

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURÓ STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1,316

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,316

Witness

John Flanagan,  
Tullagower,  
Tullycrine,  
Co. Clare.

Identity.

Commandant Second Battalion  
West Clare Brigade.

Subject.

National activities, Tullycrine, West Clare,  
1908-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

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STATEMENT OF JOHN FLANAGAN,

Tullagower, Tullycrine, formerly Commandant,  
2nd Battalion, West Clare Brigade.

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I was born in June 1888 on the farm on which I now live with my wife and family. I was educated at the local National School which I left on attaining the age of fifteen years to help at home on the land.

An uncle of mine, Michael Flanagan, was a prominent member of the Fenian Brotherhood, being the Centre for the Tullycrine-Kilmurray McMahon district. In consequence of his activities in that movement he had to flee to America. There was a sound Fenian tradition throughout the parish in my youthful days fostered to a great extent by the O'Donnell family of Tullycrine. Mr. O'Donnell himself was an old Fenian and his wife came from the same stock. She was an aunt of Con Colbert, executed for his part in the 1916 Rising, and a relative of Seán McDermott, who was also executed. In the years prior to the Rising, Colbert came to O'Donnell's on holidays every year and Sean McDermott paid a few visits there also.

The O'Donnells were in very comfortable circumstances then and their house could be regarded as the headquarters for Irish Republicanism in West Clare from the first decade of the present century until, I might say, well after the signing of the Treaty. I was very friendly with all the family and it was one of them, Simon, who asked me to join the I.R.B. in September, 1908. This happened as the two of us were coming from a race meeting in Kilrush when he explained the aims of the organisation and its method of working to me. I agreed to join that evening during which he swore me in as we were standing beside Owen Doyle's pump in Henry Street, Kilrush. He asked me to

attend a meeting of the circle which was due to take place a couple of nights later in his own home in Tullycrine.

I attended the meeting as requested and in subsequent years was present at similar meetings in the same house from time to time. The business, as I now remember it, consisted mostly of discussions on the recruitment of new members and the circulation of the paper "Irish Freedom". It seemed to be the policy of the I.R.B. to get as many as possible to read this paper as we were always urged to hand the copies which we bought ourselves to the neighbours. All the members paid an annual subscription of half-a-crown and this covered the price of the paper.

I would say that in 1913 or 1914 Simon O'Donnell, our centre, emigrated to America and his place was taken by his brother, Art, who had been a few years in a Training College in Dublin and had then returned home. At the end of 1913 the Tullycrine circle was still active and consisted of up to twenty members. At no time can I remember having received instructions in the use of firearms as a member of the I.R.B.

Shortly after the formation of the Irish Volunteers in Dublin, a Company was established in Tullycrine by Art O'Donnell who was elected Captain. He enrolled between thirty and thirty-five members at the outset and I think that everyone of them remained in the Movement right through the Redmondite "Split" and up to the Rising in 1916. I was elected 1st Lieutenant of the Company but I cannot recall the name of the 2nd Lieutenant. We were drilled by Art O'Donnell himself and met once or twice a week for this purpose.

The only training received by us in the use of firearms prior to the Rising was on the revolver and some practice in shooting.

Art O'Donnell got a couple of .45 British Bull-dog revolvers from some source and he explained the mechanism of these weapons to each member of the Company and gave us lessons in loading the guns and in aiming. (The lessons always took place inside in O'Donnell's sitting-room). He also got a large type of air-rifle from Dublin and this was used for shooting practice. This gun fired an ordinary lead pellet and it was accurate up to a range of twenty yards.

About a week before the Rising in 1916 I was told in strict confidence by Art O'Donnell that a landing of arms from abroad was expected to take place in the near future and that it was likely that the landing might take place in Carrigaholt, or that some of the guns would come there. There was no special mobilisation of the Tullycrine Company on Easter Sunday 1916, but all the members of the Company met in O'Donnell's house as usual every night during Easter Week. We were told on Easter Sunday to be ready for military action at a moment's notice but the week passed away without any unusual happening. Each night while the fighting in Dublin lasted Mrs. O'Donnell insisted on everyone in the house getting on their knees to say the Rosary that God might bring success to the brave Dublin men.

