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ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,324

Witness

Joseph Barrett,
57 Moore Street,
Kilrush,
Co. Clare.

Identity.

Brigade Operations Officer,
Mid Clare Brigade.

Subject.

National activities, Mid Clare,
1908-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

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STATEMENT OF JOE BARRETT,
57 Moore Street, Kilrush, Co. Clare.

Formerly - O/C, Operations, Mid-Clare Brigade.

I was born in February, 1888, at Barnageeha, Darragh, Ennis, Co. Clare. I am the eldest of a family of sixteen, ten boys and six girls. I worked on my father's farm after leaving Killone (Ballyea) national school. At present, I practise as an auctioneer in the town of Kilrush, at the above address.

I was sworn into the Fenian Brotherhood on the 15th August, 1908. In this part of the county, the Irish Republican Brotherhood was always known as the Fenian Brotherhood, being, as it was, handed down directly from the Fenian organisation of 1867. At the time I joined, it was the practice in our part of Clare to invite the eldest sons of all the old Fenians to become members of the Brotherhood, and my father was an old Fenian at the time. I was sworn in by Peter McInerney of Lisheen, Ballynacally, Co. Clare, at an unoccupied house at Drumquin. There were fifteen of us, mostly the eldest sons of old Fenians, sworn in on the same night. This fifteen formed the nucleus of a Circle which represented three or four parishes. We held meetings about every two months or so, where the ways and means of procuring arms and ammunition were discussed and, so far as we were able, we did our best to acquire what arms we could.

After about six or eight months, the Circle numbered thirty men. We took an active part in the local agitation for the acquisition of ranches by the Land Commission and, in the division of such lands, we tried to ensure that our members would get preference. These large estates had been in the hands of landlords against whom there was a traditional hostility; they were mostly of planter stock and invariably were opposed to every Irish national movement.

Between 1909 and 1913, the I.R.B. extended its membership throughout County Clare, especially within a radius of ten or fifteen miles from the town of Ennis which came to be the meeting place for the members of that Circle. Meetings of the Circle were held about every two or three months. There was no fixed time or interval for the meetings, but there was seldom less than a two-month interval between them and never more than three. The question of recruits occupied a good deal of the time at those meetings, and another matter which generally came up for discussion was the number of guns of all sorts, particularly those in the houses of the ascendancy class, which were immediately available in the neighbourhood if the occasion should arise to acquire them. In actual fact, the Circle did come into possession of four or five rifles of the Winchester type by purchase from gamekeepers in the employment of landlords for whom they had no great love.

Besides the I.R.B., we had the Gaelic Athletic Association going well in the county in those early days, and we saw the fading days of the United Irish League, which was a political organisation, mostly

dealing with land. It was originally organised for the purpose of resisting evictions, reducing rack-rents, and generally to improve the position of the tenant farmers. I believe that it was through the agitation of the League that the Wyndham Land Act was passed in the British Parliament. The United Irish League was another name for the Land League, or rather, the United Irish League was the successor of the Land League, and its objective was the same, though it relied more on constitutional agitation.

The Gaelic League did not make its appearance in our part of Clare until about 1910-11, and it, along with the other organisations which I have mentioned - the I.R.B., the United Irish League and the G.A.A. - was the only body which catered for people in Clare who had the interests of Irish nationality at heart until the start of the Volunteers in 1913.

The Irish Volunteer organisation was started in Dublin in November, 1913. We organised a Company of the Volunteers in the parish of Killone a week after the Dublin meeting. The Company was small but the material was good. The majority of the men enrolled belonged to the Fenian Brotherhood. The members of the I.R.B. started the Volunteers on their own, without assistance or instructions from any outside body or person, that is to say, we had no instructions from the Supreme Council, on the one hand, or the newly formed Volunteer Executive, on the other. Between the end of 1913 and the summer of 1914, Volunteer companies were started in most parishes in Clare.

About the summer of 1914 the Redmondite party - the Irish Parliamentary Party of the time - became

very interested in the Volunteer movement, and insisted on having men nominated by them placed on the Executive Council. A parade of Irish Volunteers from all over Clare was held in Ennis about the month of June or July, 1914. This parade was reviewed by William Redmond, then the Irish Parliamentary Party member of Parliament for East Clare. A few months later, the Parliamentary Party encouraged or advised the Volunteers to join the British army and fight for England in the 1914-1918 war. This caused a split in the movement, and the majority of the Volunteers in Clare went with the Redmondite Party at the time. About a third remained faithful to their oaths as Fenians and gave their allegiance only to the Irish Volunteer executive under the leadership of Eoin McNeill. They opposed recruiting by every possible means in their power. For a period after this split, matters did not go too well for the Irish Volunteers in Clare but gradually they gathered strength there while the Redmondite section of the Volunteers, which became known as the National Volunteers, became weaker. The Redmondite Volunteers carried on in their own units.

Early in 1915 the Redmondite Volunteers began to fade out and a good percentage of the arms they held were handed over by them to the Irish Volunteers. A lot of these rifles were really not much use for fighting purposes and, as far as the area which subsequently became known as the Mid-Clare Brigade was concerned, I would say that from about twelve to fifteen of these guns - mostly Martin Henri rifles - were fit for service during the Black and Tan days.

As the year 1915 wore on, a number of the Redmondite Volunteers rejoined the Irish Volunteers. Arms were being procured in various ways. Soldiers were coming home on leave at the time and were allowed to carry their rifles and equipment into their homes. In almost all cases, they were collected by the Volunteers. In some instances, they were seized. In other cases, they were got by a few drinks. In that way, we collected about a dozen rifles until the practice of soldiers being allowed to bring their rifles home while on furlough was stopped by the authorities. In 1917 the South Irish Horse were stationed at a place called Edenvale, outside Ennis, at the time. This was a yeomanry regiment which had been mobilised for war service, and some members of the regiment were friendly to us. We collected some arms from them and bought others. After a short time, the arms were found to be missing and the regiment was transferred to another station.

During 1915 Ernest Blythe came to Clare as an Irish Volunteer organiser - a job which he carried out very satisfactorily. He was followed everywhere he went by the R.I.C., frequently eluding them and leading them on wild goose chases, to his great amusement. The R.I.C. authorities in Clare at the time visited the hotels which had given him accommodation and asked the proprietors not to keep him. In this request, the police were generally successful, and Blythe was only able to get accommodation in an odd hotel here and there.

During the years 1914 and 1915 there were frequent meetings of the I.R.B. in County Clare and

in Limerick. Limerick City was the Divisional Centre for Munster. Meetings of this Divisional Centre were held about every six months in Limerick City. I attended most, if not all, of the meetings of the Munster Council as one of the I.R.B. representatives from Clare. The general trend of the discussions at these meetings, however, was that the Council wanted to ensure that the I.R.B. was in control of the Irish Volunteer organisation because, through such control, it would be in a position to handle any situation that might arise. This objective, to a great extent, was successfully accomplished. I do not remember many of the other people present at these Munster Council meetings, as they were mostly strangers to me at the time. I do recall having seen there Michael P. Colivet, Jim Leddin, - Dundon, all from Limerick City; Seán Hegarty, Cork, Pakie Ryan, Doon, Art O'Donnell, Sean McNamara, Con Kearney and Ned Fennell, all from County Clare.

At one of the Munster Council meetings in Limerick held, as far as I can remember, between May and September, 1915, it was made known to the men present that a Rising was contemplated at some future date. As far as I remember, but I am not quite sure, I think it was Seán O'Hegarty from Cork that made this statement. That statement was expected by many of the men present, and did not appear to create much surprise.

Owing to R.I.C. activities, we had only two further meetings of the Munster Council in Limerick up to the Rising, 1916. On one occasion, the police were so vigilant that the delegates had to return home

without being able to attend the meeting.

After the Redmondite split, the I.R.B. had become a very strong organisation in Clare. The Volunteers would have had a hard time to overcome the opposition, were it not that the I.R.B. was the backbone of the Volunteer force and practically all Volunteer officers belonged to the I.R.B. As is well known, the I.R.B. was banned by the Catholic Church, and that ban would have had a serious effect on the Volunteer organisation as well as the I.R.B., had not the I.R.B. members been advised that any action taken by men for the freedom of their country was no sin. They were told that the clergy were bound to take such action and propound such views as the hierarchy might direct, but that, where men were satisfied - and it was pointed out to them how they could satisfy their own consciences - that their actions were good and legitimate, they need not disclose their membership of the organisation to their confessor. I cannot remember exactly who gave us this advice, but I did hear it from my father as well as from various visiting Centres who attended our local Circle meetings.

