

W. S. 1, 337

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BUREAU STAIRÉ MILÉATA 1913-21
NO. W.S. 1, 337

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,337.....

Witness

David Daly,
Faheran,
Moate,
Co. Westmeath.

Identity.

Commandant First Battalion
Athlone Brigade, I.R.A.

Subject.

Faheran Company Irish Volunteers,
Athlone Brigade, 1914-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

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STATEMENT BY DAVID DALY,

Faheran, Moate, County Westmeath.

I was born in the locality where I now reside and received my education at the local National School. Yes, I would say that my schooldays certainly had a bearing on my actions in later life. We had a teacher named Patrick Delaney and he was an enthusiast about everything Irish. He taught us the elements of the Irish Language and also Irish verse and Irish History with particular emphasis on the glorious deeds of Irish leaders of the past.

When a Company of the Irish Volunteers was started in Feheran I joined that unit. This was prior to the split in the Volunteers. Mr. White of Clara was in charge and the Company was about forty strong. We had no arms of any type and used sticks and home-made wooden guns to drill with. When the split in the Volunteers was brought about by the imperialistic utterances of John Redmond, Leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party, the vast majority of our members followed Redmond and formed the Irish National Volunteers. Five or six members left off altogether and the Irish Volunteers as an organisation became a thing of the past.

Simetime later an attempt was made to reorganise the Irish Volunteers in the area and a meeting was arranged to take place at Newtown crossroads. I canvassed all the local young men whom I considered suitable, Peter Malinn and Sean Hurley from Athlone, and also a man named Maguire who was organising for Liam Mellows. ^{ATTENDED} The R.I.C. also turned up in strength so no meeting was held. Only about nine or ten other men turned up for this meeting. There was no Irish Volunteer organisation in the area prior to or after the 1916 Rebellion and it was not until the end of 1916 and early in 1917, when the prisoners were released, that things got moving again.

I made an effort to organise the Irish Volunteers in the area at the time of the Count Plunkett election in Roscommon. I got in touch with Count Plunkett and as a result Sean McCormack of Drumreaney came to me and we discussed the matter of the formation of a Company. I forwarded an affiliation fee of ten shillings to Gregory Murphy in Dublin. I now started a Company in Faheran and got in touch with Sean Hurley of Athlone who was in charge of the Westmeath area.

We succeeded in enrolling about fifteen members of which I took charge. We had membership cards printed and given to our members but we did not take any oath then. Each member paid a weekly subscription of a few pence per week. We held parades weekly and sometimes more often and I gave the instruction. I had no previous experience except what I had gained in the National Volunteers but I had a few British Army Manuals which I studied and thus was able to carry on in a sort of way.

A convention of the Irish Volunteers was held in Croke Park, Dublin, which I attended. Each Company in the country was entitled to send one delegate and I was surprised to learn that there were then only twenty-four Companies affiliated in the country. There were probably many more who were not affiliated. Great care was taken to ensure that only genuine delegates were admitted to the convention and that Detectives or other British Agents did not gain admission. Each delegate had to be identified as to his credentials before admission. I was identified by Peadar Bracken. There was quite a big gathering there and Mr. De Valera presided. A lengthy discussion took place as to whether the executive should be empowered to plunge the country into a state of war by a simple majority vote. Mr. De Valera held that at least a two-third majority should be essential and, as well as I can remember, he

succeeded in having this agreed to. Several instructions about organisation of the Volunteers were given out.

Later on in the year Diarmuid O'Hegarty, who was appointed Organiser by the General Headquarters of the Volunteers, came down to Westmeath to organise a Brigade in that county. I was now appointed to be Officer Commanding a Battalion which was to be organised in the Athlone area. The area roughly comprised Athlone, Moate, Mountemple, Drumreany, Coosan, Summerhill on the Roscommon side of Athlone across the Shannon and Faheran. This was the 1st Battalion area. Other Battalions were to be organised by James Maguire of Gleniden, Mullingar, and by Joseph Kennedy at Castlepollard and by another man whose name I cannot remember now for the Shannon Bridge area. Each was to organise a Battalion in his respective area. A Brigade Staff was also appointed, Sean Hurley being appointed O/C. of the Brigade. James Martin was appointed Vice Commandant to me and George Manning, Adjutant. I cannot remember who was made Quartermaster then.

Companies were organised in Mountemple, Drumraney, Moate, Athlone, Coosan, Summerhill and Faheran. At first the Companies were very small being just a nucleus to build upon. Each Company elected its own Captain and two Lieutenants. There were no arms available except an odd old revolver here and there of different calibres and very little ammunition for such weapons. I bought a long pattern Lee Enfield Service Rifle from the McCormack's of Drumreaney and a few rounds of .303 ammunition. I think that this rifle was one of the ones they had received from Headquarters prior to 1916. It was a very useful weapon to us at this time and we took it around from Company to Company and taught the men how to load, aim and fire with it. Of course, our firing practices were dry ones as we had no ammunition to expend.

All the time we were adding to the strength of the Battalion by enrolling new men. We were very careful about the type of young men we took into the Volunteers. Our country had such a legend of informers and betrayers over the centuries of its occupation that we were nervous in this respect and perhaps over-diligent, and every recruit's background and upbringing was gone into carefully before he was accepted. This selective attitude paid dividends later, when wholesale arrests and ill-treatment were meted out by the enemy to obtain information. All our men stood firm, taking their punishment but giving no information. I am sure that the cases of Volunteers breaking down and giving information are very rare, if any at all. All men were kept under observation for some time before they were enrolled.

