

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1918-21  
BURO STAIRÉ MILÉATA 1913-21  
No. W.S. 1539

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. ....1539.....

Witness

David Hall,  
Knutstown,  
Garristown,  
Co. Dublin.

Identity.

Officer Commanding 1st Brigade,  
1st Eastern Division.

Subject.

Activities of 1st Battalion, 1st Brigade,  
1st Eastern Division, I.R.A., Co. Meath,  
1918-1921

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

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1539

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21  
BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21  
No. W.S. 1,539

STATEMENT BY Mr. DAVID HALL,  
Knutstown, Garristown, County Dublin.

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I was born in Dublin City but was reared at Culmullen, County Meath, by an aunt of mine. I received my education at the local school in Culmullen. The subjects taught at this school were the ordinary ones for that time and there was nothing outstandingly Irish. I joined the Kilmore Company of the Irish Volunteers. James McCann was the Captain of this Company which then had a strength of about eighteen men. There were no arms of any sort in the Company then. James Maguire of Dunboyne did the instruction. He had no previous military experience, but he was intelligent and, with the aid of British Army Manuals, he made a successful job of it. On joining then, we had to take some form of oath, the gist of which I cannot remember now. We paid some small subscription to a Company fund towards the procuring of arms, equipment and other expenses.

In 1918 when the Conscription crisis loomed on the country there was only a slight influx of men to join the Volunteers and our strength only increased to about twenty-three. This was contrary to the usual trend of events at this time when generally the strength of Volunteer Companies went up by leaps and bounds. There was plenty of activity at this time. Parades were held in public and the Volunteers were instruments in having everyone sign the Anti-Conscription pledge and in collecting monies for the National Anti-Conscription fund. Other than this activity there was nothing done to meet the menace and we waited for instructions and a lead from Headquarters in Dublin. When the crisis had died down our small increase remained on, in the Volunteers, and drilling and training were resumed and became routine.

Things were very quiet until the latter part of 1918 when a General Election was held and a wave of election enthusiasm gripped the country. Sinn Féin had decided to contest the elections against the Redmond or National Party. There were meetings galore and parades of Volunteers to these meetings and so forth. Sinn Féin was not well organised in Meath at this time and the main brunt of the work fell on the Volunteers who, of course, were also Sinn Féin. The Volunteers canvassed voters on behalf of Sinn Féin and made collections for the Election fund. In fact, they did practically all of the pre-Election work for Sinn Féin. On polling day they had transport organised to take the voters to the polling stations, and they had men on duty at the stations to ensure that the supporters of Sinn Féin were not prevented by the opposition from casting their votes. The R.I.C. also had men on duty at the polling stations. The R.I.C. were even at this stage openly hostile to Sinn Féin; yet there were no clashes between them and the Volunteers. The Volunteers were used extensively to "personate voters" on behalf of Sinn Féin and the slogan "Vote early and vote often" became the slogan of the day. As elsewhere in the country, Sinn Féin won the election in Meath by a big majority.

The First Dáil assembled in Dublin early in January 1919, or rather what was left of them, as quite a number of them were in jail at this time. Having established themselves as the Government of the Irish Republic, one of their first acts was to float a Loan in order to get money to finance their operations. Here again the Volunteers had to do the great bulk of the work in canvassing and collecting for this Loan. I have no recollection of the amounts that were collected for the Loan, but I would say that they were disappointingly low for a county like Meath. Rural Meath was composed mostly of the landed aristocracy and large

grassland farmers. The aristocracy were hostile to Sinn Féin and everything Irish and the grassland farmers, with some exceptions, were not much better.

The Dáil now took over responsibility for the Volunteer Force and they became the Army of the Irish Republic and under the control of the Minister of Defence in the Dáil Cabinet. Every officer and man was now required to take an Oath of Allegiance to the Irish Republic. All our officers and men subscribed to this oath.

