

W.S. 1,392 ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21  
BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21  
No. W.S. 1392

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.  
STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,392.....

Witness

Edward John Ryan,  
3 St. Patrick's Terrace,  
Nenagh,  
Co. Tipperary.

Identity.

Member of A.S.U. No. 1 Tipperary Brigade;  
Lieutenant 'A' Company 1st Battalion do.

Subject.

Irish Volunteers, Nenagh, Co. Tipperary,  
1913-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

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STATEMENT BY EDWARD JOHN RYAN,

3, St. Patrick's Terrace, Nenagh, Co. Tipperary,

formerly a member of the No.1 (North) Tipperary Brigade

Active Service Unit.

I was born on 23rd June, 1894, in the townland of Tyone on the outskirts of the town of Nenagh. After having passed the junior grade examination I left the Nenagh Christian Brothers' schools at fifteen years of age to learn the trade of baker from my father.

The Irish Volunteer movement was founded in the Nenagh district in December, 1913, at a meeting held in the Literary Institute, a couple of hundred men joining at the outset. The principal figures responsible for the starting of the organisation were I.R.B. men, Frank McGrath, Ned O'Leary and Bill Hoolan. I was a member of the Irish Volunteers in Nenagh from the outset and at least up to the Redmondite "split" in the following August rarely missed a parade. The company met for drill in the local showgrounds thrice weekly under the direction of five ex-British soldiers, Harry Fitzgerald, Thomas Francis, John Condon, Jim Moylan and McGuigan. I am not able to state whether those men were paid or not for their services but they certainly were first-class instructors, and, being as eager to impart their knowledge as we were to learn, the company made good progress going from all phases of footdrill to company drill by the summer of 1914. During that summer we went through extended order drill and manoeuvres on the Nenagh Racecourse. By using timber rifles made locally we also learned the rudiments of arms drill.

The first real guns which I remember coming to the Nenagh Irish Volunteers were about half a dozen Russian rifles of an obsolete type, very heavy and awkward to handle. On the occasion of a big parade of Irish Volunteers at Castleconnell in the summer of 1914 where there was a review by Dr. Esmonde, M.P., I happened to be one of the half dozen Volunteers who were selected to carry these Russian rifles, and I felt very proud indeed when I was shouldering that rifle through the streets on the way to the railway station in Nenagh. By the time we had reached there I had learned my lesson. I was lathered with sweat from the weight and clumsiness of the gun, and by pretending to a pal of mine that I was conferring a favour on him induced him to take the weapon from me. By the time we got back from Castleconnell that night the company nearly lost all its Russian rifles for the want of Volunteers who were prepared to carry them.

When the Redmondite "split" took place the majority of the Nenagh Company supported the group led by John McNeill and from thence onwards were drilled by the company officers, Frank McGrath, Ned O'Leary, Liam Hoolan and Jimmy Nolan.

In January, 1916, I went to work in Graham's bakery in the town of Kildare, where I did not make any contact with the Irish Volunteer movement. When news of the Rising reached me on Easter Monday, a friend of mine named Jim Conway, a van driver in the bakery, and I made arrangements with a publican called Cosgrove with whom we were friendly and whom we knew to be in sympathy with the rebels, to try to get to Dublin next day. That night I was due on a night shift and on my way to work I was

held up by a patrol of R.I.C. who arrested me. I was detained in the Artillery Barracks in the town for a week and ~~was~~ then released.

In the following September I returned home to Nenagh, where I at once rejoined the local company. Though Frank McGrath and a number of the officers were in jail, public drilling was in full swing, the company being then drilled, as far as I can remember, by Seán Gaynor, afterwards Commandant of the No. 1 Tipperary Brigade.