I attended a lecture in Limerick early in March, 1916, given by Seán MacDermott to an I.R.B. gathering. Everybody who attended that lecture knew that a Rising was imminent. The speaker did not put it in so many words, but he left all those present under no doubt whatever on the point.

During the months of March and April, 1916, from different communications that had been sent to

the Volunteers, the Rising was expected at any time, but it was generally thought, in our part of the country, that it would not take place until about June or July of that year. The communications, referred to, dealt with preparations for the Rising. They all came from Limerick City and were extracts from communications sent by Volunteer Headquarters in Dublin to the Limerick Brigade, which then controlled the counties of Clare and Limerick.

On Easter Saturday, 1916, I got verbal instructions to mobilise on Easter Sunday and to carry rations for twenty-four hours, as well as all the arms and equipment at the disposal of the Company. We were to mobilise at Darragh Cross. By that time, a Volunteer Company had been formed at Ballyea of which I was the Captain. We had about thirty men. Though various rumours were circulating, I was satisfied myself that we were mobilising for armed insurrection. We got all the equipment necessary to take the field, trench-coats, boots, ammunition and twenty-four hours' rations. Our orders were to remain at Darragh Cross and await further instructions from Brigade Headquarters.

Altogether, about thirty Volunteers assembled at Darragh Cross. With the exception of three, they were all members of the I.R.B..

We remained mobilised on Easter Sunday until four o'clock on the Monday morning. As no orders had been received by that time, the men were dismissed and told to go home. We were four miles from Ennis and had seen no Sunday paper. Therefore, we did not know

of the cancellation order issued by Eoin McNeill. I went to Ennis on Monday morning to find out what was going on, and I heard there that the mobilisation had been cancelled by McNeill. Later that day, I heard that the men were out in Dublin, Galway and Cork and various parts of the country.

As a matter of fact, I heard the news of the Rising from the lips of an R.I.C. Head Constable, named O'Keefe. He came into the Old Ground Hotel in Ennis, where I was and which belonged to my aunt, and said to me, "What are you doing here? It's very seldom we see you in town on a Monday. What are you doing in town?" I said, "I came in to do some business and, if you ask my aunt, she'll tell you all about it". He said, "The sooner you go home, the better, or we will lock you up!" I was rather friendly with him and I asked him what was up. Then he told me that there was a rebellion in Dublin and that the city was destroyed by fire, and that there was terrible fighting going on there. And he added, "Go home, you, and stay at home!"

After leaving the Head Constable, I got in touch with various other Volunteer officers and asked if they had any instructions, but learned they had received none. A messenger was sent to Limerick, and he found out that the Irish Volunteers in that city had mobilised but they were disbanded again on orders from McNeill.

On Tuesday, I heard from some source that the Volunteers were out only in Dublin, Galway and Wexford, and, in the absence of any instructions from Limerick,

I was in a quandary as to what action I ought to take. Eventually, I and the other officers of my Company decided to do nothing, in the absence of orders. The men, who had mobilised at Darragh, were notified, when they were dismissed on Easter Monday morning, to be available at short notice if we received word to come out. The same applied to a good many Companies in different parts of County Clare.

The order to mobilise on Easter Sunday, 1916, had been given verbally. I should also mention that we were expected to obtain horses and carts for the transport of the arms which we expected to be landed along the Clare shore of the Shannon. There was no difficulty in getting all the horse transport we required - and the farmers' sons as drivers.

Beyond what I have stated, we did not know any more of the details of the landing of arms, just merely that the landing was expected. We expected it to take place somewhere on the Shannon between Kildysart and Carrigaholt.

When we learned that the Limerick Volunteers had surrendered their arms to the British authorities, the Volunteers in my area entirely disagreed with this action. The fact that we disagreed was due to our strong I.R.B. background. We voiced our disapproval to each other and resolved that we would not surrender our arms and did not do so.

Following the Rising, there was, of course, police activity around the country, but only Mícheál and Paddy Brennan, Eamon Waldron from Ennistymon, and

some two or three others were arrested in Clare. These men were sent to Dublin and deported to England. As nothing had happened and there were so few arrests in Clare, most of the companies remained intact, but there was no activity until the end of 1916 or early 1917.

In the spring of 1917, reorganisation became really active. About that time, a separate Brigade of Irish Volunteers was formed for all County Clare. Within a few months, most of the companies doubled their strength.

In the early summer of 1917, Major William Redmond, who was the Parliamentary representative of East Clare, was killed in France. This created a vacancy for which Mr. de Valera was nominated as the Sinn Féin candidate. The election campaign took place in June and July and was won by de Valera, by a big majority. The prisoners who were sentenced after the Rising were released in June, and numbers of these, as well as the men who had been released from internment earlier, came to Clare to assist in the election. The presence of all these men around the county, as well as the meetings held in connection with the election, gave a great fillip to the morale of the Volunteers in the county. Thousands of new recruits joined the ranks during that time. Clare became one of the best organised counties in Munster, due to the activities of the 1916 men in the course of the election campaign. I had the honour of being put in charge of the guard of honour given to de Valera on his first appearance in Clare during the by-election.

When the conscription crisis came in 1918, there was increased activity in trying to acquire arms and preparing the Volunteer units to meet the situation when it would arise. There was some further increase in recruiting but, as the County Clare had been pretty fully organised during the 1917 Clare election and almost all the available young men had already joined up, there was not such a considerable influx of recruits in 1918 as elsewhere, but, when the Conscription Bill was passed in the British House of Commons, everyone became more active. Parades for drill purposes had almost a hundred per cent. attendances, subscriptions and levies were promptly paid by the Volunteers themselves, and the anti British feeling increased very much in intensity.

At the end of 1918, Clare was divided into three Brigade areas, East Clare, Mid Clare and West Clare. The boundary between East and Mid Clare was as follows:-

Latoon Bridge to Quin - Quin village was in East Clare.

Clooney to Tulla - Clooney was in Mid Clare and Tulla was in East Clare.

Ballinruan to the) - Ballinruan was in Mid
County Border) Clare, and Killnenay was
in East Clare.

The boundary between Mid and West Clare was:-

The parish of Ballycorick in Mid Clare to
Kildysert in West Clare;

Lissycasey in Mid Clare to Cranny and
Coolmeen in West Clare;

That is, the boundary from the Shannon
to the north.

The Brigade boundary ran from west of Froor, in
Lissycasey, nearly straight to Spanish Point.
Spanish Point and Miltown-Malbay were in Mid Clare,
and the parish of Mullagh was in West Clare.

At the meeting at which these Brigade areas and
their boundaries were fixed, there was a representative
of General Headquarters down from Dublin. I don't
remember who he was, but I know he was there. The
three Brigade Commanders were appointed at that meeting -
Micheál Brennan to command East Clare Brigade, my
brother, Frank Barrett, to command Mid Clare Brigade,
and I forget who was given charge in West Clare. I
was not present at that meeting, but I was appointed
Brigade Adjutant of the Mid Clare Brigade at the
meeting. Previously, I had been on the old Brigade
Staff as Assistant Adjutant when the single Brigade
covered all Clare. Martin Devitt (afterwards killed)
was appointed Brigade Vice O/C, and, as far as I
recollect, Eamon Waldron was Brigade Quartermaster.

The Mid Clare Brigade was organised into six
Battalion areas. I attended most of the Battalion
Council meetings for the purpose of election of
Battalion officers. The Battalion O/Cs reorganised
the Battalion areas into new Companies, as some of the
existing Companies were too large. Seán O'Grady,
Crusheen, was made O/C, 1st Battalion; Patrick

Costello (Pappy), Darragh, O/C of the 2nd Battalion; Seán Casey, O/C of the 3rd Battalion; Ignatius O'Neill, Miltown-Malbay, O/C of the 4th Battalion; Andrew O'Donoghue, O/C of the 5th Battalion, which, later on, was divided into two Battalions, Seán McNamara becoming O/C of the 6th Battalion.

At the end of 1918 or early in 1919, Ernie O'Malley came to Clare as a G.H.Q. organiser. He carried out training in three or four of our Battalion areas and then left.