All of the County Meath at this time constituted one Brigade area, and the districts generally of Dunboyne to the Kildare border on the south and to the County Dublin border on the east, and to near Tara on the north and Battery John and Summerhill on the west side, made up the 1st Battalion area.

Seán Boylan of Dunboyne was the Brigade O/C, and James Finn of Athboy was the Brigade Adjutant. I cannot remember now who held the rank of Brigade Quartermaster then. Our Battalion O/C. was Bernard Dunne of Dunboyne. The Adjutant was Patrick Kenny of Dunshaughlin and James Maguire of Dunboyne was Battalion Quartermaster. There was a large number of units or small pockets of Volunteers scattered throughout the vast Battalion area and, as yet, not properly organised into Companies.

The Kilmore Company of which I was a member were disbanded because of some differences they had with the Brigade O/C., and the Company Commander ceased to be a Volunteer. New Companies were started in Killale and Kilcline and the old Company of Kilmore was divided up and its members transferred to these new units. William Smith and I remained of the old Kilmore Company and were unattached, and our only activities were the carrying of dispatches and such like work. There were no other particular activities in the area at this time.

This was the position until June 1920 when we joined the Dunshaughlin Company, being re-sworn on doing so. Patrick Blake was Captain of the Dunshaughlin Company which had a strength of about twenty-eight men. The only arms in the Company were some shotguns, a few revolvers of different types and a few old pattern Service Rifles. I do not know what make the rifles were, but they were of Service type and definitely of very old pattern. I doubt if there was any ammunition for them. We paid, I think, a subscription of a shilling per month towards Company funds. Training parades were usually held weekly and in secret, and were carried out usually in the fields at Gerrardstown. The R.I.C. had a force of police in a barracks in Dunshaughlin, but they never interfered with us.

The Battalion area was still the same, but more Companies had come into being. There were now new Companies in Skryne, Ratoath and Curragha and a section in Dunboyne. There was also a Company in Culmullen and, as I was living in that area at the time, I was transferred to this Company as was also Smith. Patrick Rooney was the Company Commander here which had a strength of about thirteen. There were no arms in the Company except for a few odd revolvers. Training went on the same as usual, but also at this time the Volunteers were carrying out the duties of policing the country. This gave us plenty of additional work to perform in the way of patrols and so forth, but our area was a very quiet one and we had not to make any arrests and we had no "unknown destinations" in our area which was a blessing.

The Sinn Féin Courts were established in the area around July, 1920, and I was appointed President of the District Court. Sittings of the Court were held in a school in Dunshaughlin and in a shed in a field. The cases dealt with were the usual ones to be met with in a

country district such as trespassing and such like. There were one or two cases of sheep-stealing. The R.I.C. did not interfere with the Sinn Féin Courts at this stage. The Circuit Court also held sessions in Dunshaughlin. Martin O'Dwyer of Clonee presided over this Court.

About August or early September a general raid for arms was ordered by I.R.A. Headquarters. There had been sporadic raids previous to this. We received a quantity of shotguns of various types, quite a number of which were quite useless. We got a few old pistols in Parsonstown Manor. While we were in the Manor house we were surprised by a party of Military from Dunshaughlin who nearly caught us. Four of us had entered the house and, just as we were leaving, a party of Military drove up the avenue and we had to get away at the rear. We had an outpost at the road for our protection, but they failed to give us warning and the Military almost caught us in the house. I was in charge of this raiding party although I held no rank at the time. We got away through the woods at the rear of the house. The men who entered the house with me were Patrick Duffy of Dunshaughlin and Joseph Lynch of Dunshaughlin and Thomas Wallace. Mrs. McKeever and her two sons lived in the house and both she and her sons resisted violently. Wallace grabbed Mrs. McKeever and held her against the wall and the two sons, who were only young lads, then gave up resistance. McKeever's maid had slipped out of the house unaware of us and had gone for the Military. Clonross House was also raided and here we got one shotgun and an amount of assorted rifle ammunition. Although we made a thorough search of the place we could not find any rifles, and the local information was that there were rifles in the place.. The fact of finding the ammunition there was a verification of this information. Nearly every farmer in the area had a shotgun

of some sort and these were handed over to us without any trouble. The arms were handed over to the Quartermaster in Dunshaughlin, who had them dumped.