After the suppression of the Rising, the only Irish Volunteer in West Clare who was taken into custody was Art O'Donnell. He was deported to England and kept in jail there until the end of the year. Though the Tullycrine Company did not break up after the Rising we did not meet for drill, as previously, and generally I would say that unit lapsed into a state of inactivity.

On O'Donnell's release, I think it was on the day after his return home, he at once began forming Sinn Féin clubs in every parish in West Clare, and in each area where a club was established

he also started a Company of Irish Volunteers. In this drive a Sinn Féin club and a Volunteer Company were formed in Knockerra. The personnel of each was almost identical though the Sinn Féin Club did include, perhaps, a dozen members who were either too old or physically <sup>unfit</sup> ~~fit~~ to join the Volunteers. I did not take a very active part in the Sinn Féin Club but, on a ballot, I was elected Captain of the Company which consisted of eighty men. We had the usual complement of Company Officers but of these I can only think of the names of the four section commanders, Martin Mahoney, Coolmeiga, Dan Grogan, Carrowfree, Mick Ryan, Knockerra and Michael (Miko) Brown, Knockerra East. The Company paraded every Sunday but also met by sections on one night in each week.

At the time of the East Clare by-election, myself and three men from the Knockerra Company were sent to Ennis to help the Sinn Féin candidate, Eamonn de Valera. We helped in keeping the anti-Sinn Féin element in that town under control. That element was mainly composed of the wives and families of British soldiers then fighting for England in the First Great War. The women were kept well plied with drink by a number of the publicans who were supporters of the Irish Party, and in their drunken condition were a frenzied and ferocious crowd to deal with. On a couple of occasions the Volunteers were obliged to use the ash plant in order to protect Sinn Féin supporters from being mauled by these infuriated females. On polling day we did guard over the polling booths and that night remained on guard over the ballot boxes at the Ennis Courthouse.

De Valera's success in the by-election did a great deal towards bringing many new recruits to Sinn Féin and the Irish Volunteer Movement in the county. In fact, towards the end of 1917, when the threat of Conscription faced the country, most men of military age were already in the ranks of the Volunteers. Orders received from

Headquarters in Dublin required each individual Volunteer to provide himself with a pike for use in the event of Britian attempting to enforce Conscription. The pike-heads were forged for the Knockerra Volunteers by George Russell, a farrier in Cooraclare. He made altogether over seventy of them for us and was paid for his work out of Company funds raised by special levies on the Volunteers.

A good deal of land trouble developed in Clare about the same time as the Conscription threat and, in many cases, the Volunteers became involved in it. I had no trouble of this kind in Knockerra. Arising out of the land trouble, the British Government declared Clare a special military area and drafted thousands of soldiers into the county to enforce drastic regulations made by the military authorities. In our area we did not experience very much of the unpleasantness of military rule like other districts. Only one military post was set up there. About fifty soldiers, part of one of the Companies stationed in Kilrush Workhouse, occupied a house in Kilmore Knock and they remained there until May, 1920.

In Knockerra, as elsewhere in Clare, the Volunteers drilled in public from July or August 1917 onwards, meeting every Sunday after Mass for that purpose. No one from the Company was arrested although the police were frequently witnesses to the drilling. I cannot say why the R.I.C. did not arrest any of us as they did in most other places, but perhaps this was due to the fact that the policemen, who had a certain amount of discretion in such matters, were not very officious. Throughout 1918 the usual Company and sectional mobilisations for drill took place and otherwise there were no military activities on our part.

At the end of 1918, due to a reorganisation of the Irish Volunteer Movement in Clare when the county was divided into three Brigade areas

there was also a widespread recasting of the battalion and company areas. The area comprising the parishes of Knockerra, Kilmurray McMahon, Kilmihill, Killimer and Kilrush became the 2nd Battalion of the West Clare Brigade. The Brigade Commandant was Art O'Donnell of Tullycrine. I was appointed Battalion Commandant, and the other members of the Battalion staff were :- Vice Commandant Jack O'Donnell, Adjutant James Lorigan and Quartermaster Seán Breen. The officers of the Companies were :-