Police activity was becoming more acute in the spring of 1919, and they were refusing permits for arms to a number of farmers. The Volunteers took up all the shotguns in the Brigade area. They had prior information that the R.I.C. were to collect the shotguns, and they were just ahead of the police in most places. Not more than two dozen guns were missed altogether in the Brigade area by our men, while we collected up to a couple of hundred weapons of all types - a big percentage of which were not serviceable.

Due to the prevalence of land trouble in Clare for generations before our time, the British Government erected all over the county a number of special stations which became known as "R.I.C. huts". These stations were additional to the ordinary R.I.C. barracks of which Clare had its quota, like every other county in Ireland. The result was that, by the commencement of the Black and Tan struggle, our county had perhaps twice as high an "R.I.C. population" and twice as many "R.I.C. centres" to

contend with, in proportion to its size, than the rest of the counties. From these very numerous police centres, the authorities were able to keep a close watch on the movements and activities of the Volunteers. The Mid Clare Brigade Council keenly appreciated these facts and felt that, in order to secure greater freedom of action and more security, it was essential that the R.I.C. should, if possible, be cleared at least out of the smaller stations or huts. At a Brigade Council meeting held in June, 1919, it was decided to attack the R.I.C. huts in Inch, Lissycasey and Connolly. The planning of the attacks was entrusted to myself.

At that particular stage of the struggle, our Brigade was poorly equipped with the necessary means for capturing any kind of stone or brick building. We had only about two dozen serviceable rifles, with a small quantity of suitable ammunition. Shotguns were not much use for anything other than preventing the police from coming out, or making a good deal of noise. We had, however, a large number of home-made bombs which I thought might be the most effective means of compelling the police to surrender, and my plan was to open the attacks by getting men to crawl up to the barracks and throw in the bombs through the windows. I hoped that, by doing this, the police would be taken by surprise, and that they would then yield to our demands to surrender.

The home-made bombs consisted of canisters, filled with scrap metal and charged with gelignite, attached to a small length of fuse which had to be ignited before throwing.

At Inch, the attack proceeded from about half-past ten at night to three o'clock in the morning. All the rear of the barracks was blown out, but the R.I.C. continued to resist. We had one man very badly wounded. He failed to get his bomb through the window and it exploded, wounding him very badly in the chest and abdomen. He had to be taken away on the backs of my brother, Michael, and James O'Keefe for over two miles. By 3 a.m., dawn was breaking and we called off the attack.

Much the same thing happened at Connolly. They failed to surprise the police. I must say that, in both these attacks, the police showed great bravery in resisting.

The Lissycasey attack did not take place, owing to the illness of the Sergeant's wife who lived in the barracks. The local Company Captain was a very soft-hearted and conscientious man, and he objected very strongly to the barracks being attacked while the Sergeant's wife was ill. There were no women in the other two barracks.

There was great police activity after those events, but no arrests were made. As a result of the attacks, all the weaker outposts in the Brigade area were evacuated, so that, in fact, even if we did not succeed in capturing the police huts, we nevertheless attained our objective, by bringing about the evacuation of these and other barracks.

The next attack on the enemy forces in the Mid Clare Brigade area took place at Islandbawn on 5th August,

1919, when two R.I.C. men were shot dead. This attack was carried out by the Vice Brigadier, Martin Devitt, with two other Volunteers. They did not expect the police to resist, and so they confronted them and demanded the surrender of their arms. The police drew their revolvers instead, fired and wounded the Vice Brigadier rather badly. One of the Volunteers, Seumas Conneely, jumped for cover. The other, John Joe Neilan, a good Volunteer - he was Vice Commandant of the 4th Battalion - threw himself flat on the road and shot the two police, one after the other. He had a service rifle. They collected the arms then, and went away to get medical aid for the wounded man. Subsequently, I arranged for Devitt's removal to Con Kearney's house in Corrahan, where Dr. McDonagh of Quin came each day to attend to him. He recovered after about three months.

During the winter months of 1919-20, the smaller R.I.C. stations in the Mid Clare area were evacuated and the R.I.C. men withdrawn to strong barracks in towns where, in most cases, British military were stationed. Following the attacks at Inch and Connolly, the British authorities declared the County of Clare a military area where all kinds of military controls were imposed on the civilian population. This was for the purpose of hampering the free movement of Volunteers.

I should mention that as soon as the R.I.C. stations

wounded. It was the first time in the Brigade area that R.I.C. men used hand grenades. If it had not been for the hand grenades, the two R.I.C. men would have been killed or captured. The hand grenades saved their lives that evening. The attackers had not known of the R.I.C. being armed with hand grenades before, and the use of the grenades took them by surprise.

On the 25th January, 1920, an attack was made on the R.I.C. barracks at Murrough, situated on the coast road midway between Lisdoonvarna and Ballyvaughan, near Blackhead. The barrack was too strong and our men were unable to capture it. This was in the 5th Battalion area. There were military and R.I.C. in Lisdoonvarna, about seven or eight miles away, and R.I.C. in Ballyvaughan, so that it was dangerous for the attacking party to stay too long, as enemy reinforcements were to be expected within a short time. When the police refused to surrender after three hours of an engagement, the attacking party withdrew.

In April, 1920, an R.I.C. man, working on intelligence duties in Ennis, was in the habit of watching all trains leaving and arriving in that town. He was particularly hostile to the I.R.A., and so a party were detailed to shoot him. This party, which consisted of four men of the local Ennis Company, fired at him, but only succeeded in wounding him. As far as I recollect, the Volunteers on this job were Peter O'Loughlin, Bill McNamara, Paddy McNamara and John Joe Clohessy.

The Vice Brigadier of Mid Clare, Martin Devitt, organised an attack on four R.I.C. men at a place

called Fermoyle in Inagh on the 23rd February, 1920. The attack proceeded for some time but, after a half an hour or so, Devitt was shot dead through the head. Ignatius O'Neill, who was about six hundred yards away, came to his assistance; being all the way under fire while making this effort. O'Neill, though wounded three times, still succeeded in reaching Devitt, but unfortunately it was all to no purpose, as his comrade was already dead. O'Neill was eventually taken away by some of the local Volunteers and medically attended. Each of his three wounds was very severe.

Devitt was waked that night in the fields outside Inagh village, and next night was buried in a turf stack. There was intense British military activity around the area. The hearse and coffin were followed by them to Inagh, but the Volunteers succeeded in eluding the enemy watchers and brought the corpse across country, on their shoulders, to Cloona where they carried out the burial. The R.I.C. discovered the body about a week later. An inquest was held at Ennistymon, at which the verdict of the jury was, "We find that Martin Devitt died on the 24th February from bullet wounds received while fighting for the freedom of his country".

Capture of arms at Ennis:

A party, consisting of an N.C.O. and seven soldiers, left the home barracks at six o'clock each evening in Ennis to guard military transport parked at the old butter market, about half a mile away from the barracks. Having watched this procedure, I reported to the Brigade that they could be disarmed without much

difficulty. They were kept under observation for about a week or ten days. During that time, they were marching in file, in close formation. About a fortnight later, however, in consequence of an inspection, the formation of this party was changed during their movement and they marched about twenty-five paces apart, the Corporal marching about seven paces behind the second file. I was instructed to train a party of Volunteers to disarm them. I took a party of twenty-one men, representing the attacking party, and seven men, representing the soldiers, to a wood, three miles from Ennis, and having decided on the method of attack, we rehearsed this, over and over again, until each man was thoroughly proficient in his particular duty. We kept at the rehearsing of this attack for about twelve nights, until we were satisfied that nothing was likely to go wrong. On the evening of the 23rd June, 1920, we came in to Ennis and we carried out the attack, as planned, successfully. It lasted about two minutes. Each member of the guard was attacked individually and simultaneously, so that there was complete surprise and the enemy party overpowered at once. We collected and locked the captured men in a stable in Jack D'Arcy's yard. The captured arms and ammunition were driven away to a pre-arranged place in the 2nd Battalion where the Battalion staff awaited them.

