

N.S. 1.272

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILENTA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1272

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,272

Witness

James Collins, T.D.,
Convent Terrace,
Abbeyfeale,
Co. Limerick.

Identity.

Captain Abbeyfeale Company;
Vice O/C. Abbeyfeale Battalion;
Brigade Adjutant West Limerick Brigade.

Subject.

Abbeyfeale Company Irish Volunteers,
Co. Limerick, 1915-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S.2564

Form B.S.M. 2

Bureau of Military History, 1913-1921.

STATEMENT BY

James Collins, T.D.,
.....Address..... Convent Terrace,
.......... Abbeyfeale, CO. LIMERICK.
.....

Date..... 5 October, 1955.

ORGANISATIONS WITH WHICH ASSOCIATED.

Irish Volunteers.

Irish Republican Army.

POSTS OR RANKS HELD.

Company Captain, Abbeyfeale.

Battalion Vice O/C, Abbeyfeale.

Brigade Adjutant, West Limerick Brigade.

PERIOD COVERED BY STATEMENT.

1915 - 1921.

COMMENTS OF INVESTIGATING OFFICER.

The witness, who is fifty-five years of age, is an auctioneer. He seems to have a very good memory and related the happenings of the period with apparent ease and confidence. His evidence was dictated to me in several interviews and expanded by questions which I put to him. He appeared to be anxious to furnish details of his evidence as accurately as his memory would permit.

..... John J. Daly
Signature of Investigating Officer.
(JOHN J. DALY)

Date..... 5 October, 1955.

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STATEMENT OF JAMES COLLINS, T.D.,
Convent Terrace, Abbeyfeale, Co. Limerick.

I was born in the parish of Abbeyfeale on the 31st October, 1900, and was one of a family of three boys and three girls. My parents, who were farmers, sent me to the local national school until I was fourteen years of age, after which I attended a private school run by a man named Mr. Danaher. While attending the private school, I became an apprentice to a chemist in the town of Abbeyfeale whose name was Richard B. Woulfe. After completing my apprenticeship, I was retained in his employment for some years until I was forced to go on the run during the Black and Tan terror.

Mr. Woulfe's wife was Miss Cathie Colbert, sister of Con Colbert (executed after Easter Week 1916) and James Colbert, and cousin of Michael Colbert who later became Brigade Vice O/C, West Limerick Brigade. The Woulfe's were great supporters of the Irish independence movement and their shop and house, from the earliest days of the movement, became a meeting place for men like Con Colbert, Captain Ned Daly and others who later figured prominently in the fight for freedom.

A Company of the Irish Volunteers was formed in Abbeyfeale in May, 1914. I did not become a member at the time. The strength of the Company was about three hundred. A Dr. Hartnett was the chief organiser, and an ex British soldier, named James Wall, was one of the drill instructors. They did not hold together for long and ceased to exist early in the year 1915, after John Redmond's speech in the House of Commons in which he offered the semi-trained Volunteers of Ireland to fight

for the freedom of small nationalities.

Some time later in the year 1915, Ernest Blythe visited Abbeyfeale and reorganised the Company. I was one of nine members who joined the Company at its inception. I was only fifteen years of age at the time. A man named Thomas Fitzgerald of the Railway Bar, Abbeyfeale, was our first Company Captain.

A short time previous to Easter Week, 1916, Captain Ned Daly and Con Colbert visited Woulfe's where I was employed. They were in uniform. On Thursday of the Holy Week previous to Easter Week, the late Batt O'Connor, who later became T.D. for a Dublin constituency, visited Woulfe's on his way from Dublin to Tralee with despatches. He was on a bicycle which he asked me to take past the R.I.C. barracks for him, in case the R.I.C. became suspicious. On Easter Sunday morning, the late Pierce McCann arrived at Woulfe's in a Wolseley motor car on his way to Tralee. He enquired for the best road to take there and was advised to take the Castleisland road. I got into the car and acted as his pilot for part of the way. Just as we left Woulfe's, four R.I.C. men put up their hands to stop the car in the town. McCann slowed down but, just as he got abreast of the R.I.C., he shot off again on his way. When we arrived at Feale's bridge, we saw a couple more R.I.C. men on duty at the bridge and avoided them by taking a bog road via Knocknagoshel to Tralee.

Immediately after Easter Week, the local R.I.C. were on the look-out for Monteith who had landed with Roger Casement at Banna strand. My employer had got word that he was in the Ballymacelligott area of Co. Kerry.

Mr. Woulfe sent me to Fr. O'Flaherty of Brosna, Co. Kerry, to borrow his car for the purpose of bringing Monteith to Co. Limerick. Fr. O'Flaherty agreed to lend the car which was a model T-Ford. Soon after, Peter Byrne, Junior, of Abbeyfeale, who was usually employed by Fr. O'Flaherty to drive the car, collected it and later brought Monteith from Ballymacelligott to Batt Laffan's of Killowan. From this to early spring of 1917, there was no activity.

In the spring of 1917 the same nine or ten men, who had previously formed the Company before Easter Week of 1916, met once again. Captain Fitzgerald again became O/C. We held routine meetings and drilled up to the end of the year. A short time after the general release, Abbeyfeale Company, with Athea, Tournafulla, Mountcollins and Templeglantine Companies, were formed into a Battalion. Dr. E. Hartnett of Abbeyfeale became Battalion Commandant.

During the conscription scare of 1918, our Company strength increased to forty-seven men. We collected some shotguns and intensified drilling at the time. After the scare, a number of the Volunteers, including some of our officers, left the Company. A re-election of officers then took place. I became Company Captain, the late P.J. O'Neill, 1st Lieutenant, and Laurence Hartnett, 2nd Lieutenant. About the end of June of this year, a despatch from G.H.Q., Dublin, arrived at Woulfe's for delivery to P.J. Cahill, Brigade O/C, Kerry No. 1 Brigade. I took the despatch to Listowel where members of the local Company refused to accept it or have it transmitted to Cahill. I then proceeded to Tralee where I contacted some members of the Tralee Volunteers in a railway signal

cabin near the town. They also refused to accept the despatch but directed me to where Cahill resided. After some abuse by Cahill's relatives, the despatch was accepted. The reason for the refusal of the Listowel and Tralee Volunteers to accept responsibility for the delivery was that curfew was in operation at the time following the shooting of two R.I.C. men in the town of Tralee on the 14th June, 1918, by Tom MacEllistrim and another Volunteer for their part in the shooting of two Volunteers some time previously: At the latter end of the year, with other Volunteers of West Limerick, I assisted in the election campaign in East Limerick where Dr. Hayes was the Sinn Féin candidate. Con Collins, the Sinn Féin candidate in West Limerick, was returned unopposed.