There were about one hundred and eighty of a Military garrison in Dunshaughlin in the old Workhouse at this time. They had established themselves there some time previously and had fortified the place with barbed wire entanglements and sand bag posts. Sometime previous to this a box of bombs was consigned by rail to Dunshaughlin by G.H.Q., Dublin. The box was labelled as containing "Nails" and consigned to P.J. Murray, Dunshaughlin and to be collected at Drumree which was the station that served Dunshaughlin. The Battalion Adjutant had been detailed to collect the box at the station when it arrived there by Seamus Higgins who was then Brigade Quartermaster. The Adjutant failed to collect the box and instead Mr. Murray's man collected it and took it to Murray's premises in the village. When the box of "Nails" was opened it was found to contain bombs and Mr. Murray immediately concluded that this was a trap planned by the R.I.C. to ensnare him. He immediately informed the R.I.C. and they came and took away the box of bombs.

The Battalion Adjutant was now suspended over this incident. He was not courtmartialled but was brought before the I.R.B. for an explanation of his failure. He could give no reasonable explanation and his suspension was confirmed. Culmullen Company revolted over the suspension of the Adjutant and threatened violence and they were likewise all suspended except four men who took no part in the revolt. The men who were not suspended were Thomas Cannon, Michael Bruton, Joseph Kelly and John Smith. They had a good sense of discipline.

Trim R.I.C. Barracks was captured on the 20th September, 1920, which was a Sunday morning. Our Battalion were engaged on blocking roads from very early that morning. A big depth of country or rather roads were blocked by felling trees across them so that Trim was completely isolated from the rest of the country. So successful was this demolition work that, although the Barracks in Trim was captured between 8 and 9 o'clock in the morning, no reinforcements succeeded in reaching Trim until 3 p.m. in the afternoon. Some of the officers of our Battalion took part in the actual capture of the Barracks. My particular job that night and morning was keeping a watch on the military garrison in Dunshaughlin while they were being blocked in. They did not get outside the barracks for any distance of importance until 3 p.m. that Sunday afternoon.

Several times we made attempts to ambush police patrols around Dunshaughlin but had no luck as the patrols did not come out. On one occasion when we were in ambush position the operation was called off by order of the Brigade O/C. On this particular night the patrol did not come out when we had left our position. We did not receive any explanation of why we were recalled. The Black and Tans had reinforced the R.I.C. by now and we were particularly anxious to have a crack at them.

Around this time a "spy" chasing fever had set in in Volunteer circles and it was a regular affair to read in the papers that men had been found shot with labels attached to them which read "Spies and Informers Beware." We had very strong suspicions about a man called Gavigan who lived in Kiltale and we arrested him. While awaiting a courtmartial he escaped from his Guards and got away, and joined the Black and Tans who had their Headquarters in

Gormanstown. He returned to the area from Dublin, where he was stationed, and arrested John McCormack of Pelletstown, James Wildridge of Drumree and Matthew Wallace of Batterstown. All three were courtmartialled in Dublin Castle. McCormack and Wildridge were interned in the Curragh and Wallace received a sentence of imprisonment and was sent to Sandhurst Prison in England. He was only sixteen years of age. They were charged with the unlawful arrest of Gavigan. The Tans also looked for Wallace's brother but, lucky for him, they did not find him. At this time I was also 'on the run' as they were looking for me also and my wife had to go and live in Trim. My house was raided regularly for me. Gavigan - the spy - disappeared after the Truce came into operation and was never heard of since.