Attack on Military lorry at Lissycasey:

The mail car between Ennis and Kilrush, in the summer of 1920, was being escorted by a lorry of military. The Brigade Council decided that this lorry should be ambushed at Decomade, Lissycasey. This decision was carried into effect on the 28th or

29th June, 1920. A horse cart was run across the road, between the mail car and the lorry of soldiers, by my brother, Michael. He succeeded in separating the mail car from the escorting lorry, but the military managed to remove the cart by reversing the lorry and pushing the shafts out of the way, so as to enable them to get through. During this part of the engagement, the lorry was under our fire and the soldiers were replying. The lorry drove to where cover was available, and then entered into a running fight with the Volunteers who, when they saw the way things were developing, began to retire. The military broke off the engagement after about twenty minutes and drove off. The Volunteers, about sixteen strong, were under the command of my brother, Michael, and were all drawn from the 2nd Battalion. The rifles we had captured from the soldiers in Ennis were used in that fight.

Laid ambushes:

During July and August, 1920, several ambushes were planned and laid, including Spencil Hill and Clooney, which did not come off because the military did not appear, but at Clooney in July, 1920, we captured two soldiers with horses. Michael Brennan, O/C, East Clare Brigade, was with us that day. Two soldiers came along with two transport horses. We took the horses and released the soldiers, who were unarmed. These horses were used, from then on, as farm horses and were never re-captured.

Capture of armed soldiers at Ennistymon:

A party of military, stationed in the Ennistymon workhouse, delivered and collected laundry

in Ennistymon. An attack on this party was organised and carried out by the local Volunteer Company on the 21st July, 1920. The military party consisted of a corporal and six men. The Volunteers surprised them in the house, in which they were collecting the laundry, and overpowered them, taking all their arms and ammunition. As far as I remember, four rifles were captured.

Formation of Brigade and Battalion A.S.U's:

At a Brigade Council meeting held about the end of August, 1920, it was decided to form a Flying Column. I was appointed to command the Column. We organised the Column at first with thirty men, most of whom were then on the run. These thirty men, who formed the original Column, remained in it up to the Truce, except for casualties due to sickness and the like. The Column was always augmented, for particular actions, by the local units. After the Brigade Column was formed and had been operating for a while, its numbers increased to about fifty. Then it was thought desirable to reduce the numbers in the Brigade Column, and some of the men were detailed to report to their own areas to form Battalion Columns there. These Battalion Columns carried out independent attacks on enemy forces in their own areas, but were always available to reinforce the Brigade Column when required.

Capture of spies:

The Brigade had discovered that two enemy intelligence officers were knocking around the Lisdoonvarna district. One of these was a civil servant, named Captain Collins, and the other was an

ex British officer, named McLean. Instructions were issued by the Brigade to the local Volunteers to arrest these two men, and this was done on the 19th September, 1920. They were disarmed, interrogated and released after some days, on giving an assurance that they would leave the country.

Attack on Ballyvaughan R.I.C. Barracks:

An attack was carried out on Ballyvaughan R.I.C. Barracks. This was a 5th Battalion job. Seán McNamara, Captain, Noughaval Company was in charge. The attack was not successful.

Rineen Ambush:

About the 22nd September, 1920, there was a considerable fight at Dromin Hill, Rineen. This was in the 4th Battalion area, and Ignatius O'Neill was in charge. However, as I was not there myself, I cannot give any personal story about it.

Attack and Capture of Ruan R.I.C. Barracks:

On October 18th, 1920, the first serious operation of the newly formed Mid-Clare Brigade Column took place in the attack and capture of Ruan R.I.C. barracks.

Ruan R.I.C. barrack was strategically situated. Commanding one of the approaches to Ennis, it was a pivotal point in the British chain of defences. At a convenient junction in the centre of the Mid-Clare Brigade, it was a useful eye in the enemy's intelligence machine. The Brigade Staff was quick to recognise the benefits reaped by the enemy from the maintenance of this stronghold. They found,

too, by experience, that it was a thorn in their own side as its peculiar position hampered the free movement of the brigade and battalion officers.

The Brigade Staff decided to attack the barrack with a view to its capture or the consequent withdrawal of its garrison by the authorities. This was a formidable task. Well-built, strongly fortified, fitted with steel shutters and sand-bags, and encircled with barbed wire, Ruan would seem to be impregnable to all forms of attack without the aid of artillery. There was no artillery available. Nevertheless the Staff were undaunted. The place must be reduced.

After patient concentration, it was discovered that this seemingly impregnable fortress had its weak point after all. It became known to our intelligence that a constable used to leave the barracks for milk every morning between the hours of seven and eight. The house in which he got the milk stood at the rear of the barrack, at a distance of some three or four hundred yards. Making his exit by a back door, the constable followed a path between the outoffices and the boundary wall. The wall was roughly seven feet high. The pathway, six feet wide, was obstructed by barbed wire entanglements some five feet high. On the outward journey, the constable used to push aside portion of this entanglement and leave it in position until his return. Here was the key of the barrack - the heel of Achilles. On receipt of this information, it was agreed that the attack should be made in the morning,

and it should be made to centre round the back entrance. Further reconnaissance revealed some minor difficulties within the grounds and in the vicinity. The paved pathway was heard to resound to the tramp of shod feet; the dogs in the neighbourhood, by loud and prolonged barking, signalled the slightest movement by night. For the first of these, there was an obvious solution; for the second, one was forthcoming.

A most formidable danger still remained - the danger of being discovered and hemmed in by superior forces from Ennis in the course of the attack. To obviate this serious difficulty, an elaborate and widespread system of road obstruction was made an integral part of the plan of attack. Two rings of obstruction were considered necessary. One, the inner one, blocked all approaches to the immediate vicinity of the barracks; the other harassed advance along the remote parts of roads leading to Ruan. The inner ring of obstructions was strong. It consisted of felled trees and hundreds of tons of large stones. Each barricade, moreover, was defended by a section leader and eight men, armed with shotguns. The outer ring was far-flung, and consisted of some twenty barricades scattered along all roads radiating from Ruan, extending, at times, to a distance of ten miles. This net-work of obstructions was allotted to the third battalion, assisted by two companies from the first, and two companies from the fifth battalions.

The barrack was a three-storied building, garrisoned by two sergeants and eleven men. The

ground floor comprised a kitchen, dining-room, hall, pantry and bed-room. Upstairs, there were three bed-rooms. In the absence of a plan, it will be found helpful to number the apartments.

No. 1, Kitchen, where two constables, armed with rifles and revolvers, kept guard;

No. 2, Sergeant's Bed-room;

No. 3, Dining-room;

No. 4, Hall;

No. 5, Pantry; all on the ground floor.

No. 6, Large Bed-room, to accommodate six men;

No. 7, Medium Bed-room, to accommodate three men;

No. 8, Sergeant's room; upstairs.

Two officers and five section leaders, with twenty-nine men, were detailed to deal with every apartment of the building -

One officer and four men for the kitchen;

A section leader and two men for the sergeant's room (No. 2);

A section leader and seven men for the large bed-room upstairs (No. 6);

A section leader and four men for the medium bed-room (No. 7);

A section leader and two men for sergeant's room (No. 8);

A section leader and two men to detain the milkman; and, finally -

An officer and three men to act as a general utility group inside the barracks should an unforeseen situation arise.

Men, picked for coolness, dash and courage, and drawn from all areas of the brigade, were set aside for the immediate work of storming the barracks. They were divided into two sections: the attacking party proper and the covering party. The attacking party consisted of two officers and twenty-nine men; the covering party of three officers and twenty-one men.

On the evening prior to the attack, the picked men foregathered at various centres, some distance from Ruan. At nightfall, they were mobilised in a vacant house, about four miles from the barracks. Each section was allotted its special task. The nature of the operation was explained and, far from deterring the men, the delicacy of the job filled them with added enthusiasm and eagerness. In the early hours of the morning of October 14th, under cover of darkness, the raiders moved out quietly in the direction of the barracks. The covering party was directed to its position by ten scouts and five guides. This party was divided into three sections, each section consisting of one officer and seven men. These three groups occupied the best available positions in the vicinity of the barrack. Their duty was to deal with any reinforcements that might evade the obstruction party, and to cover the retreat of the attacking party proper.

In a wood, about half a mile from their objective, the attacking party removed their boots and marched barefoot to the high wall at the rear of the barrack. Fortunately, there was no comment by the dogs of the neighbourhood. They had been all poisoned. Each section leader held his men in readiness for the order to march.

