ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21
NO. W.S. 1,647

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913–21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1647.

Witness

John J. O'Brien,
29, Emmet Road,
Inchicore,
Dublin.

Identity.

Member of "Knocklong Rescue" Party.
Vice Comdt., 6th Battn., East Limerick Bde.

Subject.

Galbally Coy., Irish Volunteers, Co. Limerick, and Tipperary No. 3 Brigade, Flying Column, 1913-'21.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

File No S. 2970.

Form B.S.M. 2

W. S. 1,647
S.2970
File.....

Bureau of Military History, 1913-1921.

STATEMENT BY

MR. JOHN J. O'BRIEN

Address 29 Emmet Road,

Inchicore, Dublin.

Date 16th July 1957

ORGANISATIONS WITH WHICH ASSOCIATED.

Irish Volunteers
Irish Republican Army
Irish Republican Brotherhood

POSTS OR RANKS HELD.

Volunteer
Member of "Knocklong Rescue" Party.
Battalion Vice-Commandant.

PERIOD COVERED BY STATEMENT.

1913-1921

COMMENTS OF INVESTIGATING OFFICER.

This statement was, in the first instance, dictated by the witness and taken down in shorthand by a typist during three interviews which I had with him in the Bureau. It was amplified and expanded in further interviews with the witness at his home.

Witness is a licensed vintner. Now 60 years of age, he enjoys very good health and his memory appears to be remarkably good. He seemed to experience no difficulty in narrating the events referred to in his statement which he signed as an accurate record of his evidence.

J. Grace
Signature of Investigating Officer.
(J. Grace)

Date 16th July 1957.

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ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1,647

STATEMENT OF MR. JOHN J. O'BRIEN,

29 Emmet Road, Inchicore, Dublin.

I was born at Mitchelstown, Co. Cork, in the year 1897, being the youngest of three brothers in our family. In the same year, my father, William O'Brien, who had a drapery premises in Mitchelstown, transferred his business to Galbally, Co. Limerick, where the family went to reside. I was educated in Galbally and, at the end of 1912, I went back to Mitchelstown as an apprentice to the drapery business in the firm of Denis Forrest, Lower Cork St., and, later, as an assistant in O'Keeffe Brothers.

When an Irish Volunteer Company was formed in Mitchelstown, early in December 1913, I immediately joined. I think the first company captain was James O'Neill of Mitchelstown. We did a lot of training which included route marches on which we were generally accompanied by two bands - a pipe and a brass.

Shortly after the Great War started in 1914, some of the company officers including, I think, James O'Neill, went to Birmingham, England, and there purchased about 40 Lee Enfield rifles and 100 rounds of ammunition per rifle for the company. They got the rifles and ammunition safely to Mitchelstown. The money for the purchase of the arms was raised by a collection made some time previously and everyone who could do so was asked to subscribe. Some of us took the rifles home with us for safe keeping.

When the split in the Volunteer movement occurred in August 1914, following John Redmond's speech at Woodenbridge, Colonel Moore reviewed a big parade of Volunteers in Mitchelstown. There were companies present from Ardpatrick, Kilfinane, Ballindangan, Anglesboro', Dungrud and Galbally.

The question of allegiance to Redmond or McNeill was not put to the assembled Volunteers, but soon afterwards the Mitchelstown Company divided on that issue. Those who elected to follow Redmond, principally members of the A.O.H. left and formed a unit of National Volunteers. I was one of about 30 or 35 young men, mostly shop assistants and farmers' sons, who decided to carry on as Irish Volunteers. James McNeill took charge of our unit and we retained possession of the rifles which had been purchased in Birmingham.

On Whit Sunday, 1915, an Irish Volunteer review was held in Limerick. P.H. Pearse, Tom Clarke, Ned Daly and others were on the platform. They brought a regiment of Volunteers from Dublin who were mostly in uniform and armed with Howth rifles. We cycled from Mitchelstown on that Sunday morning to Galbally, a distance of 10 miles, had a cup of tea in my father's place, where we left the bicycles. We all mobilised outside the church gate and marched to Emly station where we entrained for Limerick. I forget where exactly in Limerick the parade was held, but we joined up with other units and Captain Robert Monteith led the parade.