On the 17th March, 1917, a big meeting was held in Mullingar. I forget now what this meeting was about but all the Companies in the Brigade were ordered to march there. The local men were mobilised and we marched to Castletown on the night of the 16th March where we billeted in houses there for the night. The following morning we moved to Ballinalee where we were joined by the other Companies of the Battalion and from there we marched to Mullingar. We carried no arms of any description - we had practically none - but men who had odd bits of equipment such as bandoliers and haversacks carried them.

There was a big gathering of Volunteers in Mullingar on that day and by the time the meeting was over we were very fatigued after our long march. The Brigade O/C. asked the Railway to supply carriages to take us home and when these arrived I remember they were labelled Military, which caused some funny comments and laughs. We travelled on the train to Moate and from there to our homes. The remainder of the year 1917 was spent in similar manner, the principal activities being training, parades and recruiting.

In late 1918 the Conscription crisis descended on the country. There was a big influx into the Volunteers now as all the young men who were of military age were anxious to join and to avoid being conscripted into the British Army. Recruiting was now thrown open as we were anxious now to demonstrate to the powers that be, our strength. Companies trebled their strength over night, so to speak. Parades were now held every evening and on Sunday in the open, and the services of ex-British soldiers were availed of to whip the new recruits into shape. The R.I.C. kept a watchful eye on all our activities and we were anxious that they should do so, as we knew they would be reporting to their authorities and wanted them to report our determination to resist conscription. Personally, I believe that the R.I.C. - at least the younger men of the Force - were in sympathy with us and would have been with us had the crisis come to a head.

Large protest meetings were held in all the towns such as Athlone, Tullamore, Mullingar etc. In those towns, which were British Army garrison centres, there was a big element who were hostile to the Volunteers and always gave them a hostile reception. Such elements were comprised of the 'hangers on' of the British Army and the wives and families of men who were serving in that force and who were drawing big monies from the British War Office. Their only fear was that the war would come to a sudden end. When the Volunteers marched in such towns to attend anti-conscription meetings they were given a very hostile reception by this element of the population. In Tullamore bricks and such like were thrown at the Volunteers and a number of them were injured. In another case boiling water was thrown on them from upstairs windows and men were scalded.

Irishtown in Athlone was a particularly bad centre in this respect. At a meeting in Athlone we got a bad time as we marched through the Irishtown area to the meeting. During the meeting we learned that the mob in Irishtown had prepared a royal reception for us on our return and supplied themselves with bricks, bottles and all sorts of implements to hammer us with. We decided we would march back through this area and teach these people a lesson. We broke up boxes and armed ourselves with the boards from these, and also with sticks, and began our march. Everything was ready for a real good battle. The R.I.C., however, threw a cordon across the streets and would not let us enter the area and we stubbornly refused to go any other way. Some of the Friars from the Friary came on the scene and they persuaded us to proceed by another route which encircled the Irishtown area and they led us around by this way avoiding Irishtown and so avoiding a clash.

The Volunteers were instrumental in having a big sum of money collected in the Battalion area for the anti-conscription fund and also in having the anti-conscription pledge signed by practically every inhabitant. Other than this, little was done in the area in the way of planning to meet the crisis and we awaited orders from headquarters in this respect. The arms situation was no better than previously. We knew, of course, where every shot gun in the area was located and could have collected them all in a matter of a few hours. A peculiar feature of the situation was that the men in the Volunteers seemed to have the least fear of conscription and this was pleasing as it showed that a smattering of discipline and comradeship was having a good effect.

When the crisis was over, the vast majority of the influx of the period became inactive again and we were back to the position that existed before it came. Those men only joined up in an effort

to save their skins and not from patriotic reasons. Looking back at it one way it was a great demonstration of national cowardice and I often thought that it was a pity it was not enforced, as they then would have been compelled to fight for their liberty and it would have made men out of them. All of them, however, were not of this brand and in later years some of them did rejoin us and gave a good account of themselves.

Just after the conscription crisis had ended Ernie O'Malley, who was organising in the Offaly area, visited me and informed me that he was giving that area a rest and would be glad to come to me for a while and help me out. I accepted his offer and he put up with me and together we visited each Company in the Battalion. Ernie inspected each Company and put them through their paces at drill, musketry and so forth and put them through small tactical exercises. Being a G.H.Q. Staff officer and looking the part he made a favourable impression on all ranks. While he was with me we constructed some bombs from treacle tins. The tins were filled with gelnite and filled with a fuze and detonator. Their morale effect on detonation would be far greater than their destructer's effect.

Around this time a change in the Volunteer organisation in Westmeath took place. Up to now the County had been organised as one Brigade area and this was now too cumbersome for administrative purposes. The area was now divided and a Brigade was organised in the Mullingar area with James Maguire of Gleniden as Brigade O/C. The Shannon Bridge Battalion area was transferred to the Offaly Brigade. This now left our Brigade area more compact. It now comprised three Battalions as follows :- 1st Battalion, Athlone area including Moate and Coosan. I was in charge of this Battalion.