Routine drilling continued during the year 1919. Following the rescue of Seán Hogan at Knocklong railway station in May of this year, Seamus Robinson, Dan Breen and Sean Treacy, with Seán Hogan, arrived in the West Limerick Brigade area where they stayed in various farm houses for some time. They had been in the area for some time when a man, who gave his name as Peadar Clancy of G.H.Q., Dublin, also arrived in the area and was taken to Mrs. Kennedy's of Castlemahon where Dan Breen and the other three men had stayed for a while. After a while, 'Clancy' disappeared for a few weeks but returned again. This time he arrived at Woulfe's of Abbeyfeale in a pony and trap, driven by a Volunteer named Mick Sheehan of Templeglantine. At Woulfe's he announced his name as 'Clancy' of G.H.Q., Dublin, and produced identity papers which seemed to be in order. I was working in the shop at the time. Mrs. Woulfe called me and told me that she knew the Clancy family of Dublin and that this man was not one of them. She was very suspicious of him and

warned me to be careful. 'Clancy' had said he wanted to go to Co. Kerry on very important business and asked to be taken part of the way there. I procured a pony and trap and called on another Volunteer, named Michael Downey, and sent him to Hickey's of Ballinatrín to warn them that I was taking 'Clancy' there. Breen and his companions had stayed at Hickey's for a while. I brought 'Clancy' to Hickey's and handed him over to a Volunteer, named John Carmody, to proceed on his journey.

As a result of Mrs. Woulfe's suspicions, 'Clancy' was eventually arrested and tried as a spy specially employed by the British to track down Seán Hogan and his three friends. Seán Hogan, who was in Dublin at the time of the arrest, came down for the court martial and identified 'Clancy' as a man named Crowley of Fermoy. Crowley was subsequently executed and labelled "spy".

Earlier in the year 1919, agrarian trouble started in the parish which lasted for nearly two years. It appears to have been started by a creamery manager, named O'Mahony, who dismissed a number of labourers and employed some farmers' sons in their place. It was a common practice for one or other of the two parties to come out at night and fire a few shots through the windows of their opponents' houses. Eventually, the farmers formed themselves into what they called a vigilance committee and, in company with members of the R.I.C., patrolled the parish. No members of the I.R.A. were involved on either side. This was the position that existed when an order was received at the latter end of the year 1919 from the Brigade O/C, Seán Finn, to collect all shotguns in the area. We managed to collect a few guns but these farmers refused to co-operate and held on to their guns.

The position continued up to May, 1920, when the 'London Daily Mail', in an item of news one day referring to this and other incidents in Ireland, said that "Abbeyfeale was the one bright spot in the Empire", or words to that effect. An evening or two later, I again saw a group of armed farmers in the town. They were joined by a number of R.I.C. men and, in a body, they proceeded to patrol the town and parish. I reported the matter to the Brigade O/C. In the meantime, our 1st and 2nd Lieutenants, Laurence Hartnett and P.J. O'Neill, respectively, raided the home of the Chairman of the vigilance committee and seized his shotgun and revolver. Seán Finn later contacted me and, after a short discussion, we decided to raid every farmer connected with the Committee and seize their arms in daylight.

Accompanied by Seán Finn, P.J. O'Neill, Slope Reidy and Con Creegan, I seized a motor car, the property of O'Mahony, the creamery manager who had started the trouble, and went from one farm to another and collected a total of seventeen shotguns and a number of revolvers which had been issued by the R.I.C. As we drove into the farmyard of James Lane, who was a Justice of the Peace, his son, Dan, opened fire with a revolver on us and wounded Reidy in the arm. As he discharged the shot, I jumped out of the car. He recognised me and approached with his hands up and apologised for firing. He, it appears, had taken us for the labour agitators. He handed over his revolver and a shotgun, afterwards bringing us into the kitchen and treating us to our dinner.

We returned to Abbeyfeale with our car loaded with rifles and revolvers, and proceeded to the residence of William Creagh-Hartnett, another J.P., and seized a rifle

and shotgun. We then went to the residence of a man named Woulfe, also a J.P., of The Glen, Cratloe, Abbeyfeale, where we got another rifle. By the 1st June, every farmer in the area, including those attached to the vigilance committee, had joined the I.R.A. I swore them in and administered the oath. Our membership went up to one hundred and twenty men.

About the first week of June, 1920, Humphrey Murphy, Battalion O/C of Kerry No. 2 Brigade, with the help of Duagh Company, Kerry No. 1 Brigade, and members of the West Limerick Brigade, decided to attack an R.I.C. barracks at Brosna in Co. Kerry. I mobilised Abbeyfeale Company for the occasion. Other Companies in the West Limerick Brigade were also mobilised for the same night. We blocked all main roads and placed armed men at each road block. Unfortunately, the R.I.C. got word of the impending attack and had a party of military stationed on and around Feale's bridge. An advance party of the Duagh Company, who were in a motor car, drove right into the military at the bridge. Six I.R.A. men in the car were arrested. I got word of the arrests in a short time and sent a despatch rider - P.J. O'Neill - to Mountcollins where Humphrey Murphy and the attacking party had mobilised at a creamery there. Murphy decided to call off the attack.

About 14th June, I received a despatch from G.H.Q., Dublin, signed by Gearoid O'Sullivan, through Seán Finn, Brigade O/C, to seize R.I.C. correspondence from Co. Kerry to the Castle, Dublin. I contacted P.J. O'Neill and Michael Collins (nicknamed Bird) from Abbeyfeale Company, James Roche and two others from Templegauntine Company. We proceeded to Barna railway station on the

15th. The mail train was just steaming into the station. As it came to a standstill, Bird jumped on to the footplate of the engine and ordered the driver and fireman on to the platform. The driver, seeing me, pointed to a coach where a number of military officers were chatting to a local solicitor named Lavin. I opened the door of the coach and, pointing my revolver, ordered, "Hands up". To my surprise, they obeyed. They were all unarmed. In the meantime, the rest of my party were busy throwing the mail bags, further along in another compartment, out on to the platform. While this was happening, the officers kept their hands up. The train was held until the mail bags were carried to the roadside. We then let it proceed.

We had just carried the last of the mail bags on our backs to a dip in the first bye-road west of Barna station when two lorry loads of R.I.C. and Black and Tans flashed by the end of the bye-road. The stationmaster had 'phoned the R.I.C. in Newcastlewest and reported the raid while it was in progress. Later, we took the mails to Sugar Hill bog where we got in between some turf banks and sorted them out. We found the R.I.C. bag enclosed in a larger one. Among the parcels we found one which, for some reason or other, we thought suspicious. It was a pie addressed to an R.I.C. man. We opened it and inside found a letter from a Miss Collins of Abbeyfeale. Unknown to her friends and neighbours, she had married the R.I.C. man some time previously. He was apparently fond of pie. The letter informed her husband, among other things, that if James Collins (myself), P.J. O'Neill and Mahony were arrested, opposition to the R.I.C. would collapse in Abbeyfeale.. We returned the letter to Miss Collins with our compliments and a warning that she would be held responsible if any of the three men were arrested.

She immediately reported the matter to the local parish priest. We sent the police bag to Seán Finn who had it sent to G.H.Q., Dublin. It contained a complete report of the I.R.A. organisation in Co. Kerry.

A day or two later, the Brigade O/C, Seán Finn, informed us that Humphrey Murphy was to make another attempt to attack Brosna R.I.C. barracks. The attack actually took place on the 19th June. I was in charge of the West Limerick men whose duty it was to man road blocks which had been prepared for the occasion. Between thirty and forty men, including about twelve West Limerick men, took part in the actual attack which started around 12.30 a.m.