The strength of the 1st Battalion, as regards numbers, had increased substantially by now, but the arms position was very poor indeed. The Dunboyne Company was the best armed unit in the area, having about seven Mauser rifles and thirty revolvers and two Automatic pistols. At this time Volunteer William Reilly of Dunboyne was shot dead by his own comrades. The Dunboyne Company were holding a drill parade and had an outpost line protecting this parade against surprise by enemy forces. O'Reilly tried to get through this outpost line to the parade centre and was shot dead in trying to do so. He was buried in Dunboyne cemetery with full military honours.

Sir John French had visited Ballymacoll House outside Dunboyne on a couple of occasions. Ballymacoll House was occupied at this time by the Honourable Kay McKee who was a big noise in the Horse Racing and breeding industry. We received information from some of the household staff that French was going to dine there on a certain

night. We laid an ambush for him on the road between Dunboyne and Ballymacoll House, but he did not turn up that night. We had about fourteen men armed with six rifles, revolvers and shotguns in position behind the hedges and banks on the roadside and in the woods.

A week later we took up ambush position at the gateway of the entrance to Court Hill House. The County Inspector of the R.I.C. and his bodyguard used to visit this house which was owned by Mr. McCarthy. The ambush was called off by orders of the Brigade O/C., and twenty minutes after our men withdrew from the position the D.I. and another R.I.C. officer and their escort passed through the gates on the way to the house. No explanation was ever given to us as to why the attempt was cancelled. It was peculiar that any attempt that was made to do anything in the Dunboyne area was always cancelled by Brigade orders and it took some time before it became apparent to us that the Brigade staff, who had their headquarters there, were determined to keep it a quiet area. This was very disheartening to the men of the Dunboyne Company and surrounding areas who were really good lads.

Our Battalion and principally the Dunboyne area now became an area of great activity in another direction. It became a clearing house for all despatches to and from the North and North-West of Ireland. Likewise, arms and explosives and all types of small equipment were being passed through Dunboyne en route to their destinations in the North and North-West of Ireland. Our men were continually handling this sort of material and passing it along. This often entailed long journeys by cycle at night. The roads were none too safe at this time as one might run into hold-ups at any time. Yet by careful scouting and with the co-operation of the local Volunteers everything was handled very successfully and without loss.

So bad was the pressure of work that we were compelled to commandeer cycles from the civilian population in order to keep our men on the road. Nicholas Moran was the Company Captain in Dunboyne and he did an enormous job of work in organising and in keeping in operation this shuttle service and accounting for it. Moran was one of the officers from our Battalion who had taken part in the capture of Trim barracks. It was now quite apparent why the Brigade were keeping Dunboyne and our Battalion area generally a quiet zone. Had anything taken place there and the British had established more posts in it or thrown a large number of troops into it, it would have been impossible to keep this essential line of communication open. The Dunboyne area was also used as a rest centre for men "on the run" in Dublin city and many of them, including Michael Collins, often came out there for a few days.

About the end of April, 1921, the 1st Eastern Division was organised and a reorganisation of the whole Meath and surrounding areas also took place. Seán Boylan, formerly Brigade O/C., became Divisional Commander. Patrick Clinton was appointed Divisional Adjutant. Seamus Higgins, who was formerly Brigade Quartermaster, now became Divisional Quartermaster. Eamon Cullen became Divisional Engineer and Seamus Finn, assisted by Paddy Mooney and Arthur Levins, became Divisional Training Officer. Headquarters of the Division was at Dunboyne.

There were nine Brigades making up the Division as follows :-  
 1st Brigade which was ours comprising the area of South Meath and portion of Kildare along it's northern border; 2nd Brigade, the area, Navan and Trim - 3rd Brigade, Kells, Virginia and Mullagh in the County Cavan: 4th Brigade comprised the Delvin area: 5th Brigade comprised Mullingar and North Westmeath area; 6th Brigade - the Edenderry area: 7th Brigade - Naas and South Kildare: 8th (Brigade) Fingall, which comprised all North County Dublin and

East Meath, and the 9th Brigade which comprised Drogheda and South County Louth.