|                               |                                |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| A. Company (Knockerra)        | Captain - Percy Cooper         |
|                               | 1st. Lieut. - Martin Mahoney   |
|                               | 2nd " - Michael Browne         |
| B Company (Kilmurray-McMahon) | Captain - John Coughlan        |
|                               | 1st. Lieut. - Frank O'Donnell  |
|                               | 2nd " - Paddy McGrath          |
| C Company (Kilmihill)         | Captain - Stephen Hanrahan     |
|                               | 1st. Lieut. - Michael Killoury |
|                               | 2nd " - Peter McMahon          |
| D Company (Kilmihill)         | Captain - Michael Honan        |
|                               | 1st. Lieut. - Patrick Normoyle |
|                               | 2nd " - Cannot remember.       |
| E Company (Killimer)          | Captain - Thomas Wright        |
|                               | 1st. Lieut. - Laurence O'Neill |
|                               | 2nd. Lieut. - Willie Cooper    |
| F Company (Kilrush)           | Captain - Murty Tubridy        |
|                               | 1st Lieut. - Matt. Bermingham  |
|                               | 2nd Lieut. - Jerry Crowley.    |

Meetings of the Brigade and Battalion staff, which were held about once monthly after this reshuffle, were mostly concerned with matters affecting organisation for the next couple of months.

Returns were required from that period onwards, from the Companies to the Battalions and from Battalions to the Brigade. These returns dealt with parades, personnel, arms and funds and were matters that were new to a lot of us. It took a good lot of time and trouble before all the units were able to submit them properly.

An organiser from General Headquarters, Ernie O'Malley, appeared in the Brigade area soon after the reorganisation had occurred. He had been in the mid-Clare Brigade area before he came to us, and, whether or not, he was responsible in any way for the changes which had taken place, I'm not able to say. He started off by delivering a series of lectures on military tactics and the planning and delivering of attacks on R.I.C. barracks and on R.I.C. patrols. The Brigade staff were taken first, then each Battalion staff and finally the Company officers. He visited each Company area and took the Company on manoeuvres, and skirmishing exercises, after having first of all devoted a good deal of time to extended order drill and explaining the value of cover and how to make the best use of cover. Undoubtedly, he was most thorough and insisted that every man complied properly with his instructions. There was many a curse put on him by Volunteers who were sometimes wearing their "Sunday best" while out on these exercises, and who found themselves having to lie down on mud or in pools of water. He tolerated no half measures and by the time he left us there was no doubt at all about the value of his work. Discipline, in particular, was much better throughout the Brigade area and the average Volunteer was well able to take his part in field exercises.

O'Malley was not long in West Clare when he disclosed to a few of the higher officers that he had plans prepared to attack the



military post in Lahinch in the Mid Clare Brigade area. He stated that he wanted our Brigade to supply twenty men to co-operate with the Mid Clare Volunteers in this attack. The twenty men, mostly drawn from the officers, were selected and each man had arranged to provide himself with a shot gun as well as a set of pads for his knees and elbows. Apparently, the operation required a lot of crawling along the Lahinch sandbanks and hence the necessity for the pads. The operation was timed to take place on a Sunday night but on that Sunday morning O'Malley received word from the Lahinch Volunteers that information regarding the attack had reached the military and he cancelled the job. On the same day, however, another incident for which no preparations had been made took place.

The Knockerra Company had its usual parade after 11 o'clock Mass. O'Malley, Art O'Donnell, Brigade Commandant, and myself attended the parade which was also watched by a Sergeant and two Constables from the Kilrush R.I.C. barracks. The police were armed; the Sergeant carried a revolver and the Constables had carbines which were attached to their bikes by means of clips. O'Malley and O'Donnell had a revolver each which, while at Mass, they left in a neighbouring house owned by a girl named Mary ~~Malone~~ Nolan.

On seeing the police and probably because of being disappointed over the cancellation of the Lahinch incident I put the proposal up to O'Malley that the police be disarmed. He asked me how I proposed going about it. I replied that the Volunteers should "fall in" and be marched past the police who were standing on the road, the two Constables together and the Sergeant a short distance from them. I would march at the side of the leading rank of the parade and have beside me Mick Ryan, one of the section commanders, a big, powerful man in whom I had the utmost reliance.

