activities were very few. I did, however, scout for members of the Divisional and G.H.Q. staff who visited the area around this time. These included Liam Lynch, Andy Cooney, Mick Price and others.

Mr. de Valera, on behalf of G.H.Q. Fianna, visited Tralee during the Truce and presented a silver cup inscribed with cross rifles to the Tralee Battalion Fianna as one of the most outstanding Fianna battalions in Ireland during the Black and Tan period. He also presented the following six members of the battalion, on behalf of Fianna Headquarters, inscribed watches for outstanding services:

Patrick Connor	William Butler (Tubrid, Ardfert)
Billy Myles	Patrick Daly
Thomas O'Connor	Michael O'Leary.

Signed: Michael O'Leary  
(Michael O'Leary)  
Date: 17th May, 1955.

Witness: John J. Daly (John J. Daly)  
(Investigator)