The 2nd Battalion comprised the Drumreany area and was commanded by the late Dick Birthles. The 3rd Battalion was the Summerhill area across the Shannon and west of Athlone town. This Battalion was commanded by the late Bernard Gaffey. Harley now relinquished command of our Brigade also and was replaced by Seamus O'Mara of Athlone; Sean O'Farrell was Brigade Adjutant and Robert Ramsey Brigade Quartermaster. Hurley was in none too good health and the appointment was too much for him to carry under the circumstances. Later on George Manning was appointed Brigade Adjutant in lieu of Farrell who relinquished that post.

Seamus Martin was my Vice Commandant and George Manning my Adjutant and when he was appointed Brigade Adjutant Joe Kennedy became my Adjutant. Brian Mulvihill was Battalion Quartermaster. I visited each Company in the 1st Battalion area weekly using a cycle to do so and as the Battalion covered a large area, including Moate and Athlone, it was quite a non-stop job getting around them. Battalion Council meetings were held fortnightly. Battalion Council comprised the whole Battalion Staff and the Captain of each Company. Brigade Council meetings, which included the Brigade Staff and Battalion Commanders, were held once per month, usually in Athlone.

In the end of 1918 a general election took place in the country and this event gave us a lot of work to do. There were parades to meetings and protection of the speakers on behalf of Sinn Féin, canvassing of voters for the Sinn Féin Clubs, fixing up transport to take voters and collection of monies for the election fund, and such like. This was really the duty of the different Sinn Féin Clubs in the area, but the Volunteers did the most of the work. Volunteers were generally members of the Sinn Féin organisation also. On polling day I visited all the polling stations in the Battalion area, as we had Volunteers on duty at each station to ensure there was no interference

with the supporters of Sinn Féin. At each station I was given a list to vote for by our men. Personation in this election was rife. We had no trouble of any sort in the area and polling day went off quietly.

The Dáil met in January, 1919 and soon after it floated a Loan to provide funds to finance its projects and the Volunteers put in a large amount of work in canvassing and collection for this Loan. A big sum of money was realised in our area and it was remarkable the way the people responded to this call. The Parish Priest in Tobber acted as agent for the Loan and received all the money subscribed and, to the credit of the Volunteers and others engaged, there was not one complaint regarding the accounting for the money. Every subscriber received an official receipt from the Dáil Department of Finance. Although the collectors represented to the subscribers that this was a loan I am sure that the majority of them just looked upon it as another ordinary collection and thus it was more remarkable how well they responded.

The Dáil now took over responsibility for the Volunteers and all members of this body were required to take an oath of allegiance to the Irish Republic and recognise the Dáil as the Government of the Republic. All our men took the oath and we were now the Army of the Republic - the I.R.A. - although Volunteers was the name more commonly used by ourselves.

Sinn Féin was well organised in the area by now and they organised and got the Sinn Féin and Arbitration Courts under way. The people took favourably to the new Courts and quickly gained confidence in them, and the British Courts were deserted except for an odd case of no lights or such brought by the R.I.C. The decisions of the Sinn Féin Courts were loyally abided by the people

who generally considered they were doing a patriotic/^{duty}in doing so and only in rare cases had the Volunteers to enforce the Courts' decisions. Some big land disputes were dealt with by the Courts in this area and the litigants in such cases had to deposit large sums of money before the cases were heard as a guarantee that they would abide by the decisions of the Court. In all cases the decision of the Courts was carried out to the full. The Courts were inexpensive and easily accessible to the people and 'red tape' was cut out completely.

The Volunteers were by now policing the country and the people no longer went to the R.I.C. with their troubles. The R.I.C. were now looked upon as an enemy military force and were every minute becoming more unpopular with the people and socially and otherwise they were shunned, and by the end of the year 1919 attacks had been made by the Volunteers upon a few of their barracks.

Our Battalion had by now increased in strength somewhat, but we were still very careful of the men we enrolled. The Companies making up the Battalion were Faheran, Captain Patrick Claffey; Moate, Captain Hugh Sheerin. Sheerin subsequently resigned this appointment and was replaced as Captain by Patrick Macken. Mount-temple, Captain James Shortall; Coosan, Captain Francis O'Connor who subsequently became Battalion O/C. when I was arrested. Athlone, Captain James Fox. The position as regards arms was still the same. We had only the one rifle previously mentioned and a few assorted revolvers which were possessed by officers here and there. The Brigade had some Service Rifles which we could get if we wanted them for any particular occasion. Some of the rifles were the remnants of what were in the area prior to the 1916 Rebellion and a couple of others had been bought from soldiers of the British garrison in Athlone.

Early in 1920, as a result of attacks and in some cases captures of R.I.C. Barracks having been made throughout the country, the R.I.C. realised that their small outlying stations were no longer safe and they withdrew the police from such places and reinforced the barracks, mostly in the larger towns, with them. In this area they evacuated their barracks at Mount-temple and the Brawny Barracks in Athlone which was situated in the Irishtown area. They also had a barracks at Creggan but this had been evacuated by them much earlier. On Easter Saturday night, 1920, we burned the evacuated barracks at Mount-temple and Creggan and rendered them inhabitable. I think the Brawny barracks was destroyed the same night also but I can't just remember now. Orders were received from our General Headquarters to do this and was a countryside operation.