As Ryan and myself would be passing the two Constables, we would rush them, taking a man each, while O'Malley and O'Donnell would then hold up the Sergeant. O'Malley fell in with my proposal and, with O'Donnell, went off to Nolan's to get the revolvers. I ordered the Company to "fall in" and, until I saw that O'Donnell and O'Malley were ready, I kept the Company marching up and down the road. Miss Nolan was slow in coming out of the Church with the result that there was some delay in getting the revolvers. Probably up to ten minutes had elapsed before I saw O'Malley coming out of the house with one hand behind his back. I took this as a signal that he was ready. As the front row of the Volunteers was about to pass the two Constables I said to Ryan, "Now Mick" and simultaneously we jumped on the two Constables and overpowered them. The Sergeant at once began to fire from behind causing the Volunteers to stampede and in their rush forward they knocked Ryan and myself on top of the police on the ground. However, we wrenched the carbines from the bikes and handed them to a couple of Volunteers to take away.

As soon as the Sergeant began to fire he was promptly engaged by O'Malley at a range of about fifty yards. He grazed the crown of the Sergeant's head with one bullet, knocking off the Sergeant's uniform cap. The latter took to his heels and ran towards the main-Ennis-Kilrush road. He was followed by the two Constables. The Volunteers had scattered in different directions and O'Malley, Ryan and myself were left. We went off to the top of a hill overlooking the Church and were there for some time when a Volunteer came to tell us that the three policemen had returned and gone into Nolan's house. We decided to go down towards Nolan's to watch what was happening but before we got that far we learned that the police had gone off with Art O'Donnell, Michael Mahoney and Tom Howard

as prisoners. To our intense disgust and amazement we also heard that the two carbines had been recovered by the police.

It appears that the Volunteers to whom we had given the carbines took them into Nolan's and hid them under a piece of sacking, and that O'Donnell, who did not come out to help O'Malley in holding up the Sergeant, remained in the house after the police had retreated where he was joined by the other two men. As the only gun we had now at our disposal was O'Malley's revolver, the question of pursuing the police and prisoners was considered to be suicidal in view of the superior equipment of the police who might also shoot the prisoners, if attacked.

As a sequel to the Knockerra incident, Art O'Donnell was sentenced to two years' imprisonment, and O'Mahoney and Howard got one year each. I was obliged to 'go on the run' with Mick Ryan and Michael Mahoney. We went to Dublin and remained for about seven months having joined the Volunteers there during our stay. I made one short visit to Clare in the interval, taking down there a parcel of ammunition which Peadar Clancy was anxious to deliver to the West Clare Brigade. At this time there was a big number of men from all parts of the country knocking about Dublin City who were in the same position as I was - wanted by the authorities. An order from G.H.Q. requested all these men to go home to their own areas, and I complied with the order and went back to West Clare.

I resumed control of the 2nd Battalion on my return. Art O'Donnell, the Brigade O/C. was at home before me after being released from prison as a result of a hunger strike, and so also were the other two men who were sentenced with him.

The first armed attack on British Forces in my Battalion area took place in Kilmihill on 18th April, 1920 when the local Volunteers attacked a party of R.I.C. on a Sunday morning after 11 o'clock Mass. The Volunteers participating in this attack were Seán Breen, Battalion Quartermaster, Martin Melican, John O'Dea and a fourth man whose name I forget. They were armed with revolvers and they opened the attack outside the Church gates as the congregation was coming out. In the first burst of fire R.I.C. Sergeant Carroll was killed and Constable Collins wounded. The third policeman retreated back through the congregation taking a zig-zag route. He was followed by Seán Breen a very tall man who towered above the people about him. The policeman fired without regard for whom he hit, but Breen, being under the disadvantage of knowing every member of the congregation, hesitated to return the fire. On account of his stature he was a fairly easy target at close range and, as he closed in on the policeman, the latter shot him through the forehead, killing him outright.