I was again away from Nenagh from June, 1918, to January, 1919, having gone to work at my trade in Waterford City during that period. I joined one of the Volunteer companies there. This company had as captain a man named O'Neill and met for drill in Manor St. I was in Waterford City for the most exciting election contest in the 1918 general election in which Dr. White stood for Sinn Féin and Captain Redmond for the Irish Parliamentary Party. All my spare time was devoted to this campaign, protecting Sinn Féin election rooms, meetings and processions. I have never met anything since to equal the fanaticism of the Redmondite supporters in that contest, who at times went beserk. I could never understand their hostility to Sinn Féin and the brutal and savage methods used by them against the supporters of Dr. White. In clashes between the rival crowds the Redmondite element used knives, bottles and bricks, often with the obvious approval of the R.I.C. On the other hand, when the Irish Volunteers in self defence retaliated with sticks and hurleys, the police were ever on the alert to charge them with batons and rifle butts. While coming along O'Connell St. with two other Volunteers one evening we were attacked by a big Redmondite mob

and we were in a very dangerous situation outside a hardware shop. Fortunately, the owner of the premises, an old I.R.B. named Toomey, came to our aid by handing us three pitchforks, with which we kept the mob at bay until we were relieved by our own supporters. I left Waterford and came home soon after the election.

About the middle of January, 1919, I heard from John Ayres that his employer, a Jew, who had a skin and hide business at the back of Connolly St., Nenagh, was carrying a revolver. I decided to seize this gun and took another Volunteer named Edward Quigley with me. We found the Jew and Ayres working in the stores and the former was requested to hand over the gun. He denied having one but eventually we overpowered him and found the revolver, a .45 British bulldog concealed on his person. For safety sake he was tied up with ropes, and to cover up Ayres for his complicity in the affair we decided to treat him similarly.

In or about the same week I was detailed to destroy some transport belonging to the British troops which had been left for repair in Minihan's garage, Nenagh. In this operation I was assisted by about half a dozen Volunteers, all from the local company, and they included Paddy Starr, Seán O'Leary and Edward Quigley. There was no guard over the vehicles and we entered the garage after nightfall. One of the vehicles was a military lorry, the engine of which was smashed up with sledges, and the other was the 'Black Maria' used by the local R.I.C. We removed the 'Black Maria' to <sup>Ballintogher</sup> Ballintogher, a mile or so outside Nenagh and then burned it. We got an amount of pleasure in destroying the latter vehicle as it was the van which the police used for the conveyance of prisoners and it had been

used to remove the local Irish Volunteer leaders arrested after the 1916 Rising and in connection with public drilling.

The Nenagh Company, in which by the end of 1919 I held the rank of 1st Lieutenant, had obtained a few Lee Enfield service rifles by seizing them from British soldiers home on furlough during the 1st Great War and also a few revolvers procured privately by purchase or as gifts from sympathisers. In September, 1920, orders were issued by brigade or battalion headquarters to seize all the guns held by the civilian population in the town and neighbourhood on the one night. The company was divided into a number of sections for this purpose, each section taking a separate locality. I was one of <sup>seventeen</sup> ~~seven~~ or <sup>eighteen</sup> ~~eight~~ who, under Seán Naughton, raided the house of Mr. Galway-Foley in Ballintogher. Mr. Galway-Foley was an ex County Inspector of the R.I.C. and I knew him to be a man who had no great love for England. In fact, during the land war in the "eighties" it was he who exposed the notorious Sergeant Sheridan in his nefarious work as agent provocateur. However, no matter how much I disliked the idea of interfering with Mr. Galway-Foley I had to comply with orders and do as I was told. Unfortunately, Mr. Galway-Foley, instead of complying with our demand for admittance fired at us with a shotgun from an upstairs window of his house. Naughton, Michael Gaynor and I returned the fire and wounded him in the chest. We were then admitted by a maid and at once rushed upstairs, where we found the wounded man lying on the floor with his chest covered with blood. The shotgun and ammunition were lying on the floor behind, and underneath his body we found a .45 revolver and a box of ammunition. We seized all the arms and ammunition and took our departure, sending for the priest and doctor to

attend to Mr. Galway-Foley before going home. I was very glad to learn after a week or so that he was out of danger and making a quick recovery.