At approximately 7.30 a.m., the R.I.C. man was heard leaving the barrack for the milk; a few minutes later, the signal was given for the assault. All sections moved according to plan: the guard was disarmed; each apartment was approached by its allotted group; and the small covering party took up position with clocklike precision. The police were disarmed and surrendered without resistance, except those in No. 6, the large bed-room upstairs. In an exchange of shots which took place here between the assailants and the R.I.C., three R.I.C. men were wounded, one fatally. When the surrender was completed, our men rendered first-aid and hastened to procure a priest and doctor. No time was lost; the arms, bicycles, ammunition and other equipment were moved to a waiting char-a-banc which moved off with an escort to a pre-arranged destination. The wounded constables, having received spiritual and medical attention, were taken to houses in the neighbourhood where they received further attention. In the meantime, the R.I.C. men were being exercised in foot-drill while our men were busy preparing the barracks for demolition. When the demolition was complete, the R.I.C. men were conducted to some houses in the vicinity. They were provided with breakfast

and warned not to leave these houses for at least one hour. They gave an undertaking - under some pressure - not to countenance, encourage or take part in local burnings or reprisals of any kind. Local Unionists were warned, moreover, that, if Crown forces carried out any reprisals in the vicinity, their mansions, now unguarded, would suffer in consequence. These warnings had the desired effect.

The booty consisted of thirteen bicycles, fifteen rifles, fourteen revolvers, one automatic pistol, two Verey light pistols, two shotguns; one thousand rounds of .303 ammunition, seven hundred rounds of .45 ammunition, two hundred rounds of buckshot ammunition, fifty rounds of automatic ammunition; three boxes of hand-grenades, one case of rifle-grenades, some Very light cartridges and a box of assorted ammunition. This fine haul enabled the brigade to equip a comparatively strong active service unit.

I accompanied the party who, travelling in the char-a-banc, took the captured material to Ballinruan where it was temporarily kept before being removed to Crusheen. The remainder of the attacking force went back to their own districts. With the 5th battalion men went two R.I.C. men who, we told the rest of the police, were being taken as hostages. In reality, one of the hostages, Constable Bill Carroll, was, in accordance with prior arrangements, leaving the R.I.C. for good to serve with the I.R.A. in the Mid-Clare brigade. He had been in league with us for some time previously and was, in a big way, responsible for the success of the raid. The other constable - Wilmot,

by name - was brought off "as a blind", to give colour to the hostages story. He was detained for a few days in the Carron area in North Clare and, when released, was brought in a car, under I.R.A. escort, to within a few miles of Gort in County Galway where he made his way in safety to the R.I.C. barracks in that town.

Monreal Ambush:

After Ruan, the armament of our brigade was substantially improved, and it enabled us to increase the strength of the brigade column by about fifteen men, making the total membership now in the region of forty-five. It was deemed necessary that the column should undergo a special course of training, and orders were issued to the members of the column to report at Lickeen and Tullaha in the Kilfenora district about the second week in December, 1920.

The column met as instructed and, for five or six days, they underwent a stiff period of training under Ignatius O'Neill and Sean McNamara in the mechanism of the service rifle (Lee Enfield), its care, aiming exercises, judging distances and grenade throwing. While this course was in progress, we heard that a convoy of two lorries had begun to travel fairly often between Ennis and Ennistymon, and decided that the convoy should be attacked at Monreal, South, about three miles from Ennistymon.

I think I cannot improve on my account of this engagement which appears in "With The I.R.A. In The Fight For Freedom", of which the following, subject to a few small amendments, is a copy:-

"The Active Service Unit of the mid-Clare Brigade was astir early on the morning of December 18, 1920. Long before the dawn of that winter day had broken over the hills, there had been a clatter of arms and equipment and an urgency of movement under the roofs of Tullagha in the Kilfenora district where, in the homes of the Lynch's, O'Brien's, McNamara's, Considine's, Devitt's, O'Donoghue's, O'Loughlins and McCormacks's, the Column had been billeted on the previous night. O'Donoghue's was its headquarters whilst in Tullagha, for Andy O'Donoghue was the O/C of the 5th Battalion of the Brigade, and it was by his house that fifty-six fighting men stood to arms that morning, under the Column Commander, with Peadar O'Loughlin and Ignatius O'Neill, prior to setting out on a four-mile march across country, to an ambush site that had been selected at Monreal, on the road between Ennistymon and Ennis, as a result of a reconnaissance carried out the previous evening.

Over thirty Column men carried service rifles, valuable trophies from the disarmament of seven British soldiers in Ennis, an attack on an R.I.C. patrol at Rineen and a big haul from Ruan R.I.C. barrack. The remainder of the men had shotguns, which weapon the mid-Clare Brigade had adapted for military purposes in a way

"that was peculiarly its own. The idea belonged to an old fowler whose reputation for shooting wild duck was a bye-word in a large part of the county, and its implementation had made the shotgun a deadly weapon at five times its normal effective range. To achieve this with an ordinary twelve-bore sporting gun, his method was simple and inexpensive, and it was readily adopted in the mid-Clare Brigade, in the absence of a sufficiency of service rifles. It simply entailed melting candle grease into a cartridge charged with buckshot, and the ammunition thus made was proved capable of penetrating quarter-inch timber at two hundred and fifty yards' range. The destructive effect achieved by it at a hundred yards or thereabouts can readily be visualised.

Over paths that led across rock and bog and heather, the Column moved in a south-westerly direction in the darkness of that winter morning. In addition to their rifles and shotguns, some of the men carried hand grenades that had been captured at Ruan. Their objective at Monreal was the destruction of two lorries of military and police which had been observed to make daily routine journeys between Ennis and Ennistymon, and the capture of their arms and ammunition. It had been noted that each lorry carried a complement of nineteen men and that the patrol usually left Ennistymon between nine and ten o'clock in the morning. The value of the potential booty could be

"reckoned at about forty rifles, with a plentiful supply of ammunition, a machine-gun or, maybe, two, with adequate pans of ammunition, and some revolvers.

Ennis lies about sixteen miles in a more or less southerly direction from Ennistymon which, in turn, was about three miles from the position selected for the ambush. There the road from Ennistymon faces rising ground before turning sharply to the south-east. Around Monreal the landscape conforms to a pattern found a great deal west of the Shannon. Heather, moss and outcrops of rocky ground predominate all around whilst the road is fenced on both sides by the loosely piled stone walls that are well-known to all travellers in the West. The walls and small folds in the ground provided the only cover available to the attackers. For that reason, it was considered necessary to engage the enemy at quarters closer than what might be deemed advisable in places where the face of the countryside had been cast in different mould. Withdrawal under fire from positions such as those taken up at Monreal presented obvious difficulties. On the other hand, there was the decided advantage of having the enemy exposed to a wide, uninterrupted field of fire from the sections lying in wait for him, and that factor, in conjunction with the closeness of the range, invariably resulted in heavy losses being inflicted on him at the beginning of such an encounter. Monreal provided an outstanding

"example of an ambush fought under such conditions.

From the point where the road from Ennistymon turns sharply round the high ground towards the south-east, a stone wall straddles the hill and stretches east. Part of the wall forms the northern side of a rectangular cattle or sheep shelter which comprises four stone walls, built to a height of seven feet or thereabouts, open overhead and with a little gap at its south-eastern corner that can be quickly opened or closed. Men of the number two section were posted inside the rectangle, and they manned the wall facing north, with signallers higher up to the east and armed flankers on protective duty on the rising ground south of the shelter and above it towards the east. The little gap in the shelter had been cleared of obstacles to permit the men inside to withdraw that way, should an evacuation of their position become necessary. It was in this manner that the column commander had disposed his forces on the east of the road, where Andy O'Donoghue was in command. The disposition of the men had also been arranged by us when we visited the ground on the previous evening.

On the opposite side of the road, the main body of the number one section had cover behind a stone wall, about thirty yards away from the road and more or less parallel with it. They were south of the number two section, an arrangement

"which permitted fire to be brought to bear on the enemy from both sides of the road without the possibility of either section being endangered by the cross-fire of the other. In a little fold of ground south of the stone wall, the column commander took up his position, and he had with him there John Joe Neylon, Martin Slattery and John Minihan. Each section had about fifteen riflemen and a fair number of grenades, and had two men detailed to guard the flanks. Men with grenades occupied selected positions behind the roadside fences. There was an outer ring of shotgun men on protective duties around the entire position.