The R.I.C. had a barracks at Ballymore which housed a garrison of five or six R.I.C. men and the Brigade staff planned to attack and capture this post in February 1920. The rifles which the Brigade Headquarters held were brought to Drumreany and placed in the possession of the McCormack Brothers there, where they were to be collected by the attacking party. Selected men from each Battalion were to carry out the attack. I do not know what the actual plan of attack was. I mobilised nine or ten men from around the Faheran area and we proceeded to Ballymore on foot to an assembly point previously agreed upon. The assembly point was a field a few hundred yards in the rear of the barracks. On arrival at the assembly point we contacted a party of our men from Athlone and waited there. A message was now received that the rifles could not be procured as the men who were bringing them from Drumreany had gone astray and no one knew where they were. We were ordered to disperse and go home, which we did, very disappointed after our march for nothing. It was subsequent to this that the R.I.C. evacuated Mount-temple and Brawny Barracks.

The Volunteers were now doing all the police work in the country and even in the towns where the R.I.C. still held stations. The withdrawal of the R.I.C. encouraged certain elements amongst the people to take advantage of the situation and to indulge in petty robberies and give vent to troubles over land disputes which had been simmering for some time. The Volunteers decided they would stop this sort of thing and stop it they did and, although they could only devote their spare time to police work, they did it far more effectively than ever the R.I.C. did, because they had the confidence and goodwill of the people and could get information which would never be available to the R.I.C. It cast a big strain on the Volunteers, but it did good in that it raised their morale and gave them useful work to do.

At a Brigade Council meeting the O/C. of the Brigade, Seamus O'Mara announced that something in the way of positive action would have to be undertaken against the enemy forces. After a discussion it was decided to attack and capture Streamstown R.I.C. barracks. Before making any plans for this it was decided that Faheran Company would keep a close watch on this barracks and ascertain the habits and routine of the R.I.C. stationed there. This was done and amongst the information gleaned it was known that two of the R.I.C. were in the habit of attending Mass on Sundays at Tobber, while the remainder stayed in Barracks. The barracks normally held a force of five or six Constables and a Sergeant. It was not fortified but had steel shutters fitted on the windows. The steel shutters were not normally in a closed position. The barracks was a two-storey building of solid stone masonry and had no windows on the rear or gable ends. It was situated along the railway line and close to Streamstown railway station. At a subsequent meeting of the Brigade Council the matter was again discussed and, arising out of the reports by the Faheran Company, a plan was drawn up to try and capture the barracks by a surprise ruse.

The plan envisaged the holding up and disarming of the two Constables when on their way to Mass. The two Constables were then to be taken to a house and stripped of their uniforms into which two of our men, specially selected on account of their physique, would dress and proceed to the barracks under the guise of being policemen and gain admission to the barracks. Meanwhile, a specially detailed party of our men would be in a position close to the barracks ready to rush the place as soon as the door was opened to admit the bogus policemen. Another party were to be in position to bring covering fire to bear on the barracks. Tom Costello and James Tormey were detailed to dress themselves in the ^{CAPTURED} perplexed policemen's uniforms and proceed to the barracks as stated. Both these men looked like R.I.C. men. Selected personnel from the Brigade were to take part in this attack and all of Faheran Company. All the arms from the Brigade Headquarters were brought to my place at Faheran the previous two nights and all Faheran Company was mobilised to take the arms to Streamstown. We had about nine or ten rifles - four Howth mausers, four Martinis and two Lee Enfields. Revolvers would be carried by the individuals who possessed them.

There was an alternative plan to place a mine against the gable end of the barracks and blow a hole in it. Some ladders were to be placed against the back of the barracks and men were to get on to the roof and smash holes in it and pour petrol and paraffin through these holes and set the place alight. This alternative plan was to be used should the first fail to get the door opened, and a further party was detailed for this operation.

On Saturday night - Sunday morning - Faheran Company mobilised at my house and took the rifles to Streamstown and met the Athlone and men from other areas there. While a party were lying in wait for the two policemen going to Mass, O'Mara, Brigade O/C. and Dick Birthles and I went forward to have a look at the barracks.

The police apparently spotted us prowling around the place and started to put the steel shutters in position on the windows. We wanted to shoot them then and so reduce the strength of the garrison to practically, ^{nil} but the Brigade O/C. would not let us do so and he went back and put the different parties into position under cover. Meanwhile, the two policemen had been held up and stripped of their uniforms and Costello and Tormey dressed in them.

Costello and Tormey eventually arrived at the Barrack door, but could not get admission. The police had dummy loop-holes in the barrack walls. Loop-holes had been bored from the inside but the plaster was still intact on the outside. This was a surprise to us. One of these was pushed out and a hand-grenade pushed through it by the police, and Costello and Tormey had a narrow escape from this - just succeeding in getting ~~through~~ behind cover in time. The Brigade O/C. now ordered fire to be opened on the barracks and this was done, and the police inside replied with vigour and put several grenades through those dummy loop-holes. No attempt could be made to put the mine to the gable end or the ladders to the roof as both those walls now showed they were well loop-holed. Fire was kept up for some time and we were then withdrawn and told to disperse and go home, which we did. We took the rifles back to Faheran with us again. We had no casualties and no gains but had expended some valuable ammunition.

The police evacuated the barracks that evening being taken away by reinforcements which had come out from Mullingar. That night the Faheran Company destroyed the barracks by burning it. This attempt took place in July 1920. Around the month of August, 1920, I was inspecting the Coosan Company and was in that area. The Brigade O/C. had been informed that a raiding party had gone up the river to search the Islands in the Lake (Lough Ree).