The officers appointed to command the different Brigades were as follows :-

1st. Brigade:	I was appointed to be O/C. of the Brigade.
2nd "	O/C. Patrick Kelly
3rd Brigade	" Patrick Farrelly
4th "	" Michael Hiney
5th "	" James Maguire
6th "	" John Powell
7th "	" Thomas Lawlor
8th "	" Michael Lynch
9th "	" Eugene Kavanagh.

As I have said, I was appointed to command the 1st Brigade although I had held no rank previously. Michael McCormack of Kilcock was appointed as my second-in-command, and Bernard Dunne, who was formerly our Battalion O/C, was appointed Brigade Adjutant. James Maguire of Dunboyne was appointed Brigade Quartermaster. The Battalions comprising the Brigade were - 1st Battalion, Dunboyne area; 2nd Battalion, Dunshaughlin area; 3rd Battalion, Leixlip area and the 4th Battalion, the Kilcock area.

The officers appointed to command the Battalions were :-

1st Battalion	- Peter Callaghan (deceased)
2nd "	- Gus Gillic
3rd "	- Patrick Mullally
4th "	- Michael Flynn.

The arms position in the Brigade was bad. We had twenty-five old Mauser rifles, two Winchester repeating rifles, two old pattern long Lee Enfield rifles, quite a good few revolvers of all types

from .22 to .45 Webley and Colt. But there were only a few of the latter. There were a couple of hundred shot guns of all types and, I think, sixty-three bombs or grenades of the G.H.Q. type. There were also a couple of Automatic pistols - Peter-the-Painter type. We also had three Thompson sub machine guns with, I think, twenty-nine pans of ammunition given to us for custody. These had recently arrived from America and were the forerunners of a large consignment which it was proposed to have landed near Skerries on the Dublin coast. The ship conveying these never arrived as it was seized by the Americans Customs Authorities. I understand there were five hundred guns and a big supply of ammunition on it. Ammunition for all our weapons was very limited and would only amount to a few rounds per rifle. The situation as regards revolver ammunition was slightly better.

The Divisional Headquarters had a Divisional dump in our area, but what they kept there I do not know. When Trim R.I.C. Barracks was captured somewhere between twenty and twenty-five rifles of the Lee Enfield Carbine type were got there, together with hand-grenades ammunition and revolvers. The vast bulk of the material was, I understand, held in the Divisional Dump; but we were never given any of it and it never came under our control and the only time it was brought into use, as far as I know, was at the ambush attempt on the troop train at Stuckumney.

Training in the Brigade area was now intensified. A Brigade Active Service Unit or Flying Column was established and went into billets at Woodlands, Batterstown, for training. Patrick Mooney of Trim, who was Assistant Divisional Officer, supervised this training, but he had to look after the Fingal Brigade Column at Moorestown. I took command of our Column. We had twenty-six men in continuous training and we also took in men from the

different Battalions for short courses of training. Local Volunteers also came in in the evenings and on Sundays to train with us. The Column proper was composed of men who were mostly 'on the run' at this time and were drawn from the whole Brigade area.

For armament the Column had twenty-one Mauser rifles and a large number of shotguns. There was also a number of revolvers of different types available. We had no proper beds but lay on straw in the old buildings at Woodlands which were well in from the public road. We commandeered a number of horse rugs for training stables near Dunsany which we used as blankets. We also commandeered some proper bedding. The weather was very fine and warm at the time; so bedding was not one of the main troubles.

We purchased our groceries and cigarettes from Mr. Kerlin of the 'Hatchet'. We had no money to pay for them and yet, to Mr. Kerlin's credit, he never refused our orders. He delivered the goods in his own van to Mrs. Geoghean of Woodlands where we collected them. When the Provisional Government was established we succeeded in having Mr. Kerlin paid. His bill was one hundred and thirty-three pounds odd.