It was a morning of heavy frost, and the coming of daylight revealed ice crusts on the many little bog-holes west of the road. The men felt the cold intensely, as they quietly awaited the enemy, in their positions behind the stone walls or in the ground folds amongst the heather. To the west, below the rear of number one section, the ground sloped sharply towards a long valley through which the River Inagh flowed. The river is bridged at Monanagh where the by-road to Sceagh leads westwards over a hill that rises up from the far bank.

The approach of the enemy was not signalled until nine-fifteen, when the I.R.A. officers found, to their concern, that three lorries would have to be dealt with instead of the two for which they had prepared. They were travelling

"about four hundred yards apart, which meant that the third lorry would still be outside the ambush position when the leading one was engaged, and that the enemy elements aboard it would be free to engage the I.R.A. sections from outside the ambush position. That situation was bound to present the column with a serious problem, for the dispositions of the two sections had been made with only two lorries in mind, and the men in ambush would be fully occupied with the first and second lorries. There was the added factor that the enemy had an additional twenty fighters available, which gave him a substantial numerical advantage over the column. Even with two lorries, his fire power would have been vastly greater than that of the attackers. Thus it happened that, from the outset, the dice was heavily loaded to the disadvantage of the waiting column; but it was a risk that attended most actions by the I.R.A. and had always to be accepted as a possibility.

As the lorries approached, a single shot rang out clearly in the frosty air. One of the men facing the oncoming enemy had accidentally discharged his weapon when endeavouring to improve his firing position behind the stone wall on the rising ground east of the road. The incident was unfortunate, for, whilst it did not cause the enemy to pull up, it undoubtedly alerted him. Immediately that the leading lorry had rounded the bend of the road, it came under a deadly fire from the men of the number

"one section who raked it at a range of about thirty yards. A stream of lead was poured into its mixed complement of military, and dead and wounded fell from it on to the road. One apparently unwounded soldier made a flying leap out of it, but his feet had scarcely touched the ground when he fell, riddled to death. The driver, who had miraculously escaped being hit, took the lorry through, at top speed, and it disappeared in the direction of Ennis. It subsequently transpired that all in the first lorry had been killed or wounded, and that most of the British losses, which amounted to sixteen killed and fourteen wounded, were numbered amongst its occupants. As it careered through the leaden hail by which it was swept that morning, it is highly unlikely that the military driver had anything in mind other than placing the greatest possible distance between the lorry and the men who had taken such toll of its occupants. It is safe to assume that, at the time, the thought of settling down in Ennistymon can scarcely have been his idea of a happy future; or could it have appealed to him than as being conducive to longevity. Yet, fate had ordained it so, for Roby Roberts, who drove the leading lorry that morning at Monreal, married a local girl and is now a well-known hackney driver in Ennistymon, having as friends and neighbours many former members of the mid-Clare column. He lives happily and content in the land of his adoption.

"The second lorry, which also carried a mixed force of military and police, drew up as it reached the ambush position, and its occupants jumped down on the road, though not before their numbers had been reduced by the fire put down on them by the number two section in the high ground above the road. The police amongst them, in particular, lost no time about getting to work on the men inside the animal shelter, and, largely by the use of grenades, they had soon made the place untenable. O'Donohue realised that his whole section was in danger of being outflanked, so he withdrew it across the hill, in accordance with a pre-arranged plan; its capture was averted by a stern and skilful rearguard action fought over a half-mile of country.

In the meantime, the number one section, which had wrought such havoc on the leading lorry, was engaged by enemy elements from the second lorry who had remained on the road and who had not taken part in pressing home the attack against O'Neill's men. Whilst this was taking place, the occupants of the third lorry deployed, and, from outside the ambush position, they also laid down a heavy and accurate fire on the number one section which had been placed west of the road. There was also imminent danger of that section being outflanked, so that the column commander had no choice but to withdraw his men from their hazardous positions. It was arranged that the commander, with Martin Slattery and John Minihan, would cover the withdrawal of the section as it

"fell back towards the river that flowed through the valley at their rear. The section would later keep the enemy down with well-directed fire, whilst the trio was pulling out. To men firing from the road, the valley was dead ground, so that it was thought that the men of the number one section would have an interval of security as they went through it. Before they had succeeded in doing so, however, the British had occupied the high ground east of the road, and having mounted a Lewis light machine-gun there, they were able to play it on the men in the valley. Another party of the enemy had worked its way along the road in the Ennis direction, under cover of a stone fence that screened and gave it protection from the fire of the commander, Minihan and Slattery. This enemy party, which had another Lewis gun, entered an old cabin that commanded the valley from high ground on which it had been built. From where they lay in the relative security of the fold of ground, the three column men watched two soldiers make a breach in the cabin wall that faced towards the valley. They were, of course, working from the inside. When the breach was sufficiently large and otherwise to their liking, they pushed the Lewis gun through it. So placed, it would have a clear field of fire on the men who were wading across the river and who were already under the fire of the Lewis gun, mounted on the high ground east of the road. Inside the cabin, two gunners sighted their weapon and made

"ready to send its contents ripping into the men below. They never got started. Calmly, the three I.R.A. rearguard men in the fold of ground waited until the breach had been completed. The larger the British gunners would make it, the lesser would be their chance of ever again handling the round magazine of a Lewis. One of them had the butt of the weapon at his shoulder, ready to open fire, when a rifle cracked and there was one gunner less in his majesty's army of occupation in Ireland. Having pulled the dead body of his comrade out of the way, the second gunner grasped the butt with his left hand, rammed the gun to the shoulder and, in doing so, exposed himself, to the satisfaction of an I.R.A. marksman who squinted his sights and squeezed his trigger, to send the gunner following his comrade into eternity. The column rearguard had made its presence felt and, covered by some of the men down by the river, the trio which comprised it then withdrew. The British had, by that time, succeeded in getting the machine-gun out of the cabin, and, having mounted it on a piece of high ground to the rear of the structure, they attempted to bring it to bear upon the river. In order to achieve an effective field of fire, it was necessary to operate the gun from an exposed position. This they tried to do repeatedly, but they gave up the attempt when five of their number had fallen to the accurate fire of the section's covering party.

"Fire from the first Lewis gun ripped the river as the men of the main body of the section waded across it towards the opposite bank. There were flecks of red here and there on the ice-cold water, for Paddy O'Loughlin, Bill MacNamara and Bill Carroll had been hit and were being helped along by the others. Fortunately, none of them had been wounded seriously and all three, with the rest of the section, reached the safety of the far side of the hill that rises up from the left bank of the river. There a halt was made, and a check showed that there were two men missing, Jack Hassett and Jim Kierse, who had been covering the right flank and who had not succeeded in getting away. Immediately that their absence had been discovered, the commander asked for six volunteers to return with him to the scene of the ambush and try to rescue their missing comrades. It was a nasty proposition for men who had just withdrawn with difficulty from a severe engagement, under heavy fire from machine-guns. To accomplish the task that lay ahead, the volunteers would probably be called up to face the same thing again, with the likelihood that some of them would not come back the next time. Yet, when the call for six volunteers was made, not a man hung back; it was answered by every one of them. With pride in his eyes, John Joe Neylon turned to his commander and said simply, "By heavens, Joe, but there are great men in Ireland still!".

Reconnaissance revealed that Kierse and

"Hassett were standing, up to their waists, in water under Monanagh bridge, and that the British were on the bridge directly over their heads, having advanced up the by-road that led west off the main Ennis-Ennistymon road in the direction of Sceagh. It transpired that Hassett had been hit when attempting to get away towards the south, which was not the withdrawal route followed by the main body. They were then unable to continue across the river, so they went under the bridge. Apparently, the British had observed them do so, for, when the Column had withdrawn behind the hill, police and soldiers advanced on the bridge, with the object of killing or capturing the two men. They would undoubtedly have succeeded in accomplishing either one or the other, had the section's return to the scene been delayed a moment longer. Hassett, in particular, was in bad shape, with two wounds in each leg and the lead having remained embedded in them. They had gone through a trying ordeal, standing waist high in the icy water, with a pitiless enemy closing in and one man so badly wounded.