When I had placed my men who were armed with shotguns on the road blocks, O'Neill and I proceeded to Abbeyfeale hill which commanded a perfect view of Brosna village. The attack had lasted for some time when we saw some Verey lights lighting up the sky over Brosna. Around 4 a.m., the attack was called off. We had a perfect view of the retreat of the I.R.A. men from the village. As we were returning to one of the road blocks on the Abbeyfeale side of the hill, O'Neill spotted some R.I.C. men crawling on hands and knees through a valley up the hill towards Brosna. He pointed them out to me; there were twelve of them. We were on much higher ground, and opened fire together. We were armed with rifles. One R.I.C. man was wounded. They sighted the road block and opened fire on the men located there. We kept up the rifle fire until they eventually withdrew to Abbeyfeale whence they had come. We had the advantage, as they did not know our strength. The attack on the barracks itself was a failure. Some time later that morning, the R.I.C.

raided my father's house for me. Luckily for my two brothers (who had also taken part in the activities of that morning) and myself, we had not arrived home.

A short time after the attempt on Brosna barracks, I received an order from the Battalion O/C, Maurice Hartnett, to burn down the local courthouse. Having procured a quantity of petrol and paraffin, I selected about twenty men from the local Company to carry out the job, including a man named McAuliffe whose father was a stationmaster at Lixnaw, Co. Kerry, and who resided with his grandfather at Pound Street, Abbeyfeale. I placed fourteen men in positions covering the barracks while the job was being carried out. Two of the men were armed with rifles; the others had shotguns. With six other men, I approached the courthouse. I carried an eighty-ounce bottle of ether which I had carefully wrapped in cotton-wool and other padding material. My intention was to hurl the bottle of ether into the building as soon as it had taken fire. McAuliffe was with me and carried a tin of petrol. The back of the courthouse was surrounded by barbed wire stretched on iron posts sunk into the ground. This wire had been cut in several places previously by my brother, Denis, to afford a way of retreat if necessary, as the barracks itself was only a few yards across the road from the courthouse.

As we were about to break one of the windows, McAuliffe began to tap the wall of the courthouse with the petrol tin and continued to do so for some time. Immediately, the R.I.C. opened fire from a gable window in the barracks which overlooked the courthouse. The petrol tin was dropped by McAuliffe and the petrol spilled out on the ground. We all retreated by the back

of the building. Luckily, the barbed wire had been cut.

I became very suspicious of McAuliffe after this incident. The tapping of the petrol tin was obviously a signal to the R.I.C. I was convinced that he had informed them of the proposed burning of the building but, sooner than bring him under suspicion with the other members of the Company, I did not mention the incident to anyone.

A fortnight later, I had all preparations made again to burn the courthouse and was determined to do it. I did not tell McAuliffe but he got to hear of it from some of the other men. When he asked me was it true that I was going to make another attempt on the courthouse, I had to admit it. On the night fixed for the second attempt on the 2nd June, 1920, while he and I were walking down the street at about 9 p.m., a big motor car arrived in the town and pulled up at Leahy's pub in the Square. Six men in civilian clothes got out and went into Leahy's. I stood at a corner and he grabbed me by the arm and said, "Come on". I refused to go near Leahy's pub. He proceeded alone. As he was passing the pub, he was grabbed by a couple of the men in civilian clothes and pulled inside. The men were R.I.C. He was placed under arrest and subsequently charged with the possession of firearms. When he had met me earlier, he told me that he wanted to go to his grandfather's house to collect his revolver for the burning of the courthouse. We would have to pass Leahy's house to reach his grandfather's. In fact, he had the revolver on him at the time. Next day, Mrs. Leahy, who was an aunt of Laurence Hartnett, our 2nd Lieutenant, told us that, as soon as the R.I.C. got him into the pub, they said to McAuliffe, "Where is he?". We

abandoned the proposed burning after this.

Next day, he was taken by lorry to Limerick prison. I was in the street at the time and saw him point me out to his R.I.C. escort. About a week later, his aunt, a Miss Mollie McAuliffe, approached me and told me that her nephew wanted to see me in Limerick prison and that he had something important to tell me. I did not want to go but eventually, when she hired a motor car to take me there, I agreed and brought my wife with me. I was still suspicious of McAuliffe and, at the last minute, would not enter the jail but arranged for my wife to take whatever message he had to a certain restaurant in the city where I decided to await the two women.

At the exact time that I had arranged to meet the two women, the restaurant was raided by R.I.C. and Black and Tans. They did not go near anybody else sitting at the tables but came straight to my table where I was sitting opposite a priest, also having a meal. They questioned me and searched me. I gave a false name. I could see they were not sure of me until the priest said, "This young man is a friend of mine", after which they left me alone.

McAuliffe was subsequently sent to Wormwood Scrubbs jail in England and was put into a cell next to Michael Relihan of Kilcara, Duagh, Co. Kerry, one of the six men arrested on the first attempt on Brosna R.I.C. barracks. The I.R.A. prisoners were on hunger strike there at the time, but McAuliffe was one of the men who were not forcibly fed on the occasion. It subsequently transpired that he was brought there to act as a spy on the rest of the prisoners. He was later released in October of that

year, on "medical grounds", as he said when he returned to the area. I did not meet him again until some time in 1920 when I was on the Flying Column.

To finish McAuliffe's story, he and Austin Stack had organised Sinn Féin Courts around West Cork during the Truce. One day during the period, I heard he was staying in a hotel in Newcastlewest. With a couple of I.R.A. men, I went to his room and arrested him, and disarmed him of a Webley revolver and eighteen rounds of ammunition. I reported the whole story to Liam Lynch. He was court martialled by Liam Lynch, during which he confessed to having been working for the enemy. He was ordered to leave the country. A short time after, I paid a visit to the Department of Home Affairs in Dublin and discovered that he was working for Austin Stack there. I was with Con Collins at the time. We told Stack of McAuliffe's career. Stack fired him on the spot. Next day, he arrived in Newcastlewest off the same train as myself. I subsequently searched his room and disarmed him of a Mills bomb. His next appearance was as a Captain in the National Army.

Around the end of June, 1920, a reorganisation of this Battalion and Brigade Staffs took place. Moss Hartnett remained Battalion O/C. I became Battalion Vice O/C in place of Jim Colbert who had become Brigade Vice O/C to Seán Finn, Brigade Commandant. Patrick John O'Neill, 1st Lieutenant, became Company Captain in my place.

One Sunday evening in July, a party of military and Black and Tans raided my father's house and asked to see the bedroom occupied by my brothers and me. During the course of the search, they took a coat from the

wardrobe and asked, "who was the owner". My mother said it was mine. As they were replacing it, she saw a Black and Tan putting two clips of ammunition into one of the pockets. He then called a military officer, took the ten rounds out and said, "Look at what I found here". My mother protested, saying she saw the Black and Tan putting the ammunition into the pocket. The Tan struck her with the butt of his rifle. The following day, a warrant was issued for my arrest.