Military, who were stationed in Kilmihill at the time and R.I.C., were quickly on the scene. Breen's body was taken by them to his uncle's place in the village. A military guard was placed over it until the next day when an inquest was held. The Jury returned the verdict that "John Breen was shot dead while fighting for his country by Constable Martin". Breen's body was handed over to his relatives after the inquest and on the following day his funeral to Kilmihill graveyard took place. The corpse had been taken to the Chapel on Monday evening escorted by the Kilmihill Company. Next day, at the funeral, upwards of eight hundred Volunteers participated in the parade which followed the coffin.

I was in charge of the Volunteers on the day of Breen's burial. They mobilised in front of Kilmihill Catholic Church and were drawn up in ranks waiting for the funeral to start when a military armoured car came up the street. On meeting the Volunteers, it drove very slowly against the front bank, attempting to knock down our men. They refused to yield and after repeated attempts the armoured car withdrew without having upset our ranks. The village bristled with troops and policemen who had machine guns posted all over the place, outside the police barracks, outside the Church and around the graveyard. As the coffin was going past the police barracks a machine gun was trained on it but there was no firing. The Volunteers marched in military formation at the funeral and the internment took place without incident, nor did the British authorities attempt to make any arrests.

I would like to say that sanction for the attack on the police at Kilmihill was sought by the local Company from the Battalion Council, and that not alone was approval given, but assistance was also offered, which was not accepted. Breen and his companions felt they were capable of succeeding without the aid of outsiders.

It was not long after the Kilmihill incident that Peadar Clancy, himself a native of Cranny, County Clare, and who was afterwards murdered with Dick McKee in Dublin Castle, came to West Clare as a representative from G.H.Q. He called a meeting of the Brigade Council at O'Donnell's in Tullycrine and announced there that he had been sent to the area for the purpose of electing a new Brigade staff, as G.H.Q. was not satisfied that the officers who had filled these posts were fitted to do so. It was the feeling of the majority of those present that the old Brigade Commandant, Art O'Donnell, should be re-appointed. Clancy pointed out that this

would not be sanctioned by G.H.Q. under any circumstances and asked for other names. On my proposition Seán Liddy, Corraclare, was then elected. The other officers appointed were :-

|                         |                   |
|-------------------------|-------------------|
| Brigade Vice Commandant | - Patrick Clancy, |
| Brigade Adjutant        | - Dan Sheedy,     |
| Brigade Quartermaster   | - Sunny Burke.    |

I do not know Burke's correct christian name. Later on, during the early months of 1921, I believe, Conor Whelan, William Haugh and Thomas Marrinan replaced Clancy, Sheedy and Burke, respectively.

During the spring of 1920 the R.I.C. withdrew from Knock barracks and in the general destruction of vacated R.I.C. Stations on Holy Saturday night of 1920 this building was demolished by the Killimer and Kilmihill Companies. In November, 1920, Kilmihill R.I.C. barracks was closed down and a couple of nights later it was destroyed under my own supervision by the Kilmihill Volunteers who used sledges and crowbars at the job.

In the summer of 1920 it was reported by the Kilrush Company that a policeman named Hanly was becoming very active in connection with enemy intelligence work and, on the matter being raised at a Brigade Council meeting, it was decided that this man should be executed. Two men, Paddy Clancy and Michael Melican not well known in the town of Kilrush, were sent in to shoot him. They decided to wait for him near his home in Moore Street.. As he came along, however, a woman pushing a pram walked beside him and he got into his home unmolested. A day or two after this the Brigade Commandant, Seán Liddy, Bill Hough, Frank O'Donnell, Tommy Marrinan and a few others armed with revolvers, attempted to hold up a black van at Tullycrine Grove for the purpose of taking them into Kilrush to shoot Constable Hanly. The van was halted and the I.R.A. party went to

the back to jump inside. Incidentally, there was no door or covering of any kind at the back of this van. To their amazement the van was full of armed policemen and, on seeing what confronted them, beat a hasty retreat. The police must have been just as flabbergasted because they made no attempt to follow the I.R.A. party and forgot to shoot until they had gone about four hundred yards from the scene of the hold-up and then began blazing away in all directions.

Constable Hanly was shot dead about a week afterwards - 21st August, 1920 - by Bill Hough in Walsh's public house in Moore Street.