This party were a military one and they had commandeered a large motor boat belonging to Cohen's of Athlone. The O/C. decided to get the arms which were now dumped in the Coosan area and ambush this boat when it was returning to Athlone. I joined this attacking party which consisted of about twenty men all told. I think we had about nine or ten rifles and some shotguns. Some had no arms. O'Mara took charge of the party. We took up a position on the bank of the Shannon where the river narrows. From our position we could see up into the lake. The boat came down the river with a number of soldiers on the deck. We opened fire on it and the military replied with machine guns. The engine of the boat was put out of action and it started to drift with the current. We followed it down the river moving from position to position and keeping firing at it. Eventually it got too close to the military barracks and we had to cease fire and withdraw and get our arms dumped as quickly as possible. I believe we caused six or seven casualties to the troops on the boat. We had no one injured despite the fire from their machine guns. They were down low under us in the water and their fire was passing over our heads.

The Coosan area was soon swarming with Tans and Military and Auxiliary Police and yet they did not capture any of our men. That evening they burned five houses in the Coosan area as a reprisal. They never went up the river again in a boat. Soon after this - in the month of September 1920 - orders were received from General Headquarters that an Active Service Unit or Flying Column was to be organised in the Brigade area and steps were taken immediately to select men for such a unit. Men who were in a position to leave home permanently and men who were 'on the run' were selected. In addition the members of the Brigade and Battalion staffs were automatically members of the Column.

Brigade and Battalion officers on joining the Column would take the rank of ordinary Volunteer for that purpose. This arrangement allowed such officers latitude to absent themselves from the Column when necessary to look after the duties of their Brigade and Battalion appointments. If they were allowed to take rank in the Column they would not be able to perform the duties of their normal appointment.

James Tormey from Moate was appointed to take charge of the Column. Tormey was a man of splendid physic and good appearance and military bearing. He had served for some time in the British Army from which he ^{had} deserted and thus had military experience. The initial strength of the Column was twelve men and for armament they had the nine or ten rifles which the Brigade held. They also had some shotguns and revolvers of different calibres and some grenades of the G.H.Q. pattern. It was decided that the Column would be brought together in my Battalion area and actually they assembled at my house which for a couple of days was a hive of industry with men coming and going and bringing equipment and so forth. The men were billeted in an old farm yard the property of the Parish Priest which he kindly put at our disposal. Food was bought and paid for out of Brigade funds and the local people helped wonderfully in this respect. Some of the shopkeepers in Moate sent out supplies of bedding and clothing for the men free of charge when approached to do so by the local Volunteers.

A few days after the Column assembled it was decided to stage an ambush at Parkwood on the main road from Dublin to Athlone and only a very short distance from here. Enemy forces in tenders or lorries frequently travelled this road in either direction and it was only a matter of waiting long enough in position and something in the nature of an enemy force was bound to turn up.

Usually single lorries of enemy travelled and we were counting on getting such a vehicle. We had received a number of grenades from General Headquarters (G.H.Q. pattern) and a test carried out by us revealed that they would not work. There was a fault in the neck pieces of the grenades. The Brigade O/C. ordered me to take all the neck pieces to Dublin to G.H.Q. and have them replaced. I packed the necks in a suitcase and took the train at Clara Station for Dublin and got there without any trouble. I was walking down O'Connell Street carrying the suitcase and accompanied by a friend of mine when an unknown man walked in between us and as he passed through he whispered to us that we were being followed by two "G" Division Police. We turned into a public house and went straight through and passed out through the backdoor and thus slipped our shadowers - if we were being shadowed. We eventually got to Clerkin's in Brunswick Street - now Pearse Street - where some man, presumably one of the Quartermaster-Generals staff, took over the Grenade necks from me but I got no replacements for them.

I had arrived at O'Connell Bridge on my way back to the Station when I noticed a very large motorised convoy of Black and Tans coming down O'Connell Street. They pulled up at the Bridge and made some inquiries of the policeman on point duty there and then they wheeled westwards up along the Quays towards Kingsbridge or the Park. I believe this was the convoy that our men clashed with at Parkwood. I arrived back by train in Moate that night and found the place in a state of terrible excitement. The town was literally full of Tans, Auxies and military generally the worst of drink. They had fired into several houses and had shot a man named Burke who had no connection with the Volunteers whatsoever. The military had then called to Moate to stop the Tans and Auxiliaries from burning the town and looting it. I came home across country from Moate Station, as I could not risk

travelling on the road. On arrival home I found that all the people had evacuated their houses and were staying out in the fields and gone to other districts. The enemy forces had searched the area around thoroughly but did not do any burnings or shootings, but the people expected them back at night. The surrounding area was now continually being raided by enemy forces and I was now truly 'on the run'.

I next contacted the Column in the County Roscommon below Athlone town where they had proceeded after the affair at Parkwood, and took my place amongst them. There was at this time a British Intelligence Officer in the military barracks named Tully. This man was reputed to be a deadly shot with either hands and to wear a vest of mail or chain. He usually went around on a motor cycle alone and had a bad reputation for ill-treating prisoners in an attempt to get information out of them. We received orders that Tully was to be shot on sight. For some weeks some of the Column were detailed daily and nightly to go into Athlone and get him, but they never succeeded in doing so. On other occasions he was reported to have gone to Dublin on his motor cycle and we laid ambushes on all the roads leading back to town, but he always outwitted us in some way. On one such occasion he came back by train. We had not thought of that loophole.