At this time, I had staying with me an I.R.A. man named Patrick Buckley who had been in the R.I.C. and had, a short time previously, handed over to the I.R.A. an R.I.C. barracks in County Clare. He was subsequently blown up at Ballyseedy during the civil war. On the Monday after the ammunition was "found" in my pocket, Buckley and I, while armed with a rifle each, walked up Main Street of Abbeyfeale and proceeded a short distance outside the town, where I hurriedly mobilised about twelve members of the local Company for the purpose of attacking a party of four soldiers in charge of an officer who, earlier in the day, had pulled up in the town and had a drink in one of the pubs. The military were taking a lorry load of baled straw from Tralee to Limerick. It was my intention to attack them on their way back to Tralee. Besides Buckley and myself, four of the men were armed with rifles; the other eight had shotguns. We took up positions in extended formation on one side of the road at Ward's Cross at 3 p.m. We waited up to 10 p.m. The military party did not return.

On the following morning, an R.I.C. Constable named O'Mahony waited in church after Mass and informed Rev. Fr. Fitzgerald, C.C., that a party of Black and Tans was

to arrive in Abbeyfeale that evening to execute the warrant for my arrest. When I received this information, I left town that evening. I contacted the Brigade O/C, Seán Finn, who at the time was located at Springmount, Abbeyfeale. He had a small fighting unit of seven men with him at the time. They were all men on the run. They had just retreated from Loughill where, with the assistance of the O/C of the 5th Battalion and members of Ballyhahill Company, they had ambushed a party of R.I.C. and Black and Tans on the 7th July, in which a Constable Fahy was shot dead. I made the eighth man of the then active service unit.

About this time, an old man was shot dead in a field in Shanagolden by a Tan named Huckerby who, for his own safety, was subsequently transferred to Abbeyfeale. He was a thorough blackguard from his first day in the town, holding up the inhabitants at the point of the revolver and visiting public houses where he terrorised the owners and public generally. He was a crack-shot with a revolver, and one of his favourite pastimes was to throw a penny in the air and hit it with a shot from his revolver, or to shoot sparrows on the wing. The Brigade O/C decided to try and have him shot for the killing of the old man in Shanagolden. He told me to go into Abbeyfeale to try and get him. I brought a man named Fitzgerald - a New Zealander who had joined the I.R.A. - with me. When we arrived in the town, we dumped our bikes and went into a public house. While we were in the pub, we saw Huckerby in the street and were waiting for him to approach our position when a local man and his wife started to fight in the street. The man was beating his wife with an ash plant. Huckerby intervened and stopped him. As this was

happening, one of our men - Slope Reidy - arrived in the pub with a message from Finn, asking us to cancel the shooting of Huckerby as he (Finn) intended to carry out an ambush on a patrol of R.I.C. and Tans within a week or two in the town and that it was possible that we would be able to get Huckerby then.

Finn and I discussed the attack later and eventually decided to carry it out on Saturday night, the 19th September, 1920. The patrol consisted of ten men, including Huckerby. They usually patrolled from the barracks to a cross-roads outside the town, a distance of a quarter of a mile. Fifty armed men had been mobilised for the attack; eight of these had rifles; the others had shotguns. Finn was in charge. He divided the attacking party into three sections. Finn himself was in charge of one section, Moss Hartnett was in charge of the second section, while I was in charge of the third section. My section was located behind a ditch in extended formation between the barracks and the cross-roads. The other two sections were located behind fences at the cross-roads itself. We had taken up our positions only a short time when the patrol arrived as usual at the cross-roads. My instructions from Finn were to let the patrol up to the cross-roads before opening fire.

Before the order was given by Finn to open fire, one of our men at the cross-roads made a noise by accidentally breaking a branch of a tree. One of the R.I.C., named O'Mahony, (who had earlier warned me of my impending arrest) crossed over to investigate. Before he reached the fence, O'Neill, the local Company Captain, fired. O'Mahony fell dead. The patrol turned and ran

for the nearby presbytery. As they ran, our men at the cross-roads opened fire on them. The patrol appears to have reached the presbytery without further casualties. Some little time later, two priests - Fr. David Fitzgerald and Fr. John Carr - accompanied the patrol to the barracks. The police had placed O'Mahony's body in a cart which they pushed down the street with them. As the two priests were with the patrol, we in our section did not open fire. It so happened that the Tan, Huckerby, was not with the patrol that night.

On the Sunday night following, several lorry loads of R.I.C. and Black and Tans arrived in the town. Most of the local people had cleared out. The Tans remained for a couple of hours while they fired some thousands of rounds of ammunition all round them and bombed several houses, including O'Neill's and my father's. My father and sisters were in bed when they arrived. My mother and sisters had only just left the house when the first bomb came through the window.

About a week later, a lorry load of Auxiliaries and Black and Tans arrived in charge of a Colonel Latimer. They surrounded a field where my youngest brother, Michael, was working. They arrested him and took him to the local R.I.C. barracks, after which they took him out into a field at the back and tied him to a whitethorn bush where they beat him and questioned him to extract information from him as to the whereabouts of myself and other members of the attacking party that had shot O'Mahony. The local square was full of people watching the beating, when the local parish priest, Canon Creegan, came on the scene. He protested violently against the treatment being meted out to Michael and eventually

succeeded in getting the local District Inspector, R.I.C., to stop the beating and to 'phone Newcastlewest military barracks for the military. When the military arrived, the Auxiliaries and Black and Tans protested at their interference. They held on to Michael and would not hand him over. An argument then developed between the two parties and was becoming serious when the Tans and Auxiliaries released him and tied him by the legs to their lorry. Preceded by the military, the Auxiliaries dragged him through the town towards Newcastlewest. When they reached Barna, about six miles away, the military halted and again remonstrated with the Auxiliaries and Tans. By this time, he was unconscious. His head and body were battered and bruised. At last, they untied him and threw him into a dyke and left him for dead.

Some time later that day, a man and his wife, returning from Newcastlewest in a donkey cart, found him and took him to their home. They washed and cleaned him and got him medical attention. It was a week before we heard of his whereabouts. About four days later, he arrived home.

On the 22nd September, the Tan, Huckerby, followed two civilians out the road. They were Jer. Healy and Patrick Hartnett. Healy had just left his place of employment, and Hartnett his home. Hartnett's mother worked in the barracks, and he resembled my brother very much. A short distance outside the town, Huckerby halted the two men, took them into a field and shot them dead, through the forehead. He returned to the barracks and reported to the District Inspector that he had shot Collins and another I.R.A. man, around a

bend in the road. I received this information from a Constable Pattison who was acting I.O. for me in the barracks. At the subsequent inquiry, this reference to Collins was deleted. He (Huckerby) was removed the night of the shooting, under a military escort, to Limerick. I subsequently heard that he was sent to the Cork area where he took part in operations there.

Constable Pattison, R.I.C., was a Protestant and native of Skibbereen, Co. Cork. He sent his information to me through a Mrs. Edward W. Ford, Merchant, of Abbeyfeale or through two shop assistants there named Miss Nance Ahern and Miss Margaret Meade. It was he who confirmed that McAuliffe was working for the R.I.C. in the first instance.

A short time after the attack on the patrol in Abbeyfeale, it was the first week in October, a Brigade active service unit was formed. An active service unit of eight men had been in existence for some time. They had taken part in the attack on Kilmallock R.I.C. barracks and other attacks in the West Limerick area. Among the men accepted on the Brigade A.S.U. at the time were Patrick J. O'Neill, Daniel Murphy, my brother, Denis, Seán Hartnett, Laurence Hartnett and James Guiney. The Active Service Unit or Flying Column were whole-time and consisted of twenty-three men. We had eighteen rifles, a number of shotguns and some small arms. Seán Finn, already in charge of the smaller unit, remained in charge of the larger unit or column. At first, we were billeted in the Athea area but, after a while, we transferred to the Kilcolman area, near Shanagolden.