We also commandeered a number of sheep from farmers, making it a point - like the Fox - never to take them from any of the farmers in the vicinity of our camp. It was mostly from Mr. Delaney of Portrane we took the sheep and here again Mr. Delaney never complained. We always took the sheep at night and the following morning gave Mr. Delaney a receipt for the animals. He kept all these receipts carefully and later on he was paid for them at the rate of £5. per sheep. We had to bury the skins and offal as it would not be safe to dispose of them. We kept a continual guard

on the Camp and in this we were assisted by the local Volunteer Companies. The British Authorities never found out anything about our whereabouts and, as far as I know, were completely in the dark about us.

The King of England had come over to Belfast and opened the Northern Ireland Parliament and for this a large number of troops had been drafted to Belfast from the Curragh. The troops were conveyed by train. It was now planned by our Divisional Staff to ambush one of these troop trains at Stuckumney when it was returning to the Curragh and an extraordinary thing about it was that it was the biggest train containing several hundred soldiers that was selected. There was another train which contained only three hundred troops and this, one would think, would be the one to be attacked. The dates and times of the train's departure from Belfast and Dublin were known to the Divisional Staff.

There was intense activity by the Division now preparing for this event. The ground had to be reconnoitred and maps studied. Materials, which included a number of concrete mines for placing between the rails, had to be conveyed to the site secretly and plans made to get the men away after the ambush. In the latter case it was planned to commandeer a number of motor cars and trucks and have them standing by at Stuckumney to take our men away. This also meant selecting capable drivers who were none too plentiful then. All this entailed a huge amount of work and planning and, as Divisional Headquarters was in our Brigade area, the major part of it fell on us.

About one hundred Volunteers were mobilised for this affair which was a big affair and was the first operation on a Divisional scale in the area and, I think, also in Ireland. The Fingall

Brigade and men from the 2nd Brigade and other units were called in for it. All men were armed with rifles of a Service pattern and the Thompson Sub Machine Guns were also amongst the equipment. Eleven of our Column took part. The Volunteers assembled near Dunboyne on Friday night the 15<sup>th</sup> July and proceeded across country to Stuckumney. This, in itself, was quite an undertaking to take so many men across country at night. On arrival at the selected spot the men were put into two houses nearby while the Engineers proceeded to lay mines on the railway. I think about seven mines were laid between the down rails. The railway runs through a slight cutting at the point selected and there was a road bridge over the railway in the centre of the cutting and from this bridge it was intended to detonate the mines. All the engineering work was the responsibility of the Divisional Engineer Eamon Cullen.

The Volunteers were to take up position behind the embankment of the cutting and when the mines exploded under the train they were then to rake the train with rifle, Thompson gun fire and grenades. To my mind the site selected for the ambush was not at all suitable. All went well on the morning of the attack - the mines had been successfully laid and connected up and the last of our men were just about to take up position when a party of British military in lorries arrived on the scene and opened fire on our men. A short fight ensued between some of our men and the British military.

This surprise attack on our men now meant that the ambush of the train was off. The train contained six or seven hundred troops and was almost due and this put our party in a nasty position. Our men were caught in the back of the attacking party of British soldiers and they were very lucky to extricate themselves which they did without sustaining any serious injuries. All the Volunteer

attacking party now retreated, but our mines had to be left in the railway and were lost. The different parties succeeded in getting safely away after many individual adventures and returning to their own areas.

One man belonging to our Column broke his leg when jumping a bank. He rolled himself into a ditch and concealed himself in the underground. The British military searched the area thoroughly but did not find him. Mr. Wardell's herd found him the following day and loaded him into his donkey's cart and took him to his own house. This man's rifle was lost and I believe the military picked it up.