The Parkwood ambush took place in October 1920 and the next fortnight or so was spent on the Roscommon side of Athlone and then the Column broke up into three sections and a section went to each Battalion area to see if they could find some small enemy force there which they could deal with. The military in Athlone had an outpost at *HUNSTAN* in Offaly and a lorry from Athlone went there with rations. This lorry did not travel on regular days but usually proceeded there at the same hour. It was decided to ambush this lorry and the section of the Column which was to operate in our Battalion

area was detailed for this job. A number of the local Volunteers were mobilised to assist them. It was planned to ambush the lorry at Tubbret.

When we arrived at Tubbret we were informed that the lorry had gone down that morning and we took up position on the sides of the road to await its return. We had three or four Lee Enfield rifles and the remainder of our party, which numbered about twenty, were armed with shotguns and cartridges filled with slugs. No road blocks or mines were used and it was planned to bring the lorry to a halt by shooting the driver. We occupied rising ground which gave us a good view of the road in the Offaly direction from whence the lorry would come. There was a slight bend in the road underneath our position and the lorry would have to travel uphill approaching it. This would give us a good chance to shoot the driver and bring the lorry to a halt when the rest of the occupants could be dealt with. One of our men, who was a crack shot and was armed with a small bore shotgun, was detailed off for the shooting of the driver.

We remained in our position for a considerable time and no lorry turned up. We knew that it should have returned by now, if everything was normal. At length we noticed a British soldier on a cycle coming from the direction in which we expected the lorry. When the soldier reached our position he was called on to halt but did not do so and one of our men was ordered to fire at him, but to try not to kill him. The man fired and the soldier fell off his cycle having had his arm broken by the shot. The soldier informed us that the lorry on its return journey had been held up by trees which had been strewn across the road some miles back in the Fербane direction and that he was proceeding to Athlone to report and get assistance to clear the road. There was no hope now of bringing off our ambush and we pulled out of the position and dispersed.

Rumour had it that the Offaly Brigade men had deliberately blocked the road to prevent the lorry returning, as they did not want any trouble in that area. I do not know if there was any truth in this rumour. Tubbret, where we had laid our ambush, was close to the border of the Offaly Brigade. The enemy withdrew their outpost a few days after this.

It was now close to Christmas, 1920, and the Column was disbanded for the Christmas period. About the 6th of January orders came from the Brigade that all arms in our possession and in dumps were to be brought to Castledaly which is about four miles from Moate in the Faheran direction. I assembled all our men who were available in the Faheran area; quite a good few had been arrested by now and we took the shotguns and some home-made bombs which were all we had and proceeded to Castledaly on the night specified. We arrived there about 9 o'clock. We were only there a few minutes when the Brigade O/C., Seamus O'Mara, arrived with a part of the Column which had been mobilised, and we handed over the equipment he had brought. I sent the men I had brought with me from Faheran area home and I stayed with the Column.

O'Mara had information about an enemy lorryload of troops that were reported to be travelling regularly between Athlone and Ballymahon and he planned to attack this in the 2nd Battalion area. We started to march to Drumreany which was a distance of seven or eight miles. Dick Birthles I think was to meet us at Drumreany, but he or anyone else did not appear. We slept in Drumreany that night and then moved on to Coosan next morning. Enemy activity was now intense and area after area was being systematically searched by them and we were put to the pin of our collars to avoid them.

I should have stated that Tormey, who was O/C. of the Column, had been killed shortly after Christmas on the Roscommon side of Athlone in the Clonark area while on his way back to rejoin the Column. The

The Brigade O/C. had sent Ned Doolin and Mulvihill to me with instructions to get in touch with Tormey and bring him to the Brigade O/C. at a house in the Summerhill area. I took Doolin, Mulvihill and another man named Ned Johnston with me and started for the Clonark area where I believed Tormey was located. We crossed the Shannon by boat and contacted Tormey in the Ballycumber area and we proceeded to Carrick-Brien area where we arrived at dawn in the morning, Tormey accompanying us. We now proceeded to the Clonark area and here Tormey insisted that we should have some rest and that he would go on to meet O'Mara, bringing with him George Adamson, Tom Harrington and a few others who had joined us. They had some arms with them. Tormey's brother had been shot in Ballykinlar internment camp by a British sentry some time previous to this and this had made Tormey impatient and he was over anxious to have revenge. On their way to the Summerhill area they had to cross the main Athlone-Summerhill road. When near the road they spotted two Tans on cycles approaching from the Athlone direction. They took these to be just a couple of Tans on patrol duty and fair and easy game. Actually they were the advance files of a large patrol or party of Tans. Tormey and the others threw themselves down and fired at the two Tans they had spotted. The remainder of the Tans' party dismounted and some of them deployed into a lane which ran at right angles to the road and thus placed themselves on our men's flank. They opened fire on Tormey and his party and shot Tormey through the head killing him instantly. The remainder of our men were able to make good their escape, taking Tormey's body with them. A messenger came to us to warn us and we made for the Shannon where we got a boat and crossed over to the Leinster side. O'Mara somehow got a coffin out from Athlone and Tormey's body was placed in this and it was rowed down the Shannon to Clonmacnoise where it was

buried in the old cemetery there at night time. Inside of a few days the Tans went out there and dug the coffin up again and brought it to Athlone where some sort of an Inquest or Inquiry was held. They subsequently handed over Tormey's body to his relatives and it was then interred in the graveyard at Mount-temple. I was near the Clonmacnoise road when the Tans took Tormey's body to Athlone and I could see the coffin on the tender as they passed with two Tans sitting on it.