During the month of October, Seán Finn sent me and another man to the 3rd Battalion area to administer the oath. The headquarters of this Battalion was Drumcollogher. Con Foley was the Battalion O/C. I visited Feenagh, Kilmeedy, Castlemahon and Knockaderry Companies and administered the oath to each member of these Companies. The other man - I forget his name - administered the oath to members of the other Companies in that area.

About the end of October or early in November, I attended a Brigade meeting at Kilcolman at which a decision was taken to divide the Column into two sections. The Brigade O/C, Seán Finn's intention was to attack small patrols simultaneously in the east and west of the Brigade area. One section in charge of Garrett McAullife was sent into the 3rd and part of the 1st Battalion areas, while he remained in charge of the other section in the 2nd and 5th Battalion areas.

Some days after the Brigade meeting at which this decision was taken, the Brigade Adjutant, James Roche, while on his way to the Drumcollogher area from the meeting, was arrested. Seán Finn appointed me Acting Brigade Adjutant in his place. The section under Garrett McAuliffe was not very long in their area when Con Foley, Battalion O/C, reported to Seán Finn some indiscipline among the members of the section in his area. I understand that the trouble arose from the fact that some local I.R.A. men, who had been transferred to police duties following the setting up of Sinn Féin courts in the area, had some difficulty with the I.R.A. in enforcing the licensing regulations. Finn called another Brigade meeting to which the offenders were

summoned. They were severely reprimanded and cautioned as to their future behaviour.

Just before Christmas of 1920, we were billeted at Knocknasna, about two miles from Abbeyfeale. A few days before Christmas Day, Fr. David Fitzgerald of Abbeyfeale sent word to us that he would say Mass for us on Christmas morning if we could find a suitable house. We found the house. Fr. Fitzgerald arrived and said Mass at 4.30 a.m. There were eight of us present - Murphy, Guiney, Mahoney, John and Laurence Hartnett, O'Neill, myself and my brother. After Mass, he saw each man individually and gave each his blessing with the sign of the Cross on the forehead. As he made the sign of the Cross on my forehead, he said to me, "No bullet will ever shoot you". There must have been something in what he said, for I was in a few very tight corners subsequently but never got a bullet wound.

In February, 1921, the two sections of the Column reunited for an attack on a train at Barragone, midway between Foynes and Askeaton. The Brigade O/C had received information that a few R.I.C. were to travel, on the 17th of the month, to Limerick to give evidence at a court martial of an I.R.A. prisoner named Willie Madigan. Seán Finn detailed an I.R.A. man, named Liston or Histon, from Foynes to travel in the last coach of the train, with instructions to wave a white handkerchief once for each R.I.C. man or Black and Tan on the train. We had mobilised in the library at Ballyhahill and left at 2 a.m. on that morning to take up our positions.

We had taken up our positions in three sections

when the train arrived. It was the first one from Foynes. One section had occupied a position at a road bridge over the railway, another section in extended formation on the Shannon side of the railway, while the third section was located on high ground which formed the embankment of the railway line. I was in charge of the section on the road bridge. Seán Finn and Garrett McAuliffe were in charge of the other sections. About half of the men had shotguns; the others had revolvers or rifles. As the train came into our positions, an I.R.A. man named Con Boyle waved a red flag. He was standing on the line. The train came to a stop. Liston was seen to wave the white handkerchief from the carriage window up and down several times. It was certainly more than the four waves which we expected.

In my section were Con Creegan, Jerry Maloney, Larry Hartnett, John Joe Leahy and Daniel Murphy. As the train stopped, we opened fire. Garrett McAuliffe threw a bomb at a carriage window which rebounded on to the embankment. At the same time, a Black and Tan left one of the carriages and crawled underneath the train to the engine where he compelled the driver at the point of a revolver to start up the train. When it got around a bend, it halted. From this position, the R.I.C. and Tans opened fire on my section. We replied to their fire. In the short encounter, Laurence Hartnett was wounded. By this time, Finn and McAuliffe had retreated with their sections. Daniel Murphy and I managed to carry the wounded man a distance of three miles over very rough ground. He was bleeding profusely. We had only just reached safety when troops and Tans were poured into the area we had left.

That evening, the Column reassembled at Monohill schoolhouse where we slept, in relays, for the night. During the night it was decided to contact the East Limerick Flying Column and to request their assistance in carrying out an attack on an enemy patrol in the area of Ballyhahill. At this time, it was usual to see convoys of enemy lorries of not less than sixty men, made up of military, R.I.C., Auxiliaries and Black and Tans, supported by armoured cars, on the prowl.

Donnchadh O'Hannigan, O/C of the East Limerick Flying Column and his men arrived in the Athea area in Holy Week. They were all rifle men and brought with them a number of gelignite mines. With the East Limerick men, we numbered at least eighty men. On Holy Saturday morning we all went to Mass and Holy Communion in the local church, stacking our rifles outside in broad daylight while we were inside. Athea was surrounded by garrisoned towns at the time. It was only six miles from Abbeyfeale, eleven from Listowel and thirteen from Newcastlewest. Ballyhahill, which was not garrisoned, was eight miles from Athea.

After receiving Holy Communion, we were all billeted on the northern side of Athea village. While we were there, a large contingent of enemy forces passed through the area. They abandoned two lorries on the Black Heights as a ruse. Enemy machine gun nests were placed around the area overlooking the lorries. They had us completely surrounded, although we were not aware of it at the time.

Finn ordered me to select a few of our men and proceed to the abandoned lorries to investigate their contents and to burn them if possible. I selected

Jerry Maloney, Jimmy Sullivan, P.J. O'Neill, Seán Brouder, Jim Guiney and Paddy Naughton. About half-way down the side of an open mountain, Maloney volunteered to proceed ahead and scout the position. We remained where we were while he went forward. While he was gone, we received information from the local inhabitants that the surrounding countryside was occupied by armed military and Black and Tans. They pointed out to us where machine gun posts had been set up. When Maloney returned, I took my party back to Seán Finn and informed him of the position. Both he and O'Hannigan were satisfied that the enemy was aware of our presence in the area. They decided to move in a northerly direction that night to the Ballyhahill area.

We arrived in the Ballyhahill area at 1a.m. next morning. The East Limerick men were billeted in the village. Our men moved three miles north-west towards Glin. Seán Finn and Donnchadh O'Hannigan, with a few other men, moved to a billet about two miles north-east of the village. I was with them and had about reached my billet for the night when Finn, at the last moment, asked me to go back and take charge of the west Limerick men. I had on me at the time a bag containing the entire Brigade documents and correspondence. I agreed, returned to the village and proceeded to catch up on our own men, three miles away. I arrived in the locality about 4 a.m. and found our men. After a check up on the men present, I selected a guard for the next couple of hours and then went to bed with Naughton and O'Neill.