Towards the end of July, 1920, it was decided to attack a military lorry which took rations from Kiltrush to the military stationed at Kilmore, Knock. The position selected for the ambush was at Burrane School, and it was timed to take place on a Monday, the day on which the lorry usually travelled. On the preceding Wednesday or Thursday a few of the Brigade officers, inspecting the position, were observed by some of the people living in the vicinity who seemed to scent what was afoot. These people, fearful of reprisals, at once began shifting their furniture to other parts of the parish. News of this reached the military in Kilmore because, on the following day Saturday, a youthful Volunteer named John Daly overheard a telephone conversation in the Knock Post Office between the officer in charge of the Kilmore garrison and the military in Kiltrush when the officer was reporting that the Sinn Féiners intended ambushing the ration lorry.

On hearing of young Daly's story the Brigade Commandant decided not to proceed with the attack on the day selected. On Monday morning the ration lorry travelled as usual but, as it reached

Burrane School two detachments of soldiers, one from Knock and the other from Kilrush, converged on the site chosen for the attack. On finding no trace of an I.R.A. party there, the military concluded that the information regarding the preparation of the ambush was without foundation, because on the following Monday the ration lorry travelled as usual.

I think it was a fortnight after the date for which the attack was originally fixed that an I.R.A. party of twenty men under the Brigade Commandant took up positions at Burrane School. The party had arrived with about half a dozen rifles and thirteen or fourteen shot guns. Instead of the lorry, a horse-drawn waggon driven by two unarmed soldiers came along. On the soldiers being called upon to surrender they promptly did so. The rations were destroyed, the vehicle was burned and the two horses were seized and driven across country to Coor. These two animals were later sold and the proceeds went into the funds of the West Clare Brigade. The soldiers were set at liberty and rejoined their unit.

The next engagement with which I was concerned occurred in the town of Kilrush on the night of 22nd April, 1921. The enemy held that town in considerable strength. There were three separate posts :-

No. 1. - The Workhouse on the northern outskirts of the town at Cut Hill on the Milltown-Malbay road. There were about 200 soldiers stationed here.

No. 2. - The Coastguard Station at Cappagh on the south side of the town which was held by 100 Marines who had, at their disposal, a fast-moving motor launch.



No. 3. - The R.I.C. Barracks in Toler Street, now St. Senan Street, in the centre of the town. Due to reinforcements from 'Black and Tan' sources and from outside stations the post had been enlarged during 1920 by the acquisition of the "Gentlemen's Club" next door. There were about fifty policemen in this barracks.

Each post was strongly fortified by sandbags and steel shutters on the doors and windows, barbed wire entanglements and well placed sentry posts.

There were eight or nine lorries distributed between the military and the R.I.C. and from the end of 1920 onwards whenever the military went outside the town to raid or on convoy duty he always did so in such strength that our Brigade with its poor equipment, eight or ten rifles and twenty five or thirty shot guns, could not hope to deliver a serious attack. Besides the terrain did not provide even one suitable position for a large scale attack along the roads used by the enemy.

The officers of the West Clare Brigade were keen on pulling off successfully an attack on the enemy which could compare in size with some of the operations that were then occurring frequently in other parts of Ireland, and when the reports from the I.R.A. Intelligence Officer in Kilrush showed that such an opportunity had presented itself immediate steps were taken to avail of it. The intelligence reports disclosed that a police patrol went around the town each night enforcing curfew from about 9 o'clock to midnight. This patrol dealt severely with an unfortunate man who was found about the streets between these hours. Several cases were reported where men were badly beaten and ~~h~~icked by members of this patrol.

The Brigade O/C., in his anxiety to punish the patrol severely, asked for assistance from his friend, Michael Brennan, O/C., East Clare Brigade. This was readily forthcoming. On the night of 20th April, 1921, a detachment of about twenty-five men commanded by Brennan himself arrived by boat from East Clare at Killydysart where they were met by a party from our Brigade about twenty strong. The East Clare men were all armed with rifles and our men carried eight or nine rifles and eleven or twelve shot guns.