In October, 1920, the No. 1 Tipperary Brigade Council decided to form an active service unit, and after appointing Ned O'Leary, Nenagh, as commander of the unit left the selection of the personnel to the commandants of the seven battalions in the brigade. The active service unit, which first met on 22nd October, 1920, at Seymour's in Arderoney, was made up of the following:

1st Battalion	(Nenagh)	- Joe Starr and myself
2nd	"	(Toomevara) - Jack Harty, Hugh Kelly, Tim Gleeson, Joe Mangar & Jeremiah Larkin.
3rd	"	(Portroe) - Michael Kennedy (The Rajah) & Michael Vaughan.
4th	"	(Lorrha) - Seán Glennon & Mick Joyce.
6th	"	(Newport) - Tom McGrath.
7th	"	(Roscrea) - Tommy Brophy & Paddy McMahon.

In the ensuing ten months the personnel of this unit varied a good deal due to arrests, illness or administrative changes.

At the outset about 11 men in this unit were equipped with rifles and the remainder had to be content with shotguns. Each man also carried a first aid kit and used a bike, either his own or one which he got on loan. In the period between 22nd October, 1920, and 2nd November, 1920, the A.S.U., as the active service unit came to be called, moved through the country a good deal, staying for a night or two in the townlands of Island and Cremlin, Moneygall, Glenaguile and Bawn outside Nenagh. We stayed in farmers' houses, a couple of men doing sentry while the others slept. Food was provided by the people on whom we were billeted, cigarettes being supplied out of brigade.

funds. We got no pocket money but now and again a friendly sympathiser might quietly slip a few shillings or an odd pound to one or two of the boys with whom he happened to be particularly friendly. During the daytime we trained and drilled in secluded fields when weather permitted and in a disused house or outhouse in inclement weather.

On 2nd November, 1920, Constable McCarthy was fired at and wounded by members of the Nenagh Company, and the brigade staff got information that the military and police in the town intended to burn the local creamery that night as a reprisal. The Brigade Commander requested Ned O'Leary to bring the A.S.U. into the town and mobilised members of the town company, about 20 or 25, who were armed with shotguns and revolvers, to defend the creamery. In all about forty men took up positions around that building after dark and waited for the enemy to come on his work of destruction. When we had been in our positions for a couple of hours one of the men accidentally discharged his shotgun. This shot, which could be distinctly heard in the calm of the night all over the town, may have warned the enemy of what was in store for them. No soldiers or policemen came within sight and it was well past midnight when we got orders to withdraw.

On withdrawing, the A.S.U. went to Knockalton and were still there on 4th November, 1920, when Joe Starr was sent into Nenagh to get a supply of cigarettes. On his return around midday he reported that he had seen Captain Hambleton, the officer in charge of the military in the town, going off on a motor bike towards Templemore or Thurles. This officer was known to have led the



military raiding party which shot dead two <sup>men</sup> ~~brothers~~ named O'Brien after they had been arrested in a house in Knigh, Nenagh, ~~a night or two before~~. The A.S.U. commander decided to ambush him on his way back to Nenagh.

For this purpose two groups of five or six men in each group were picked from the A.S.U. One group was sent on to Kilkeary and the other group went west to Casey's Cross. ~~Hambleton had the choice of two roads for his return journey and a group was placed in positions which commanded each of these roads.~~ I was among those who went to Kilkeary under the command of Pat O'Brien, who had joined the A.S.U. only a few days previously. The A.S.U. commander himself led the group at Casey's Cross.

In the afternoon, I'd say about 2 o'clock, Hambleton came back via Casey's Cross, and in the first volley of shots fired by O'Leary's party the captain was knocked off the motor bike. He tried to return the fire but was at once put out of action. He was still alive when our men approached him and his last words were: "You b.....s, you got me at last". In an official report published later by the British authorities it was alleged that this officer's body showed that he had been hacked and mutilated by the attackers, but Joe Starr, who was one of the party, told me when he read this report in the papers that the allegation was entirely untrue. He said that Hambleton was wearing a steel jacket which was pierced by armoured plated bullets that drove fragments of the steel jacket into the body.

As a reprisal for the shooting of Captain Hambleton the houses of Jim Nolan, John Flannery and William Gill

and the creamery in Nenagh were burned. About a fortnight or so later one of the finest members of the Nenagh Volunteers, Denis Carey, was taken from his lodgings by masked R.I.C. men and mortally wounded. Two policemen, Smith, a Cavanman, and Keane, a native of Wexford, were blamed for the shooting of Denis Carey.