Later that morning, three lorry loads of R.I.C. and Black and Tans arrived from either Newcastlewest or

Adare. At Whiskey Hall Cross, they slowed down their lorries and cut off the engines. Some three members of the East Limerick Column were billeted in a house at this cross. Seeing the lorries, they left by the back door and ran into an open field. They were fired on as they ran. The Tans, instead of proceeding into the village, turned the lorries and went down a side road which ran alongisde the field the three men had taken. This side road led to the house of a man named Danagher of Woodview, where Seán Finn, Donnchadh O'Hannigan, Jim Colbert, Jimmy Finn and some others were billeted.

Hearing the shooting, Finn and O'Hannigan, who at the time were outside Danagher's house, ran for their rifles and gave the alarm and came out to investigate. By this time, the lorries had come within a few yards of them. While all of the I.R.A. men in Danagher's were running through a ploughed field, in single file, Finn was mortally wounded and another I.R.A. man, named Quane, was wounded through the jaw.

The death of Finn saved the other men. When the R.I.C. and Tans saw his dead body, they were so anxious to collect it that they failed to follow up the retreating men, thus saving them from certain death. I was asleep at the time, but Paddy Naughton, who was billeted with me, when informed that morning that shots had been heard to the east towards Ballyhahill, took no notice at the time. An hour later, I received a despatch, informing me that Finn had been shot and requesting me to mobilise our own men and bring them back to ~~At~~thea parish area again. Here we were billeted along the slopes of Direen, situated on the north-western boundary of the county, near Moyvane.

On the following morning, my brother, Denis, Jim Guiney and Patrick Naughton, while billeted in a house at Blain Bridge cross, got up early to wash their shirts. They decided to move elsewhere, as the house was on a public highway. They had only gone a few minutes when three lorry loads of Tans and R.I.C. arrived and searched the house, afterwards proceeding in the Glin direction.

After the shooting of Seán Finn, O'Hannigan decided to move his Column back to East Limerick. He asked for volunteers from the West Limerick Column to come with him. We were numerically too small to remain in our own area and carry out any effective attack on the enemy, with their huge concentrations all around us in Listowel, Newcastlewest and Abbeyfeale. About eighteen of the West Limerick men volunteered to join O'Hannigan's Column. Twelve of these, including myself, were from the Abbeyfeale or 2nd Battalion area.

Before we left for East Limerick, a re-shuffle of the Brigade Staff took place following the death of Seán Finn. Garrett McAuliffe replaced Seán Finn as Brigade Commandant. Michael Colbert became Vice O/C. I became Brigade Adjutant (I had been acting in that capacity since the arrest of James Roche), James Colbert, Quartermaster, and Edward Creegan, Brigade I.O.

In two night marches, we travelled from the extreme western boundary of the county, on the Co. Kerry border, to Elton, Knocklong. We moved around the area in various billets at the foot of the Galtees until Sunday, the 1st May, 1921. At daybreak on this particular day, Michael Colbert and I were on guard duty, protecting the eastern end of a Column in charge

of Ned Ryan of Cappawhite, when a cycle patrol of military - the Green Howard's - halted a short distance from where we were posted. Their officer, who was known as King of Galbally or Shakey Head, began to view the countryside with a binoculars. He was only thirty yards from a gateway where we were posted behind a pair of pillars. After a while, they mounted their bikes and proceeded towards Kildorrery. I reported the incident immediately to Ned Ryan who contacted O'Hannigan.

At this time, there were in East Limerick three Flying Columns. The eighteen men of West Limerick were divided among the three. I was attached to the Column in charge of Ned Ryan who was a blacksmith from Cappawhite. Michael Colbert of West Limerick was accepted as leader of another Column, and Dan Allis was in charge of the third Column. It appears that the reason for the cycle patrol's activities that morning was the fact that John Joe Hogan of Tipperary had burned down the home of a loyalist some time earlier the same morning.

On the assumption that the patrol would return by the same route later in the day, O'Hannigan immediately made plans to ambush them in the vicinity. Ned Ryan, whose column was on the spot, was ordered to take up ambush position. He divided his column into three sections and placed them in extended formation for a distance of half a mile, on one side of the main road east of Shraharla church. The main road connected the town of Galbally, from which the patrol had come, and the town of Mitchelstown. I was in charge of one of these sections, Michael Colbert was in charge of a second section while Ned Ryan himself took charge of

the third section. We were all armed with rifles. In the meantime, O'Hannigan was collecting the other two columns to reinforce our column. As these two columns were advancing towards our positions, through an open field, three lorry loads of mixed military and Black and Tans advanced along a bye-road which overlooked the field in which the two columns under Seán Carroll of Castleconnell and Liam Forde were proceeding to their positions. The lorries pulled up. The military and Tans opened fire with machine guns on our men in the field. They ran for cover of a ditch opposite to where part of Ned Ryan's column were placed. My section, which was in a flanking position, opened fire on the three lorries. Firing lasted for about an hour when the enemy was reinforced by an armoured car which raked the surrounding countryside with machine guns. Our column had to retreat as best we could. As we retreated, one of our men, Jimmy Humphries of hurling fame, was wounded and fell into a water-filled hole in the ground. I managed to pull him out and brought him with us. In the encounter, the other two columns had three I.R.A. men killed and one man wounded. The wounded man, whose name was Casey, was captured. He was subsequently executed after a drumhead court martial in Cork military barracks. The three dead men were collected that night by the local Company who arranged for their funerals.

Led by local scouts, we all reached Lackelly, Knocklong, that night where we billeted in the area. We were not long in bed when we were roused again. The Green Howard's were out early again and were raiding houses along the road where one of the columns was billeted. They were in charge of the same officer, King of Galbally. A Cumann na mBan girl, by the name

of May Maloney, saw the raiding party. She knew where our men were located and proceeded in that direction to warn them. They followed her. She turned into a bye-road and cycled around the first bend. Here the column had just mobilised. The military wheeled around after her and, at point blank range, fired into the assembled men, using a machine gun. Four of our men were killed on the spot. Murphy, one of the West Limerick men, was with this column and had a man shot dead each side of him. He afterwards related to me the incident of the priest who, on the Christmas morning previous, had said Mass for us and gave each of us his blessing afterwards. The priest, after making the sign of the Cross on his forehead, had also said to him, "No bullet will ever kill you!".

I was still with Ned Ryan's column but we were billeted some distance to the west of the column which had been attacked. A railway line lay between us. When our column heard the shooting, we advanced towards the point from which it came. On our way, we met a scout who informed us of the attack on the column and of the deaths of four of its members. We proceeded through a field near the railway line and took cover in some long rushes. A few minutes later, we saw some military crossing a gate immediately to our front. After a while, we saw a number of our own men coming into the same field in which we were located. As we approached the railway line, I saw two railway workers taking cover in the side of a ditch. They pointed to a belt of high oaks and lime trees east of the track and said that they saw soldiers climbing the trees. As I was in conversation with these two men, I saw a lone man, half

a mile away, running towards us. When he reached us, I saw it was O'Hannigan. It is now obvious that the cycle patrol of Green Howard's was only a decoy party. By the time we reached the railway line, reinforcements of military, Auxiliaries and Black and Tans were pouring into the area. I told O'Hannigan of the soldiers in the belt of trees. He replied, "Never mind! Try and get through!". He ordered our column under Ned Ryan, who by this time were all lying in the rushes and long grass, to proceed through an opening in a nearby fence into an adjoining field. When we got into this field, a section of Black and Tans, located in a ditch opposite, opened fire on us. We made for the cover of the railway fence on our bellies. While doing so, one of our men, named Reidy, was wounded in the leg. Another man, named Noonan, was also wounded and fell into a stream from which he was rescued. When we reached the cover of the railway fence, we replied to the fire of the Black and Tans in the ditch opposite. We had a short time previously seen the Black and Tan party who opened fire on us but, as they had their tunics thrown over their shoulders, we took them to be our own men.