Having sized up the situation, the section manoeuvred six men into a position from which they put down on the bridge a heavy fire that drove the British back to the crossroads. The British returned the I.R.A. fire from the roadside, but, whilst these exchanges were taking place, column men, not engaged, succeeded in getting their wounded comrades from under the bridge, and,

"having availed of the cover provided by surrounding fences, they conveyed them safely to the security of the far side of the hill. There, the full section answered the roll-call. The British made no attempt to follow the section beyond the bridge, and, untroubled by further enemy interference, it withdrew towards Sceagh. Whilst on the way, the men had adequate evidence of the enthusiasm of the people for the cause for which the war was being waged. Buttered cake, raw eggs and junks of cooked bacon awaited them, together with cans of tea and milk. Horses were provided to carry the wounded, and various other forms of assistance were forthcoming to get them quickly to relatively safe billets in which medical attention and nursing care could be provided. Amongst the medical men who attended the wounded were: Dr. Hillary of Milltown-Malbay; Dr. Peterson of Lisdoonvarna; and Dr. Hayes of Kilmaley. Bill Carroll was wounded whilst crossing the river during the withdrawal. He was the R.I.C. man who had been stationed in Ruan barracks."

A sketch of the Monreal engagement is given in Appendix "A" to this statement.

After the Monreal engagement, the Brigade Staff reviewed the whole question of the suitability of one large brigade column of upwards of fifty men, and decided against the idea. It was felt that a

smaller column could be better handled and more easily fed and billeted.

It was decided that, instead, the brigade column should consist of not more than thirty men, all of whom would be drawn from 1st, 2nd and 3rd Battalions, and that the 4th and 5th Battalions should each form its own battalion column, each of which would consist of about fifteen riflemen and as many shotgun men. Each member of the brigade column had a rifle.

The reformed brigade column had its first fight at Decamade, Lissycasey, about seven miles west of Ennis. It was rather a hurried ambush. That morning, we were after visiting Cahercon college for the purpose of warning the priests there, who were on our side, that some pleasure boats which they had were about to be seized by the British. We had got inside information about this, and we wanted to avoid the seizure of the boats if possible. As we were leaving the college in the morning, early, and crossing up to our own brigade area, we saw thirteen lorries leaving Kildysart and going towards Kilrush. The column, about twenty strong, marched to Lissycasey, and there it was decided to ambush these lorries on their return to Ennis, at Decamade, two miles away.

The convoy returned about six o'clock that evening. The first and last vehicles were armoured cars and, in between, about a hundred yards between each, were four lorries, all of them equipped with high wooden crates, covered on top with netting wire to prevent hand grenades from being thrown into them.

The first two vehicles were allowed to pass without interference, and we concentrated our fire on the remaining four, apparently with good effect, because we found a good deal of blood on the road afterwards. At the Ennis side of the ambush position, an old bog road ran from the main road around the rear of our positions. The fight had been in progress for about ten minutes when it struck me that the enemy might avail of the bog road to outflank us, so I took five men with me as far as a turn in the bog road, about five hundred yards from the main road. On arriving there, we found the enemy troops had dismounted from the lorries and had actually begun advancing along the bog road towards us. We at once opened fire to which the enemy made but a brief reply, and then retreated back to their lorries and drove off to Ennis.

Though it is definite that the enemy sustained casualties, we were never able to ascertain what they were. On examining the positions which he had occupied during the fight, they revealed a lot of blood stains. Local people told us afterwards that there were about half a dozen wounded, but that none was killed. We also picked up a lot of rifles and revolver ammunition. There were no casualties on our side.

A fortnight or so after the Decade engagement, we organised an ambush on a big scale. In all, there were about eighty men assembled to attack a convoy of not not less than five lorries which was expected to travel from Ennis to Kilrush. The site chosen for the encounter was in the townland of Caherea, about

eight miles from Ennis, and the men mobilised by us came from all over the mid Clare brigade area except the district between Lisdoonvarna and Ballyvaughan which was too far away. From memory now, I would say that approximately sixty men carried rifles and the rest had shotguns.

I have prepared a sketch of this engagement, and it is attached to this statement - see Appendix "B".

Our party was divided into three sections which I will refer to as sections 1, 2 and 3.

Section 1 comprised the main party, contained about sixty men and was under the control of Sean O'Keefe, Brigade Quartermaster. My brother Frank, the Brigade Commandant, who was in complete charge of the operation, took up his position with this section which was placed along a by-road running north-west from Caherea or Fergus View national school into the bog. The nearest man in that section was a hundred yards from the junction of this by-road with the main road, and the others were extended for a distance of about three hundred yards to the right. As the by-road went over rising ground, the men here had an excellent position which gave them command of the main road for nearly half a mile from the schoolhouse towards Kilrush. Deep trenches were cut during

the previous night on the main road, and these trenches were carefully finished with a camouflaged covering, so that the leading vehicles, presumed to include at least one armoured car, would run into them and be immobilised. The trenches were about two hundred yards beyond the school, in the Kilrush direction.

Section 2 consisted of fourteen men under the command of Sean Casey, O/C, 3rd Battalion. It held positions around the Fergus View school-yard. The armament of the men here was made up of rifles and shotguns.

Section 3 was made up of seven riflemen under my own control. We were placed in the fields south-east of the school and roughly two hundred yards from the main road.

In addition to the three sections, we had about a dozen unarmed scouts posted on the Ennis and Kilrush sides of the school for a distance of about half a mile each way. Each scout was two hundred yards or so from the next man.

Positions were taken up before daybreak on 9th January, 1921. The scouts were specially warned not to relax their vigilance, no matter how long we had to wait for the enemy.

About three o'clock in the evening, scouts reported that lorries were coming from the Ennis direction. This was a late hour for them to come, and we had just been wondering if the enemy might have

received information that an ambush had been prepared for him. In view of the subsequent behaviour of the enemy, I became convinced that he had been warned of our presence, and, as a result of later enquiries made by us, I'm satisfied that this happened through loose talk on the part of certain parties from the Caherea district.

Shortly after hearing from the scouts, they sent a further report that the enemy troops were dismounting from the lorries, about three-quarters of a mile from the ambush position, and that they were moving towards us through the fields in two parties, one on the north side of the road, and the other on the south side, with the obvious intention of trying to outflank us. While this movement was proceeding, an armoured car and two caged lorries of troops advanced as far as the Fergus View school, almost into the centre of our position. This was clearly a manoeuvre designed to entice us into a fight while the outflanking operation was in progress.

For fear of our men falling into this trap, I sent a message across the road to our main party, warning them of the enemy's plans and urging them to withdraw in a northerly direction, which would leave them outside the right wing of the encircling forces; I also advised them to effect the withdrawal in small sections, one section covering the other while retiring. My advice was promptly put into operation, and, though the men came under enemy fire in the process, they sustained no casualties in attaining their objective though they had to fall back for about half-a-mile.

The troops from one of the lorries, which had come as far as the school, had, in the meantime, dismounted and started another movement against my position. They used the by-road running south and about one hundred and fifty yards to our left. Simultaneously, fire was opened on us from the armoured car at the school. I detailed two men to engage the troops advancing along the by-road, while myself and the others opened up on the armoured car and the troops in the second lorry. Soon, I found we were confronted with a fresh threat. The soldiers, who had earlier dismounted from the lorries and gone into the fields at the south side of the road, were now closing in on our rear from the east. Our fire was now directed to them while, at the same time, we withdrew gradually towards the south and also to higher ground. Only a field, shaped like an isosceles triangle, about fifty yards at the base and with sides about a hundred yards, now separated us from the forces who constituted this new danger. My immediate objective was to get to the top, or apex, of the field before them, as whoever got there first was certain to be victorious. I detailed two of the five men I had left to make their way, as quickly as they could, to the top of the field. From there, they could command both sides of the field and, with well directed enfilade, beat off the enemy's threat sufficiently long to enable the rest of us to get outside his enveloping movement.

During the fighting on the sides of this triangular field, I know that we hit some of our opponents. At times, we were only twenty yards apart,

and every man that I had with me was a sharpshooter. I caught a Black and Tan crossing a gap, at twenty-five yards range, and "knocked him kicking". This casualty slowed up the advance of the enemy towards the top of the field. It happened at a crucial stage of the fighting, because it helped in allowing the two men I had sent off to try to reach the top, to get there first. They held on to that position until the rest of us arrived there, and, once this happened, we were not long in forcing our opponents to retreat back to the main road. The first two men who had been detailed to pin down the enemy advance along the by-road did their job well, and they retired in the same direction as we did, meeting us later that night.