At the time there was an R.I.C. post in Killydysart garrisoned by about twenty policemen who carried out occasional patrols in the village between nightfall and midnight. The combined I.R.A. forces took positions around the village in the hope that the police patrol might come out, but it did not do so. About midnight the positions were vacated and all the men marched up and down through the village. Brennan himself went up to the door of the Police Barracks and, knocking loudly, challenged the police to come out. The challenge was not accepted and the I.R.A. party then set out for Tullycrine and Knockerra where I had arranged billets for them. The march, which was about eleven or twelve miles, was completed between four and five o'clock in the morning and before retiring to the billets the entire party sat down to a substantial meal at Art O'Donnell's in Tullycrine.

While resting in the billets two members of the Knockerra Company were posted outside each house in which the men slept, using, while on such duty, the guns of those inside. I also established a look-out post on the top of Knockerra Hill which, from its elevated position, gave a splendid view all over West Clare. The men posted there could clearly see every enemy

vehicle leaving the Workhouse in Kilrush where the military were stationed, and follow the direction in which it was going. The headlights of the vehicles made their movements at night even more visible. Due to the fact that Brennan needed further information from the Kilrush Volunteers before he could make plans for attacking the enemy there, the men remained in their billets in Tullycrine and Knockerra until about 5 o'clock in the evening of 22nd April. The party started off for Kilrush about half past five and reached the outskirts of the town about 8 o'clock. Nightfall was then setting in. The attacking force was divided up into sections, each of which was led off by members of the Kilrush Company to the position assigned to it in the operational plan.

This plan was mainly based on detailed reports submitted by Joseph McNamara who dealt with Intelligence <sup>Work</sup> ~~Officers~~ in the town of Kilrush. He had been keeping a very close watch on the movements of all enemy forces in the town especially on street patrols and also compiled a timetable of these movements. Sketches of the enemy positions and of the routes generally taken by patrols were prepared by the Battalion Adjutant, Michael McMahon and the 1st. Lieutenant of the Kilrush Company, Stephen Madigan, for the information of Brennan and the other officers who drew up the plan of operations.

The following details will give an idea of this plan :-

1. Coastguard Station. Six men under Michael McMahon, Adjutant, 2nd Battalion, West Clare Brigade, to cover off the entrance to this building.
2. Workhouse. Eight men under Bill Hough, West Clare Brigade, to occupy positions covering the front entrance, and eight men

under Seán Liddy, West Clare Brigade, to be posted at the  
 rere of this building.

3. R.I.C. Barracks. Six men under Stephen Madigan, West  
 Clare Brigade, to cover the front from position in the Convent  
 field.

4. Ambush party. About a dozen men under Michael Brennan and  
 Tom McGrath, O/C., and Vice O/C., East Clare Brigade, respectively,  
 to attack the police patrol. This party was to occupy three  
 positions at the entrances to Ball Alley Lane, Malt House Lane  
 and Stewart Street, all off Moore Street where the patrol was  
 to be ambushed.

The police patrol usually left the R.I.C. barracks at 9 p.m.  
 and came by the back road into Henry Street, then through  
 Vandeleur Street, The Glen and Burton Street into The Square,  
 where it halted for a quarter or an hour or so before going down  
 Moore Street to the end of the town and then back by the same  
 route to The Square. As a rule, the patrol, after coming to  
 the Square for the second time, waited around there until 11 p.m.  
 and then went back to the Barracks for the night. From time to  
 time the District Inspector of Police checked on the movements  
 of the patrol.

During the evening the District Inspector (Captain May) got  
 very drunk in one of the local hotels. It was known to the  
 police going out on patrol that he was still in that condition  
 in the hotel. The Sergeant in charge of the patrol, Sergeant  
 Foley, was an easy-going man inclined to choose the easier way  
 out of things. When he and his men reached the Square, after  
 completing the first part of the nightly itinerary, he decided  
 to finish for the night and take the patrol back to the barracks,  
 without going through Moore Street.

Shortly after the return of the patrol to barracks two thirsty policemen, Sergeant McFadden and Constable Hopkins came out again in quest of a drink. They had reached the Square when they were challenged by Michael Brennan, Tom McGrath and Matt Bermingham who had come up from Moore Street to investigate what was delaying the patrol. The two policemen were called on to halt and in reply Sergeant McFadden shouted, "It's all right. We're R.I.C." The Sergeant had assumed that he was meeting a military patrol. The I.R.A. leader and his two comrades opened fire, killing McFadden outright and wounding the Constable in the shoulder. In the darkness the latter escaped to the barracks and McFadden's revolver was taken from him.