Firing had lasted for about an hour when the Black and Tan party, with whom we were engaged, suddenly broke off the engagement. It seems that they had been attacked from behind by another section of our men. They retreated to a farmhouse a couple of hundred yards away. Our column then advanced into the position they had vacated. When we got there, we found the four dead bodies of our men who had been killed earlier that morning, as well as forty cycles which the enemy had abandoned.

The Black and Tans in the farmhouse were later joined by a party of military. We could not open fire in case we shot the woman of the house who was used as a screen by one of the military officers every time he came out to scan the countryside with a pair of binoculars.

The enemy, however, fired indiscriminately for over two hours at anything they saw moving. Several cattle around the house were shot dead. Eventually, the officer with the binoculars appeared alone. As he did so, he was shot dead by one of our men.

We eventually made for the belt of trees and got through without further interference. In the confusion of that day, it is not easy to give a correct picture of the fighting as it developed. The fight had lasted for eight hours when the enemy decided to withdraw. When it was over, the four dead men were collected as well as the forty cycles abandoned by the Green Howard's. The four dead men were buried next day in a corner of a field. A priest was present at the burial. The cycles were handed over to the local Company. Our Column had moved on; we did not wait for the burial.

That night, we were in an area around Kiltteely where, with three of our men, I was billeted in the house of a man named Quinn. Early next morning, we sent Miss Quinn out to buy some chocolate. As she left, the three men with me left by the back door to stroll around. When Miss Quinn returned, she informed me that a party of Black and Tans were approaching the house on foot. I was in bed at the time. I jumped up, dressed and grabbed four rifles, a bondolier and

two pairs of leggings, went out the back door, crossed a low wall and lay down there. The Tans searched the house and left by the back door, taking the opposite side of the back yard to that where I was lying down. In the meantime, the three men who had left the house earlier spotted the Tans and lay down. When the Tans had gone, they came along and collected their rifles.

Shortly after, some members of the local Company arrived. The night before, they had shown each man on the Column his billet for the night. They brought us to a double ditch where we assembled for further orders. Except for two men - my brother, Denis Collins, and James Guiney - the full Column was present. As we lay in the ditch, we could see the Tans raiding houses in the neighbourhood, including the house where my brother and James Guiney had slept during the night. The Tans left the house when they saw the owner - an old, deaf woman - lighting the fire. Unknown to her, her son had the two men upstairs all night. They joined us later. In the meantime, a 'plane, which flew overhead for six hours, assisted the Tans in their raids. We had to remain where we were.

That night, Sean Wall brought word that the West Limerick men were to move back to their own area. We were later joined by the East Limerick men who accompanied us to Howardstown on the fringe of the West Limerick Brigade area. We all billeted in the area for the night. Next evening, the West Limerick men proceeded to Granagh in our own area. We billeted here for the night but we were not long in bed when we were ordered up again to leave the district. Earlier that night, it appears that members of the local Company, while escorting a prisoner who had been sentenced to death,

were surprised by a military patrol. An exchange of shots took place in which one of the escort was shot dead. His name was O'Shea. We got on the march again and covered the forty miles via Castletown to the Ballyhahill area before we could get a sleep.

Garrett McAuliffe, Brigade O/C, and Ned Creegan, Brigade I.O., had remained in their own area while the two Colberts and myself, also Brigade officers, were in East Limerick. A short time before our return, Liam Lynch had been in the area with the object of forming the West Limerick Brigade and other Brigades into a Division. A short while after our return, I attended a Brigade meeting at the house of a farmer by the name of O'Connor of Glenagown, Newcastlewest. Liam Lynch presided.

Among the many topics under discussion that night which were agreed to were the formation of a Division, the disbandment of Brigade Columns and the formation of Battalion Columns, the formation of Battalion signalling systems and the furnishing of daily reports from each Company to the Battalion Adjutant and from each Battalion to the Brigade Adjutant.

Immediately after the meeting, the Brigade Column was disbanded. During the meeting, it had been suggested that all rifles in the Brigade area should be distributed equally between the five Battalion Flying Columns. We of the Abbeyfeale, or 2nd Battalion, protested. It so happened that the majority of the men who had gone to East Limerick were from the 2nd Battalion, and we had in our possession twelve rifles while one or two of the other Battalions, although having some rifles for their own Battalion operations,

felt that all available rifles should be distributed equally. It was eventually agreed to loan the rifles to any Battalion requiring them for use in an attack.

When the members of the Brigade Flying Column returned to their respective areas, Battalion Flying Columns were formed in each of the five areas, the intention being to strike in each Battalion area on the same day or night. In each area, Volunteers came forward to man the available arms. These men were not generally known to the enemy and were able to go home after an operation. Dug-outs were prepared for men on the run. While some of the arms were kept at the Battalion dumps or dug-outs, most of the riflemen retained their rifles in their own dug-outs. A list of active service men in each Battalion area was prepared about the time.

About this time, a "gentleman" by the name of Kissane, who was known locally as "Captain Hand", arrived from G.H.Q., Dublin, in the area. He was staying at Barry's of Newbridge, Rathkeale. The house was raided by R.I.C. and Black and Tans one morning while he was there. He managed to escape but he left behind him the complete list of active service men in the Brigade which the enemy captured.

In each Battalion area, a headquarters was set up for the receipt and issue of dispatches with fixed hours for each. A Brigade Headquarters was set up at Carrickkerry, Ardagh, in a dug-out on the bog-lands of Denis Goulding. Seán Brouder of the Newcastlewest Company, who was a journalist, was appointed Chief Clerk on the Brigade Staff. He was fully occupied

issuing and receiving despatches and filing correspondence.

In the meantime, the Brigade Staff set up a signalling system. A training school was first established in the Mountcollins Company area. An ex British army signaller, named Thomas Liston, became the instructor. One Battalion was taken on at a time. Volunteers from each Company attended courses of instruction in morse and semaphore. After a short time, we had in the 2nd Battalion area a perfect signalling system which I would venture to say was one of the most efficient in the I.R.A. Each Company area had been allocated a code number. At night-time, use was made of cow horns to send messages from one hill to another in the area. The use of these horns had a very noticeable demoralising effect on the enemy.

At the end of May, from the Brigade Headquarters at the dug-out, I attended a Brigade meeting in a nearby house owned by a Miss Noonan. Captain Hands was present. Each of the Battalion officers present was asked to submit plans and arrange a suitable date to attack the enemy simultaneously in their areas. While this meeting was in progress, our guards could see a Flying Column of British military in Kilcolman library, not two hundred yards away. They were previously stationed in the courthouse in Newcastlewest but they closed up the courthouse and took over the library. We knew we were in safe country. When the meeting was over, we moved off in one's and two's.