Following the death of Capt. Hambleton the A.S.U. moved off to Traverstown, Dolla, and next day laid ambush at Kilkeary Churchyard for enemy lorries which, it was thought, would be coming from Nenagh to Templemore. At nightfall we withdrew without having seen a policeman or soldier. Within a day or two another ambush was laid at Letteragh for a lorry coming from Templemore to Nenagh. The Brigade Commandant, Seán Gaynor, was in charge on this occasion. We remained in wait until dusk and were in the process of withdrawing when a lorry of soldiers came along. It was fired on but, due to the failing light and the fact that we were not all in suitable positions, the vehicle drove through the ambush without being halted. As far as I remember, the enemy officially admitted having had three or four soldiers wounded in that encounter, which occurred about 8th or 9th November, 1920.

That night the A.S.U. went to billets in the townland of Coologue, but the commander, fearing reprisals, took myself seven or eight others back to Letteragh to defend Ryan's (Shauneen) publichouse which was near the scene of the attack that evening. We spent the night guarding the place but no attempt was made to burn it. Next day he moved the whole unit out of the district to Ballywilliam, where we billeted in Mountsack for a time. The only attempt which I can recall having been made by the A.S.U. to attack

enemy forces around that period was at Portroe on 8th December, 1920. A position was selected on the Ballina side on the outskirts of that village to attack a police patrol. It was a day of heavy snow and frost, which probably caused the police to remain indoors. The A.S.U. waited from before daybreak until nightfall but then had to retire without getting a chance to fire a single shot. We went back to Ballywilliam for the night and next day set out for new country, Birdhill, getting billets for a few days in Ryan's cottage in the townland of Cragg. As no accounts reached us of an opportunity to attack enemy forces in this locality, the commander decided to try his luck further east, and after an all day trek we got into the mountainous country of Curreeney, about four miles north of Kilcommon village, and put up for the night in Murphy's of Beenoskeagh. We were joined here by some of the local I.R.A. men, who told us that the police stationed in Kilcommon Cross came each day for their mails to the post office in Kilcommon village and also gave us to understand that the battalion staff of the area, 5th Battalion, were opposed to the idea of any military activity around Kilcommon as they were apprehensive of the fate of their own homes should any of the police be shot in the district. Pat Hughes, 1st Lieutenant of the Curreeney Company, was most anxious that we should attack the police patrol and had all the information regarding its movement which we needed.

The commander of the A.S.U. decided to ambush the patrol and had his own force strengthened by Pat Hughes, Curreeney, Dan Ryan (Barrack), Jim Ryan, Boherlody, James Clifford, Glenculloo, Denis Dwyer, Foilduff, and Mick Kennedy, Foilduff. I think these men all carried shotguns, and from memory I now estimate that the strength of the

attacking party was eleven or twelve riflemen and about eight or ten shotgunmen. On the night previous to the attack the party moved from Beenoskeagh to Reiska, a mile and a half from Kilcommon, and put up there in Ryan's haybarn. At 6 o'clock in the morning of 16th December, 1920, we moved off for the ambush position.

The A.S.U. commander had learned that the police in Kilcommon Cross varied their movements a good deal in going to and coming from Kilcommon village. Sometimes they went by the direct road which runs along the valley roughly parallel to the Aughvaria river, while at other times they used a roundabout route along the Loughbrack road and then by Diarmuid and Gráinne's Bed into Kilcommon. These two roads formed a rough triangle almost equilateral, the roundabout road forming two sides. Between the roads the land rises rather sharply, forming a hill, the ridge of which is on an average between three and four hundred feet above the level of the direct road between Kilcommon and Kilcommon Cross and between one and two hundred feet above the level of the other road, and between a quarter and a half mile in distance from either road. In order to ensure that, no matter what road the police took he would be able to attack them, the commander, after selecting three men to act as scouts, divided his force into two sections. In one of these sections he placed those who carried shotguns, stiffened by two or three riflemen. He posted that section under the control of Pat O'Brien about one hundred and fifty yards on the Kilcommon village side of the entrance to Pat Ryan's (The Grove) on the direct road to Kilcommon Cross. The section were placed at a bend which gave them clear view of the road for a distance of nearly three hundred yards in the direction of Kilcommon Cross, and facing in that direction