When the shooting in the Square was heard in the Coastguard Station and the Workhouse, the Marines and the Military attempted to send out detachments to go to the assistance of the police. The Marines promptly retired as soon as the I.R.A. party at the entrance to the Coastguard Station opened fire on them. At the Workhouse the men under Bill Hough had orders that, in the event of the Military coming out through the front gate, fire should be withheld until orders were given by him, as it was his intention to allow the soldiers to be well outside the gate before opening the attack. However, as soon as the first half a dozen soldiers had emerged through the gate an over anxious Volunteer fired. The rest of the party did likewise causing the soldiers to beat a hasty retreat into the shelter behind the Workhouse walls. No further attempt was made by either the Marines or Military to leave their posts. From both posts, however, machine gun and rifle fire started and this continued until dawn. At the police barracks there was no attempt made by the garrison there to

venture out but the shooting which took place from that building was just as wild and reckless as that indulged in by the Marines and Military.

The I.R.A. did not leave their positions until about 6 a.m. and then the different sections under the guidance of the local Volunteers moved off to Cooraclare, the pre-arranged rendezvous. In that village Michael Brennan bought one drink for each man and then took the whole party to Cree where billets were arranged, and food supplied. While the men slept during the day the local I.R.A. Company performed protection duty. That night, about 10 o'clock, the billets were vacated and the East Clare detachment accompanied by most of the West Clare men who had participated in the Kilrush operation moved southwards towards the Shannon until they reached Cahermurphy convenient to the point which had been fixed for the boat to pick up Brennan and his unit to bring them back to East Clare. After nightfall on 24th April, after the boat moved off, the party from West Clare returned to their home areas.

No I.R.A. casualties were sustained in the Kilrush operation. The enemy losses were never established. The death of Sergeant McFadden and the wounding of Constable Hopkins were admitted.

The British were very sore over the attack, particularly because of the fact that it was well known to the public that the I.R.A. held complete control of the town throughout the night. In an effort to account for their poor show that night a fantastic report was issued a few days later from General Strickland's Headquarters in Cork. He was O/C., Southern Command. The report described the I.R.A. force as being four hundred strong and stated that it comprised Flying Columns from Cork and Kerry.

Inspiration for this report may have come from two Marines who were captured outside the Coastguard Station while courting two local girls. The Marines were held as prisoners and in the morning were brought a few miles from the town as their captors were retiring. They had been well treated and chatted freely with our lads. Among the questions asked by these prisoners were - where did the attackers come from? - where were the attackers going now? - and did the attackers ever have transport? On being told that the attackers came from Cork and Kerry, that they were now on their way to Athlone and that all journeys had to be on foot, one of the prisoners, in a most sympathetic voice answered, "Ye poor b-s". They were released when it was considered that the time which it would take them to get back to the station was sufficient to enable the men who had them as prisoners to reach Cooraclare.

There were no reprisals in the town of Kilrush after this operation due, it was believed, to the intervention of influential local loyalists. This did not save the homes of the Brigade O/C., Sean Liddy, in Cooraclare, and the Brigade Adjutant, Bill Hough, ~~Monmore~~ ~~Moymore~~. Both places were burned by a strong detachment of police and military from Kilrush.

From the end of April, 1921 onwards the enemy forces in West Clare became exceedingly cautious. In the towns, vigilance was intensified and a sharp look out kept for possible attacks. Individual policemen, who had made themselves unpopular, became very careful about their movements. In the rural areas the roads were so heavily trenched and barricaded that enemy lorries could get through them only by refilling trenches and removing road obstacles, such as stone barricades, scattered stones on the road,

felled trees or broken bottles. Often, numbers of the civilian population were rounded up and compelled, at the point of the gun, to do this work. The enemy did not relish the delay and trouble caused by our road obstruction activities and used the roads only as little as possible in the months which just preceeded the Truce in July 1921.

Signed:

*John Flanagan*  
(John Flanagan)

Date:

*15-12-55*

15.12.55

Witness:

*D. Griffin*

(D. Griffin)

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