The failure to bring off this ambush after such elaborate preparations was a severe blow to our morale, and shook our confidence in our higher commanders. It was the first operation under Divisional control and why they should have selected one, on such an elaborate scale I do not know, but I think G.H.Q. were pressing them for big things at this time. Feelers for peace were being put out by the British Government at this time and G.H.Q. and the Dáil wanted to put on the pressure on a big scale to impress the British Government. The fact that so many men could be assembled under arms and the mines on the railway and so forth I suppose had some effect in this respect. A peculiar thing about the operation was that, while the principal members of the Divisional Staff were present and looking after their own aspect of the operation, there was no one really in charge. The Divisional Commander was not there.

The Truce came into force shortly after this and we had no further opportunity of having another crack at the enemy. We did not really know what to think about the Truce - we seemed to be all

in a dream and it took some little time to get accustomed to it, and to realise one could go home and sleep and go about freely again. None of us, however, thought that it would last very long as we did not trust English politicians and, accordingly, plans and training were intensified to meet the situation should a break take place. On the whole we had come off lightly in the previous years. We had about nineteen Volunteers from our area arrested and now detained and there were about thirty-five to forty men on the British 'wanted' list and 30 'on the run'.

We had destroyed about twenty bridges in the area, all on the main arteries used by the enemy. We had tried to destroy the bridge on the main Dublin/Navan Road at Clonee, but this had failed us. It was a very strong bridge and would require the use of explosives which were not available. Our men were continually engaged in cutting telegraph and telephone wires and poles and thus interrupting enemy communications, and in felling trees across roads to block them to the enemy. When we were trying to throw down the bridge at Clonee we had twenty men in an ambush position in case a party of enemy forces might come along. None came.

We had Intelligence sections organised within the Brigade and Battalions under Intelligence Officers. They were not of much use from the Military Intelligence point of view as, with the exception of Dunshaughlin, there were no large enemy posts in our area. There were a number of R.I.C. and Black and Tans' stations in the area. The Intelligence sections were useful for keeping watch on people who were inclined to be friendly or helpful to the enemy and in the tracking down of local lawbreakers. Every Volunteer was an Intelligence agent and reported all items which attracted his attention.

There was a Constable Malone serving in the R.I.C. and stationed in Dunshaughlin. This man was very useful to us. He had

a motor cycle and usually travelled up to us in uniform with a civilian coat over his uniform. He kept us informed of all bits of information he could lay hands on, such as who was giving information to the enemy around Dunshaughlin, and the areas and persons who were wanted by the police and the houses and districts that were going to be raided. Much earlier on Malone was going to resign from the R.I.C. but we prevailed on him not to do so, as he could render much better service to us by staying in the Force. There was also a Constable Crean in Dunshaughlin Barracks who was also helpful and he collaborated with Malone. A Mr. Costigan, who was a National Teacher in Dunshaughlin, was also useful. Costigan was not a member of the I.R.A. and was very friendly with the Police and with the District Inspector of Police. In this way he was able to pick up useful bits of information which he handed on to us. The Post Offices in the area were not of any use to us. The people who ran them were afraid to co-operate with us.

There were three men dealt with for being British Intelligence agents in the area. Patrick Duke of Warrenstown supplied information to the police in Dunshaughlin about the whereabouts of a Volunteer who was 'on the run' and for whom the enemy was looking. The ugly part about this was that Duke was a particular pal of this Volunteer and they were nearly always together. Duke was an ex-British Army man. Duke gave a note to Constable Crean in Dunshaughlin telling him where his pal was. Crean had, of course, to hand the note to his superiors but, before doing so, he showed it to Constable Malone. Malone took a copy of it and came up to us that night with it but, in the meantime, the Volunteer had been arrested. We were now looking for Duke but he disappeared. Some days later, Coleman, who was our Brigade Signal Officer, came to me and told me that Duke was

in a certain public house after coming off the train from Dublin and that he was speaking to him.