they were all behind the left-hand side of the road fence. The other section, which he commanded himself, included myself and eight or nine other riflemen. It was placed behind a fence which ran close and parallel to the ridge of the hill and between two hundred and two hundred and fifty yards on the Killcommon Cross side of Pat Ryan's house. Roughly three hundred yards to our left and where the ridge started to slope down towards "The Cross", Paddy Hughes, Dan Ryan and Denis Dwyer were posted as scouts. The scouts had a clear view of the crossroads in front of the R.I.C. barracks and their job was to observe which of the two roads the police were taking in going to Kilcommon village that morning. The men who were posted at the bend of the road were instructed not to allow any person to pass along that road towards Killcommon Cross and to hold up any persons who came that way and detain them in Pat Ryan's house. It so happened that only one individual was detained and he was brought into Ryan's kitchen under a guard of two men armed with shotguns. We were particularly careful in preventing people who had seen us from reaching Killcommon Cross because we were aware that a number of families in the locality were not trustworthy and might notify the R.I.C. that we were waiting for them.

The idea in posting the section of riflemen on the ridge of the hill was that they would be able to open long range fire on the police if they went by the Loughbrack road, along which there was not much cover once they had gone about half a mile from the barracks. Besides, if the other section withheld fire until the police, <sup>the leading members of</sup> or, at least, the patrol, came within five or ten yards of that section, we on the ridge could have ample time to come down to that road and cut off the police from their base. Instructions to that effect

were given to the men in Pat O'Brien's section.

At about ten o'clock in the morning the scouts came towards us to report that the police patrol was travelling along the direct road. The patrol consisted of eight R.I.C. men on foot and in extended formation, two abreast and about ten paces between each pair. All of them carried rifles.

On hearing the scouts' report the column commander led us back under cover of a fence in the direction of the other section. The fence was low and we had to bend down or crawl behind it lest we might show ourselves to the police. After a couple of minutes firing broke out, and, unfortunately, this occurred prematurely. Instead of allowing the police to come within five or ten yards of O'Brien's section one of his men opened fire as soon as the leading two policemen reached the gate leading into Ryan's house and then the others did likewise. Strange to say, the man who did so was not a raw Volunteer but an ex-British soldier who had fought in the 1st Great War. Some of the police were killed or wounded in the first exchange of shots. The others had scattered or taken shelter before the column commander and his section had reached the road. One of the police who had jumped on the lower side of the fence made his way unseen by us into Nevin's cottage and hid himself there until we had left the locality. The sergeant in charge of the patrol, Bray, whom we were most anxious to shoot, got into Pat Ryan's house and also concealed himself until we withdrew. The two last men of the patrol ran as hard as they could back to the barracks, but they were observed and pursued by Paddy Ryan (Lacken), Seán O'Leary and Paddy Starr who were with us coming down from the ridge of the hill. These two policemen had almost reached the

barracks when they were both shot dead, but at a point where their rifles could not be procured as they were within point blank range of the other policemen in the barracks, who at that stage were fully alerted and were actually discharging rockets to attract reinforcements from outside R.I.C. stations, particularly the district headquarters in Newport twelve miles or so away.

By the time I had reached Ryan's house the fighting had almost finished. The sergeant who was concealed there, although I heard afterwards that he fired one shot through a window, made no attempt to fire at myself or a few others who passed by the house. We could see only two policemen lying on the road. Paddy Ryan (Lacken) had joined us by that time and we both jumped out on the road. One of the police was a Black and Tan named Bundy and the other was an R.I.C. man called Halford. Both were wounded. The latter died a short while afterwards inside in Pat Ryan's kitchen. We searched the two of them for papers but found nothing. We took their rifles and ammunition pouches.