After Tormey's death O'Mara took charge of the Column personally, but he did not seem able to handle it. Simon Donnelly, who had recently escaped from jail, came down from G.H.Q. to our area on an inspection and organisation mission and he ordered a meeting of the Brigade Council. At this meeting O'Mara said he wished to relinquish the command of the Brigade and he was allowed to do so and Tom Costello was now made Brigade Commander with George Adamson as Vice Commandant. There were no changes in the Battalion staff. No one was appointed to command the Column definitely. It was arranged that when the Column was operating or billeted in a Battalion area, the O/C. of that Battalion would command it and, should it go into another Brigade area, the last O/C would continue to command. This arrangement had one advantage in that each Battalion Commandant knew his area and the Volunteer Officers in it.

As stated, after the failure to ambush the lorry in the Drumreany area, the Column moved on to Coosan and it was a whole time job now avoiding contact with the large enemy forces which were operating in the area. The Column was in none too good a shape - some of the original members were still absent from it and a lot of others had joined it. The reinforcements were men who were compelled to go 'on the run' and they had attached themselves to the Column. There was no effective armament for them. It was more of a gathering now than a Column.

I was now ordered by the Brigade to proceed to the Mullingar Brigade area. My mission was a twofold one. I was to get I.R.A. actively going in that area in order to try and draw off the enemy pressure on ours, and secondly to reorganise the I.R.B. which, apparently, had lapsed in that area. It was now the month of April 1921. I was to proceed to Drumreany being there at a certain hour and date, where scouts would contact me and take me across country to Gleniden, Mullingar, where I was to meet James Maguire who was O/C. of the Mullingar Brigade. I went to Drumreany the night previous to my appointments with the scouts and stayed at the house of Tom Cullen. The following day I went to McCormack's, arriving there about half an hour before the appointed time. I had no arms on me but I was carrying an envelope containing some documents in connection with the I.R.B. including a list of names of individuals in the Mullingar area. The two McCormack brothers were at home and I stood in the kitchen talking to them. While we were there some one came in and said the house was surrounded by Tans.

We made an attempt to get away and got out of the house and ran some distance being fired at as we done so. We ran towards a bank and ditch as there did not seem to be any Tans on that side. I was leading and as I scrambled up the bank out of the ditch I got a poke of the butt of a rifle in the mouth which knocked me back into the ditch. As I fell, I remembered the documents I had on me and I put my hand into my pocket and pulled out the envelope and forced it into the mud under me in the ditch.

We were now prisoners. We were now searched, then beaten, then searched and finally beaten again. They could find nothing on any of the three of us and neither did they see the envelope stuck in the mud, of which I was very glad. We were now handcuffed and put in the lorries and made stand up. We were first taken to Ballymore and then to Moate and then to the Police Barracks in Athlone. We were

compelled to stand all the time. We were three nights in a cell in the police barracks. The conditions there were awful; the place was filthy and there were no sanitary arrangements and we had to relieve nature in our cells. No one in Drumreany or elsewhere knew where we were apparently and Father Clavin from there came into Athlone in search of us. He went to the Military Barracks but found we were not there and then came to the Tans Barracks. He was informed we were there but he would not be let in to see us. He insisted on getting in but to no avail and finally forced his way in when the gate was opened to allow a lorry out. He was now given permission to see us and I told him about the envelope stuck in the mud and this was recovered by some of our men and returned to the Brigade O/C.

After three days in the Police Barracks we were transferred to the Military Barracks and put in the wire cages there. Conditions as regards food, bedding and sanitation were much better here. There was a large number of prisoners here including Austin Stack with whom I became very friendly. We got great amusement in watching the batches of new prisoners arriving. Apparently the British were collecting in every male who could walk now. Parties of old men would arrive, dressed as they were picked up on their way to the bog to work and with their trousers tied up at the knees with cords and hay ropes. Their military escort would march along on either side of them - rifles 'at the slope' and their arms swinging high - while the poor old prisoners would shuffle along as best they could. Some of such prisoners had hardly any boots or shoes on them or a mixture of both and they, with their spick and span escort, presented a really funny sight.

The Military Provost or Police Sergeant who was in charge of us prisoners was a typical British Non-Commissioned Officer. He was all shining and polish - "Elem", the soldiers called it, and with the cane always under the arm. As stupid as a beetle and with no sense of

humour or imagination, he would tramp into the old men and rap the table with his cane and tell them to be packed up and ready to move by 09.00 hours and such like. They had no idea what this military language meant and we used to kid them and tell them that was hanging time and so forth. When all ready, they would find that they were only for medical examination or interrogation or some such routine matter. They were not issued with eating utensils as apparently they were not to be kept long and when a pot of stew would arrive for dinner, it was funny seeing them trying to eat it with their hands. Of course, we helped them out as best we could. They were all eventually released.

Stack and I had plans made to escape. There was a dry canteen in the barracks and you could get a pass to go there, under escort of course, to make purchases. We planned to jump our escort and disarm them and then make a dash for a low portion of the barrack wall which we believed we could scale easily. On the night before we planned to do this a prisoner named Mullooly from Roscommon escaped from the hospital by jumping out of the window of that building. He got clear away. This put an end to our plans as all passes were now stopped and regulations were more stringently enforced.