Coleman had only left me when a dispatch arrived from Dublin by motor cycle which was marked "Urgent". The dispatch stated that two I.R.A. Intelligence Officers in Dublin had seen Duke coming out of Dublin Castle that afternoon. They followed him and he entered a public house in Capel Street. They went into the pub and got into conversation with him and, putting on English accents, led him to believe they were of the English Forces. He showed he was in sympathy with them about the I.R.A. They asked him why he did not join the British Forces and he told them he was an Intelligence Agent for the British. They got his name and address from him. They followed him when he left the public house and saw him board a train at the Broadstone Station for Dunboyme and the Meath line. The time of departure by train was given in the dispatch.

When we went to look for Duke he was gone but the following Sunday night two Volunteers named Lynch, who were not brothers, went to his house and found him there. One of the Volunteers was armed; the other was not. They took him out and when some distance from his house told him to kneel down and say his prayers as he was going to be shot. He made as if to kneel down but instead jumped on the armed Volunteer, knocking him down, and started to grapple with him to get possession of the gun. The other Volunteer gave Duke a few kicks and he, Duke, then jumped up and made a dash for liberty. There was plank across the ditch from the road to the field and he made for this. Of course, he knew the area around his own place well. As he

turned for the plank the armed Volunteer fired at him; but he succeeded in getting across and disappearing. It was dark at the time. The Volunteers searched for him but could not find him and he got clear away. Duke now joined the R.I.C. and was stationed in the Depot in the Park, Dublin. He did not behave badly, however, and did not lead the Tans in any raids around his native place.

When peace came again Duke returned home and subsequently married a local girl. I was often speaking to him about the affair and he showed me a long scar across his chest where the bullet fired by the Volunteer had caught him. He believes the act of turning for the plank saved his life. He also told me he knew the two Lynchs quite well that night and that while they were searching for him in the field they almost walked on him a couple of times.

Another man named Cavigan, whom the evidence was also strong against, succeeded in escaping from the Volunteers who were holding him pending his Courtmartial. This man also joined the Tans and subsequently led them around his native district and was responsible for having a few Volunteers arrested. He fled the country when the Tans were disbanded and was not heard of since. John Donoghue of Ratoath was executed for spying. Donoghue, although very young, was also an ex-British Army soldier. He had been giving information to the police in Dunshaughlin about the Kilbride Company. As a result of the information supplied by him, Michael Manning was arrested by the Black and Tans and given a bad time. He was beaten and made to dig a hole for himself. They put him in the hole and then filled it up to his neck with clay. They did not shoot him however. Donoghue was shot and tied with the usual label - "Spies and Informers Beware". There were other people suspected in the area, but there was no concrete evidence against them.

The only munitions that were made in the area were buckshot and concrete mines. Quite a few of the latter were made. We made our own buckshot and filled it into cartridges, but it was next to impossible to keep cartridges dry in dumps and it was hard to load them and well nigh impossible to extract them. We did not try to make bombs, as we could usually rely on G.H.Q. to provide these, and we had a fair share of them.

We raided the mails many times but the principal raids were on the mail trains. Twice we seized the mails but we never found anything of value in them.

Just shortly before the Truce we raided the house of the former Captain of the old Culmullen Company. This man had ceased to be a Volunteer when his Company was broken up and he retained the few arms the Company had and refused to give them up. We recovered two Winchester rifles, three or four revolvers and some explosives. Another man named Wallace was known to have a Colt revolver but would not admit having it. After the Truce he was going around flaunting this gun and vowing that anyone who interfered with him would get the contents. He was an undesirable character to have with a gun. One night I was on my bicycle on the road and I came upon this man. I was armed and I held him up and found the Colt revolver on him which I duly took possession of.

SIGNED: David Hall

DATE: 14 December 1956

WITNESS: Matthew Larry Crotti