I have no idea of the exact casualties which the police sustained in that engagement except that I know definitely that two were killed, one mortally wounded and another wounded. I heard that there were four killed and three wounded, but I cannot vouch for the latter figures. There were no casualties on our side. With regard to the booty, I can give no authoritative data on this point. I am positive that we got two rifles and a couple of hundred rounds of .303 ammunition, but I did hear it mentioned that we captured four or five rifles.

About half an hour after the Kilcommon attack was over the I.R.A. party was on its way towards Templederry.

We halted at Meehan's in Glastrigan, where we had a meal and then rested for a while. R.I.C. and military reinforcements had in the meantime reached Kilcommon, and one of their first actions on arriving was to set fire to the homes of some of the staff of the 5th Battalion, Pat Doherty, Commandant, John Caplis, Vice Commandant, and William Hanly, Adjutant, none of whom wanted or took part in the operation. That night the A.S.U. moved back again towards Kilcommon and billeted in the townland of Garryglass. A few days later we disbanded for the Christmas holidays.

I spent Xmas, 1920, between my own home in Tyone during the daytime and neighbours' houses at night. I cannot remember how soon afterwards the A.S.U. reassembled, but I am certain that with Michael Kennedy (The Rajah), Pat O'Brien, Tom McGrath and Paddy Ryan (Lacken) I spent 5th January, 1921, at Toor waiting for four R.I.C. men who had gone on a sidecar from Reagh barracks to Nenagh. On the return journey the R.I.C. went astray and thus, by an accident, avoided the ambush we had prepared for them. Between that occasion and the end of the same month I was again a member of a party organised by Paddy McDonnell, Commandant 3rd Battalion, for the purpose of attacking a patrol of R.I.C. from Portroe barracks which came to the Killaloe slate quarries once a week. We occupied a disused house in the neighbourhood of the quarries in which we could not light a fire for fear of giving our position away, and during three days spent there we had to subsist on bread and stout. The weather was bitterly cold and we had a most unpleasant time, all for nothing as the police failed to show up.



Sometime early in February, 1921, the commander of the active service unit, Ned O'Leary, was transferred back to the brigade staff, this time as adjutant, and was replaced by Jack Collison, Moneygall, later killed in the Civil War. Before leaving the A.S.U. O'Leary made another unsuccessful effort to attack the enemy. He had the A.S.U. in occupation of a position at ~~Harabeg~~<sup>Annakeg</sup>, near Drumineer, to ambush a tender of police which he had been informed was to go from Drumineer R.I.C. barracks to the Nenagh assizes. Whether the information was incorrect or the police changed their mind I do not know, but at any rate they did not travel.

At the end of February, 1921, the brigade staff completed arrangements to set up a training camp for battalion and company officers at Glenculloo, Silvermines. A house known as "The Buildings", then vacant, was selected for use during the period of training. About half the brigade A.S.U., under the commander, were ordered to do guard duty at the camp, which was timed to start on the last Sunday in February. I was one of those picked for the guard, which totalled ~~about~~<sup>only</sup> eight men, and we proceeded to our destination on the previous Saturday. When we reached Foilnamuck, about five miles from Glenculloo, we observed a big enemy round-up in progress in which hundreds of soldiers and police were participating. The operations were being directed from the house which our people were about to occupy for the training camp. We billeted at Foilnamuck for the night and next morning, as the enemy forces had withdrawn, we went on to "The Buildings". Some of the officers who were to participate in the training course had also arrived when word was received from our brigade headquarters that the arrangements for the training camp were

cancelled and that the members of the A.S.U. were to proceed to Moneygall. It was suspected that information about the training camp had reached the enemy and it was considered too risky to go ahead with the arrangements that had been made. Instead it was decided to change the venue to the other end of the brigade on the Lorrha side. Even on our way to Moneygall the enemy acted as if he were well posted as to our movements and in a series of lightning raids only narrowly missed surrounding us on two occasions.