I remained in the cage in the military barracks until June, 1921 when I was transferred to the Rath Camp, Curragh. The McCormack Brothers had been sent there earlier on. I was handcuffed and chained to a pole in the centre of a lorry manned by military and accompanied by a heavy armoured car. Between Athlone and Moate the road was blocked by a felled tree. The officer in charge of the escort consulted his map and found a bye-road by which we reached Moate. On the east side of Moate we came upon another felled tree across the road. This time there was no bye-road and it was a case of cutting a way through the tree. My handcuffs and chain were undone and I was put at the end of a crosscut saw. Any male who came along the

road was commandeered to assist and one time a man who knew me well was put on the other end of the saw. He never spoke or made any attempt to recognise me or I him. If I had, they would probably have held him. He was actually a neighbour of mine as this place was quite close to my home. All the way to the Curragh we came across several road blocks and the escort had to divert from its route and travel by bye-roads through bogs and so forth. It was really surprising to me to see the amount of demolition work including destroyed bridges there was. At one point on a bog road our lorry stuck and the armoured car had to pull it out with a wire rope.. On reaching the Curragh I was put in the Rath Camp (internment) and I remained there until the following September when I escaped through a tunnel which we had constructed. A big number of prisoners escaped that night.

I made my way back to Moate and then someone informed me that I would have to report back to the Rath Camp - that my escape was a breach of the Truce. I reported to Sean MacEoin who was now in charge of the Midland Division which had been organised in my absence and he instructed me to go to the Brigade Training Camp at Benown and remain there and this I did.

I joined the I.R.B. in 1918. Sean McCormack of Drumreany swore me into that organisation. I now formed a local Circle in the Faheran area of which I was head. We had five or six members, all Volunteers and we paid three pence per week subscription to a fund. We had regular meetings, the routine of which was the reading of any instructions from the County Centre or higher authority and a general discussion. Sometime in 1919 I was appointed Centre for Westmeath and this meant travelling all over the County attending meetings of local Circles and attending meetings in Dublin of the Leinster Council. Sean Murphy of Clanbrassil Street, Dublin, was Secretary of the Leinster Council at this time. Meetings of the Leinster Council were usually

held in the premises of the Typographical Society of Ireland in Gardiner Street in the city. I usually stayed in Flemming's or Vaughan's hotel when in the city for such meetings. It is hard to say what was really the objective of the organisation at this time in view of the policy of the Volunteers except that it formed a hard core of resistance inside that organisation who would carry on the fight should the Volunteers weaken in their purpose.

The only attempt to construct munitions of War in this area was the making of mines or bombs of the cartwheel box type and the filling of cartridges with slugs. We made our own supply of slugs from old lead which we melted down and ran through a rough gauge. They were terrific weapons at short range but it was nearly impossible to keep the cartridges clear of damp under our conditions of storage, with the result that it was hard to extract or load them into the guns and thereby they were wont to jamb.

There were Intelligence sections organised inside the Battalions and Companies but they were of little avail as regards getting information about enemy intentions. They were useful for local jobs such as watching persons who were suspected of collaborating with the enemy. The British forces, and I suppose all military forces, had the habit of regularity - that is doing the same thing at the same time regularly. By keeping record of army vehicles travelling on roads you could quickly assess the one that travelled regularly. This was some of the sort of work carried out by intelligence sections. In the matter of major intelligence, this was the prerogative of the Brigade Headquarters entirely. Every Volunteer was, in fact, an intelligence agent and was instructed to keep his eyes and ears open and report everything he saw or heard. This was all done verbally - records were a dangerous thing to keep and particularly that type.

A retired officer of the British Army named Captain Bailey lived in Ballindine House, not far from here. Captain Bailey kept hunting horses at his residence for a Colonel Bannerman who was stationed in the Military Barracks, Athlone. Colonel Bannerman was a frequent visitor to Bailey's house and often stayed there for periods to hunt and shoot. One of the maids in Captain Bailey's house came across some documents in Colonel Bannerman's room which interested her. She told one of our Volunteers who was friendly with her and he reported the matter to me. It was arranged that this maid would take out the documents to me. Captain Bailey and Colonel Bannerman were both away from the house at this time. She took the documents to me and I found a lot of names of men in the Athlone and surrounding areas recorded. Seamus O'Mara our Brigade O/C. was amongst the names listed as were a lot of others, some of whom were known to me and were active Volunteers. Sean Collison was recorded as having paraded a number of men at Monegall on the previous Easter Sunday. This would be in the Tipperary area. I made copies of the documents and gave them to Sean McCormack who took them to our intelligence section at General Headquarters, Dublin. The originals were given back to the maid to safeguard her position in the house. Apparently the Colonel was combining intelligence work with his sporting activities.

We had no arms in the Battalion area except a few old shotguns and the most serviceable of those were taken to equip the Column and, in the circumstances, very little in the way of activities, except the destruction of communications and so forth, could be undertaken. Roads were extensively blocked by felling trees across them and where possible bridges were destroyed. We had no explosives for destroying bridges and had to be content with what we could do with picks, and crowbars, and this was not easy. There were no spies shot in this area.

Signed: David DalyDate: 16.12.55Witness: Matthew Barry Comd't.

(Matthew Barry) Comd't.

(David Daly)

16.12.55

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

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