It was getting dark at this time. The British did not show much heart in coming to re-engage us, and I decided to break off the fighting. Making our way through the fields, we crossed the main road safely and rejoined the rest of our colleagues during the night and billeted in the Kilmaley district.

Through not having succeeded in our objective in the Caherea engagement, I cannot say what casualties were inflicted on the British. We sustained no losses. The ambush taught us a lot, and the experience gained there convinced the brigade staff of the necessity to improve our own training in battle tactics. Within a week, the brigade column, reinforced by men from the 4th Battalion, met in the Inch district for such training.

Using Caherea as a model, mock ambushes were staged. Simulated fire was opened on the supposed enemy. Sections were instructed to concentrate on

this or that flank; sections moved under cover or under the covering fire of other sections; the value of cover and exercises thereon was demonstrated; and lectures were given on the importance of acting strictly on orders while under fire. This training lasted for three weeks, and, by the time it had finished, we felt satisfied with the results. Proof of this was forthcoming in a skirmish which we had with the Auxiliaries in May, 1921.

Part of the Brigade column was quartered at the time around my father's place in Barnageeha. Word suddenly reached us that a party of Auxiliaries were coming on bikes from Kilrush to Ennis. Though, through the short notice, we could only assemble a total of about twenty men, we decided to attack the enemy at Darragh Cross, six miles or so from Ennis. There were only about twenty minutes in which to make preparations when the Auxiliaries showed up. They were much stronger than we expected, numbering up to eighty men, and they were extended along the road for a mile. Every I.R.A. man was armed with a rifle. In Appendix "C" to this statement, there is a sketch of the engagement.

Our main position was held by about fifteen men and was something more than five hundred yards from the Kilrush-Ennis road. On our right flank, we had three men posted in a by-road, just half a mile away, while, about three hundred and fifty yards on the other side, two men were placed to guard our left flank. I was in charge of the operation.

It was roughly half-past two in the evening and

just as the rear of the Auxiliaries had passed Darragh Cross when we opened fire. After the opening volley, the enemy quietly took cover and, for the next quarter of an hour, the firing was of a desultory nature. Then the enemy started to advance on our main position through the fields. He had little or no cover, and the accuracy of our fire began to tell. Five Auxiliaries were wounded, and the remainder were halted for a while. They were in very extended formation and, finding that there was less opposition coming from our right flank, they were quick to exploit this weakness. A number of them advanced to a position, six hundred yards from our main party, and, using a machine gun, started to rake us with enfilade fire. At this stage, our two left flankers proved very useful. The machine gunner was shot through the shoulder by my brother, Bernard, and, after that, he and his companion succeeded in holding the enemy in check.

The advance against our main position was resumed but, after half an hour's fighting, the enemy could not come nearer to us than two hundred yards. Now he began to probe our right flank and met with some success. Realising that danger now threatened the main party, I sent off a section of seven men to occupy an old fort, four hundred yards to our rear. This fort was on an eminence which commanded the ground over which the enemy was trying to advance, and, from it, the section which had retired were able to pin him down while I and the remainder of the main party were retreating to the fort. The three men on our right flank fell back also, moving more or less parallel with the men who had gone to the fort.

By the time the fort was occupied and firing opened from there, the Auxiliaries had reached within thirty yards of the main position. However, under the protection of the fire from the section in the fort, myself and the seven men, who were now with me, worked our way back safely to our comrades. My brother, Bernard, and his companion on our left fought a rearguard action on their own for a while, but eventually they joined us beyond the Rathkerry river.

The Auxiliaries pressed after us towards the fort and, from there, we withdrew again, using the same tactics as in the first retirement. Our men were behaving splendidly, displaying great confidence and coolness. The period of training at Inch was now paying dividends. Ultimately, after our main party had crossed the Rathkerry river at the point where it touches the Ennis-Kilmaley road, the enemy broke off the engagement and, retiring back to Darragh Cross, he resumed his way to Ennis.

Word of the fighting must have reached the British forces in Ennis, as we had no sooner got across the Ennis-Kilmaley road than a large convoy, including armoured cars, came out from Ennis and, on reaching the townland of Rathkerry, the troops dismounted and occupied a stretch of the road, about a mile long. Had this taken place ten minutes earlier, we would have been in a very tight corner indeed. These fresh troops would have been able to cut off our retreat and encircle us. As things turned out, however, we were lucky to elude them, and, taking every possible precaution, we proceeded across country until we got

into Upper Kilmaley where we found billets for the night.

The fighting ceased about four o'clock in the evening. We had not even one man wounded. I'm certain that at least eight of the enemy were hit, as I was told so by a nurse who dressed their wounds.

In the interval between the Caherea and Darragh ambushes, attacks were delivered on the police barracks at Clarecastle, Kildysart and Tiermaclane. These attacks were carried out for the purpose of keeping the enemy forces there confined to their posts. For some time, they had ceased to carry out patrols, but about February, 1921, short patrols were resumed. The attacks were carried out in rotation, from ten to fifteen men taking part. They were all of a sniping nature and were timed to take place between nightfall and one or two o'clock in the morning. On a few occasions, ambush parties were placed between these stations, for the purpose of catching stragglers, and, although we did succeed in capturing a couple of R.I.C. men travelling singly, they were let go again, after being stripped of arms which they carried and also deprived of their bikes. Ambush positions were taken up several times, too, to attack the patrols, but the police did not come out.

The activities against these three police barracks were mostly carried out by the 2nd Battalion and resulted in the virtual ending of police patrols in that battalion area after March, 1921. It was in this battalion area that the brigade column was quartered for most of the time between March and July, 1921.

When military parties appeared along the road between Ennis and Lissycasey, they rarely escaped being sniped. Even when the column was scattered looking for food or for some other reason, any man who was available and had a rifle convenient opened fire when he saw the enemy passing. The Kilrush-Ennis road passed through the 2nd Battalion area, and on that stretch of road there were four ambushes between September, 1920, and May, 1921. As a result of these ambushes and the persistent sniping, the enemy came to look upon the district as a very dangerous one. In the three or four months prior to the Truce, he never appeared in the area except in strong force. It may also show how well he was kept in check by pointing out that not a single house in the 2nd Battalion area was raided by British troops during that period.

In my native parish, the police in Tiermaclane who numbered fifteen rarely ever left the barracks except when a few of them visited the local public house after nightfall occasionally. A few times they were held up between the pub and the barracks, but they never carried arms. Among the police was a Black and Tan, a Scotchman, who was known to the locals as "Jock, the Sailor". After the Truce, he became very friendly with us and often told us how surprised he was at being so well treated by our men when he was captured by them. He expected to be shot at sight. A number of these policemen, who afterwards were trying to join the newly formed Garda Síochána, came to me for references. Whether they were able to foresee what was coming or not, the most of them became friendly.

To give the old R.I.C. their due, I must say that, where we met them in a fight, there were no braver men. Having decided to stick to their guns, they did so in a manly way. As the fighting became more intensified, they seemed to waver in their allegiance to the Government which they served, so that, by March 1921, a good number of them were anxious to help our cause. One outstanding example of this was Constable Bill Carroll who planned with us to capture the Ruan R.I.C. barracks.

Concerning spies, at one stage there was a scare in the 2nd Battalion area that there were a number of them in the locality. All of those suspected, entirely men, were arrested and closely interrogated. I am glad to say that we found no person who was a spy. There was no execution of spies in any part of the mid Clare brigade area. Even though we knew that the British forces were warned a few times that ambushes had been laid for them, later enquiries convinced us that the information which reached the enemy came to him through careless talk rather than by deliberate betrayal or spying activities.

With regard to my connection with the political and civil side of the fight for freedom against the British, I took only a very small part. I did happen, however, to be the only rate collector in County Clare whose services were not terminated when the County Council decided, in February or March, 1921, to dispense with rate collectors altogether and

to utilise the I.R.A. to collect the rates. In actual practice, however, I was not able to attend to this work myself for some time previously, and I was obliged to ask a couple of reliable friends to do the job for me.

SIGNED: Joseph Barrett
(Joseph Barrett)

DATE: 15th December 1955

15th December 1955.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1919-21
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NO. W.S. 1,324

WITNESS D. Griffin
(D. Griffin)