In Moneygall the A.S.U. assembled at full strength, about eighteen men, and went on to Gortmore House a couple of miles outside Terryglass. Here the training camp, transferred from Glenculloo, began and the A.S.U. did guard duty. After five days the camp was again transferred, this time to Ballymacegan, near Lorrha, where it lasted for about ten days. The officer in charge of the course was Michael McCormack, a Dublinman, who had been sent down from general headquarters. Although he was known to us as Captain McCormack, he seemed to have powers higher than those appropriate to that rank, as from the time of his arrival until he eventually was appointed Commandant of the 3rd Southern Division he appeared to have full control of the No. 1 Tipperary Brigade. During the period the training camp lasted he took the A.S.U. and men selected from those who were attending the course, on three occasions to Borrisokane and once to Cloughjordan to attack police patrols, but each time nothing happened as the enemy did not make an appearance.

When the training camp closed down at Ballymacegan the A.S.U., under its own commander, Jack Collison, were heading towards Moneygall on 23rd March, 1921. I think

it was in a place called Burnwood, a couple of miles from Cloughjordan, that at about ten o'clock in the morning we were crossing the road leading to the latter village when two lorries carrying a mixed force of police and military almost ran into us. We were separated by a bridge. Apparently the enemy commander, who had seen us, got the impression that we had an ambush prepared and that the bridge was mined. The lorries halted on the far side of the bridge, about two hundred yards from where we had been seen, and then began to reverse. Most of the A.S.U. had got across the road and Collison, on seeing the lorries reversing, concluded that it was the enemy's intention to get back to the entrance to a side road which intercepted the route in which we were heading. This road was about a quarter of a mile from us and Collison decided to reach it before the enemy. Leaving "Wedger" Meagher (Toomevara) and myself behind with orders to open fire on the enemy, he led the rest of the A.S.U. across a bog to the side road under cover of a fence which prevented the enemy from detecting the movement. Our fire drew return fire, including bursts from one, if not two, machine guns. It looked as if the enemy, who had now halted, were prepared to keep Meagher and myself engaged at long range, five or six hundred yards. On reaching the by-road Collison saw that if the enemy could be kept so engaged there was a chance of cutting him off from his base in Roscrea and at once began to do so. He continued with his men into the fields at the far side of the by-road, but before he had got far enough the enemy had observed the attempt at encirclement, broke the engagement and beat a quick retreat into Roscrea. In this encounter we heard at the time that four of the enemy were wounded. The A.S.U. had no losses. Incidentally, "Wedger"

Meagher, who assisted me in covering our party's advance to the by-road, was not a member of the A.S.U. He had attended the training camp and was accompanying us on his way back to his own area in Toomevara.

Two days after this brush with the enemy-it was Good Friday, 1920. I got leave to go home and another member of the A.S.U., Seán O'Leary, came with me. O'Leary, who was a native of Killarney, had been employed in the Munster and Leinster Bank in Nenagh up to 25th October, 1920, but was then obliged to go 'on the run' following a raid made on his 'digs' by masked and armed policemen, who obviously came to murder him.

On the day after we came back to Nenagh (Holy Saturday) Jim O'Meara and Christopher Gaynor, both active members of the Nenagh Company, arrived out at my place and put up the proposal that an attempt should be made to rescue another Volunteer, Paddy McCarthy, who was then a prisoner but was after being transferred from the Nenagh military barracks to the local hospital. They said they knew that no guard would be placed over McCarthy in the hospital until late that night. McCarthy belonged to Kilmallock, Co. Limerick, and had not been living in Nenagh very long. Though we did not know it at the time, he was a bluffer who masqueraded as a member of a well-known East Limerick I.R.A. family, with which he had no connection whatever. I was not at all in love with the proposal to rescue him. I was aware that the job was an unofficial one and there were at that time strict orders against unofficial activities, and, besides, discipline had been considerably tightened. Very much against my own judgement I agreed to be a party to the rescue and only so far as undertaking to provide a horse and trap to convey the prisoner from the hospital into freedom in the

country. Seán O'Leary, who was very young and ever ready to participate in anything that would upset the British authorities, went with O'Meara and Gaynor. Without meeting any trouble they brought McCarthy out of the hospital. In the meantime I borrowed a horse from one of my neighbours and a trap from another one and got a non I.R.A. man named Joe O'Meara to volunteer to drive the outfit as I wanted to make sure that what I had borrowed would be taken back to the owners. This man and myself were sitting in the trap outside the hospital when McCarthy and his rescuers came out. Leaving Jim O'Meara and Chris. Gaynor behind, we drove off to Moneygall, ten miles distant, passing the R.I.C. in Toomevara on the way.