At the meeting, an order was issued to James Liston, Battalion Commandant, 1st Battalion,

Newcastlewest, to have the evacuated courthouse in Newcastlewest burned down. Guarded by the Battalion Flying Column, the courthouse was burned down in about the first week of June. Liston's despatch to Brigade Headquarters read, "Collins, Brigade H.Q., Courthouse gone west. O/C of the 1st".

After the Brigade meeting, Captain Hand asked me to come to Brouder's of Athea with him. He insisted on taking the main road but I refused and took a bye-road. I reached Brouder's about an hour before him. We stayed there that night. Next morning, as two men of the house were preparing to go to a fair, the house was surrounded by a party of military. I happened to be up at the time. I saw one of the Brouder men with a dish of oats and a bridle in his hands, about to go into a paddock to catch a horse. I grabbed the oats and bridle, went into the paddock and advanced towards the horse. As I did so, the military stood watching. When I caught the animal, I jumped on his back and rode towards a far-off ditch. I leaped the ditch and ran for my life. In the meantime, the military searched the house. Luckily for Captain Hand, they did not go into the bedroom he occupied.

Following the request at the Brigade meeting for a specified time and date for an attack on the enemy in each Battalion area, it had been arranged for these attacks to take place on June 5th. In the 2nd Battalion, we had decided to attack an R.I.C. and Tan patrol. For the two previous Sunday mornings, we had plastered the walls and hoardings around the town with stencilled notices, such as, "Take down your steel shutters and let in the fresh air", or "Bring out your armoured cars

and tanks! Devil a bit we care!", or "Scum of Frongoch and Dartmoor, come out and take them off!".

The following Sunday morning was the 5th June. We had put up similar notices all over the town and even put one on the door of the barracks that morning. My brother, Michael, and the Company I.O., David Shanahan, were the only two men aware of the impending attack. I intended to occupy certain houses in the town for the attack. The occupants were all sympathisers. My brother made arrangements with the householders to leave a door or window unlocked to facilitate us. I contacted my friend, Constable Pattison, and arranged to meet him at Forde's pub; when he met me, he assured me that he would have the Black and Tans in the barracks out early that morning.

On the night of the 4th and morning of the 5th, I moved the Battalion Active Service Unit from Meenahelia to the outskirts of the town. At the Protestant church, my brother had eight scouts waiting. The Column did not know my intention and thought it was of a more simple nature. Each scout and each member of the Column removed his footwear. Led by the scouts, the Column had occupied their allocated houses by 3 a.m. I had twenty-two armed men ready for the actual attack, apart from some armed men on outpost duty on every road leading into the town on which we had road blocks.

Just before daybreak, at 5 a.m., eleven Tans and one R.I.C. man left the barracks and approached a junction in the main street. We had the walls around this junction plastered with the stencilled slogans and had occupied five houses covering the spot. They

halted exactly where we wanted them. They undid their tunics, slung their rifles over their shoulders and, with their penknives, began their customary task of tearing down the stencilled posters. Ten of them concentrated on the gable end of a house owned by people named Joy, in a dead line opposite a house owned by a Mrs. Eggleston, where I had placed eleven shotgun men in charge of John McAuliffe.

Unknown to me, Mrs. Eggleston had come upstairs to the eleven men and brought them downstairs to breakfast or a meal of some sort, just before the appearance of the Tans. I waited for some time for McAuliffe to open the attack, to drive the Tans into our positions, but there was nothing doing. At last, I lifted a curtain to signal them to attack. As I did so, one of the Tans fired at me. With that, we opened fire; most of them were out of sight, around the corner from our positions. One Tan was killed; four, including a Sergeant, were wounded. They ran for the barracks. We dashed out into the street where we captured a rifle off a Tan who had run in the opposite direction. I received a slight flesh wound.

Among the men who took part in this attack were my brother, Denis, Jim Guiney, P.J. O'Neill, Patrick Naughton, John Hartnett, Jer. Maloney, Laurence Hartnett, Daniel Hartnett, William O'Keeffe, Johnny Jones, Capper White and Mick O'Sullivan. O'Sullivan was a North Cork man and a Column leader who had just moved into our area to escape a round-up.

After the attack, we retreated to Mileen Glen, beyond Mountcollins, where we stayed for the day. That night, we walked through the night, retracing our

steps into Athea, to avoid a round-up which we anticipated to be in operation next day. That Sunday, Canon Creegan, parish priest, condemned us from the altar and asked the authorities to avoid punishing the innocent people of the houses we had occupied that morning but to deal mercilessly with the rebels responsible for the murder of the policeman. He promptly received a despatch from Brigade Headquarters, warning him of the consequences of his talk from the altar.

Our next big contemplated operation was at Barna. Paddy O'Brien of Liscarroll, North Cork, Moss Hartnett and myself had planned a large-scale attack on three lorry loads of Black and Tans which, on certain days of the week, travelled from Newcastlewest to Listowel via Abbeyfeale. The Brigade Staff spent about a fortnight in the locality, measuring distances and timing their movements. O'Brien had brought the North Cork Column with him for the attack. Every armed man in the West Limerick Brigade had been mobilised. The North Cork men had a number of land-mines with them as well as a machine gun. We had sent all the gelignite in the Brigade area to Ballydesmond for the manufacture of the mines which were to be electrically detonated. They were placed at intervals in the road for a distance of two miles from Dore's Cross to Barna Bridge.

The attacking party in charge of Paddy O'Brien numbered eight riflemen, a machine-gunner and several shotgun men. They were placed in positions on each side of the road. Everything was ready. We had a complete first-aid section and a signalling unit.

As the three lorry loads of Tans, led by a motor cyclist, left their barracks in Newcastlewest, our scouts and signallers had us informed. It was 10 a.m. They had never left at that hour before; it was usually around 3 p.m. before they left for Listowel. We hurriedly decided to let them pass and to attack as they were returning. They never returned that day. We waited for three days and three nights, and slept in houses in the vicinity and in open fields, as the weather was so warm.

On the third morning, Paddy O'Brien, Garrett McAuliffe, Moss Hartnett and myself held a consultation. O'Brien was of the opinion that, with so many armed men in the area only a few miles from the strongly garrisoned town of Newcastlewest, it would not be safe to strike after such a long wait. We guessed that the enemy was aware of our presence by this time. We called it off. The time was twelve noon on the 11th July, 1921. Just at that hour, a 'plane flew over our positions.

As my Battalion Active Service Unit was removing the mines, the three lorries arrived. The Tans all dismounted and stood watching for some time.

After the Truce, I remained at Brigade Headquarters which by then was set up at Patrick Mulcahy's house in Moneygay. Later, in charge of the I.R.A., I took over Newcastlewest R.I.C. barracks. Garrett McAuliffe and Jim Liston, O/C, 1st Battalion, took over Desmond Castle from the military.

The ~~attached~~ copies of three proclamations, issued by E.P. Strickland, Major-General, on the 27th December, 1920, were given to me by Mrs. M. Hayes (sister of Seán Finn, Brigade O/C, who was killed at Ballyhahill,) for presentation to the Bureau.

SIGNED: _____

James J. Collins

(James J. Collins)

DATE: _____

5th October 1955.

5th October 1955.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRS MILITARY 1913-21

No. W.S. 1.272

WITNESS _____

John J. Daly

(John J. Daly)