We left McCarthy, who was by no means very ill, in Cooney's of Laughton, and O'Leary and I stayed in a dug-out near at hand for the night. Next day, Easter Sunday, at about 2 o'clock, O'Leary and I had a meal in Mangan's of Laughton, after which we met McCarthy and Tom Waters and, accompanied by Joe Mangan, we all went off to visit Pat O'Brien, a member of the A.S.U., who was laid up with pneumonia in a house near Moneygall. We were coming along the road into that village and were just at the dispensary when three lorry loads of Auxiliaries coming from the Roscrea direction also reached the village. On seeing them, O'Leary, McCarthy, Waters and I jumped inside the fence on the dispensary side of the road while Mangan got over the opposite fence. The Auxiliaries opened fire and quickly surrounded us, but not before they had mortally wounded O'Leary, who died in Nenagh hospital next day, and also wounded Waters. McCarthy and I were made prisoners, while Mangan escaped.

I got a bad time after being captured. None of the four of us carried arms or anything else that would incriminate us and I posed as an innocent party who had no connection with the I.R.A. In accordance with their usual practice, the Auxiliaries tried to beat the truth out of me and, in addition to kicks and blows, the persuasive methods employed by them included the pulling out of two of my toe nails, from the effects of which I still suffer. I was in such a helpless condition from the treatment I had received that I was unable to climb into the lorry, but two of this elite force quickly got over that and <sup>hauled</sup> handed me up from the ground by gripping the hair of my head.

To account for my presence in Moneygall I coined a story that I had come to the place in order to get a cure from a local quack for distemper in greyhounds. I stuck steadfastly to that story even after I was brought into Nenagh military barracks, where I was questioned several times and put through a very close interrogation. In that barracks I was under military control and received decent treatment. One of the men who often did guard over me was a little Scotchman, who appeared to become very interested in my welfare and was clearly impressed by my protestations that I was an innocent man. He told me afterwards when I met him during the Truce that he had made repeated representations to his officers to set me at liberty. After being detained for four weeks I was interviewed by two military officers, on whose report I was released. Needless to say I did not remain at home after getting out, as I had a premonition that the enemy would find out the truth about me. My expectations proved to be correct because in a matter of three days my home was raided by the police, but I was not there.

Though I had to go 'on the run' after coming out of the Nenagh military barracks, the condition of my health did not enable me to rejoin the active service unit for six or seven weeks. ~~afterwards~~. My first experience was to receive a severe reprimand from the brigade staff for my connection with the rescue of McCarthy. I kept on the move about the brigade area, gradually recovering in health, until 10th June, 1921, when I was able to go back into the A.S.U., which at that time was located at Whitebarn. A good many changes had taken place in the personnel of that body during my absence but Jack Collison was still in charge. Within a couple of days the A.S.U. were rushed <sup>from Glasstrugan</sup> to brigade headquarters <sup>in Fawnlough</sup> and from there dispatched to Ballinahinch to attack a detachment of enemy cavalry who were moving from Castleconnell towards Nenagh. We remained around Ballinahinch for two days when news came that the cavalry had returned towards Limerick. The A.S.U. was then sent by Maryglen, Latteragh and Moneygall to the country outside Roscrea, where we were inspected by Count O'Byrne, then the Sinn Féin T.D. for North Tipperary. The Divisional Commandant, Michael McCormack, had by that time arranged for us to go into Leix to bring off an attack on the British forces in that county, but the project had to be abandoned as word had come from G.H.Q. in Dublin about the truce.

Signed: Edward John Ryan  
(Edward John Ryan)

Date: 30<sup>E</sup> March 1956

30th March 1956.

Witness: D. Griffin (D. Griffin)  
(Investigator)

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