That evening, when everything was over, it was decided to make a show of our strength and we were marched through Irishtown where a lot of "separation" people lived; of course, we were never too popular with them. They attacked us with bottles and stones and other missiles, but the Volunteers held their ranks. Our company was in front and, as we had rifles, we were safe, but the other companies were not so lucky. The "separation" people followed us to the railway station, shouting, jeering and throwing bottles at us. Tadhg Crowley fired over their heads using, I think, blank cartridges. Some of our men were slightly injured by the bottles and stones and one of our rifles was taken by the mob from Patrick Sullivan of Mitchelstown. We returned by train to Galbally and cycled back to Mitchelstown.

On St. Patrick's Day 1915, we marched to Lough Gur, Co. Limerick. I went there with the Galbally Company. Eoin McNeill reviewed us and spoke. The Limerick Volunteers were all there, a lot of them in uniform. About 14th March 1915, we marched to Kilclooney Wood for the O'Neill-Crowley anniversary. Sean McDermott reviewed the Volunteer companies and addressed them. We also had route marches to Galbally, Ballyporeen and Ballylanders.

About that time, too, a Volunteer officers' training camp was established in Galbally. Those in charge of the camp were: J.J. ('Ginger') O'Connell, camp commandant; J.J. Burke, Q.M. and Frank Fahy (later T.D. and Ceann Comhairle of An Dáil). All who attended paid a certain sum each week for their maintenance. They marched to the church on Sundays led by a piper. The R.I.C. kept an eye on the proceedings but did not interfere. The training included night operations, and one night the trainees at the camp came to Mitchelstown and staged a sham attack on the town which was defended by our company.

Again in 1915, Captain Bob Monteith spent a lot of time in the area. He established classes where we were taught signalling, finding direction by the stars, and, generally speaking, he gave us the benefit of his army training. The official Volunteer organ stated that a man armed with a revolver and a pike should be able to defend himself. We got some pikes made in the Shannon foundry, Limerick, of which M.P. Colivet, who was a Volunteer officer, was manager.

On St. Patrick's Day 1916, we- the Mitchelstown Company - marched from the drill hall down to the railway station with full equipment and entrained for Cork. We were reviewed by Patrick Pearse and other leaders. I remember meeting Tomás McCurtain and Terence McSwiney there. I should have mentioned that during 1915, McSwiney visited us in Mitchelstown and gave us lectures. While in Cork on that occasion, I met my

brother, Willie, who was then a chemist in Cobh. He was subsequently arrested in May 1916, and died after his release from prison in November 1916.

Before we left Cork, we received intelligence that we were to be attacked by the "separation" people in Fermoy on our way back. We left the train at Ballyhooley and marched to Glanworth and got back to Mitchelstown without incident.

On Easter Sunday morning 1916, we were up early as we were under orders for manoeuvres in Galbally. I was oiling and cleaning guns pretty early in the day when a motor car arrived. At that time, motor cars were very scarce. The car came that morning to the Square in Mitchelstown. I remember seeing a dispatch brought by one of the occupants of the car to one of the company officers. I believe it was The O'Rahilly's car. The dispatch, as far as my recollection goes, said: "Volunteers completely deceived. Cancel all parades until further notice. Signed, Eoin McNeill".

The officers decided that they would go ahead with their original arrangements, and we marched to Galbally, crossing the old mountain road and getting Mass in Anglesboro. The manoeuvres had been arranged by the Galtee Battalion. Galbally was defended by the Galbally, Ballylanders and Anglesboro companies, and was attacked by the Mitchelstown, Dungrud and Ardpatrick companies. I remember being captured on that same day during the manoeuvre. I think Liam Manahan was in charge. There were a number of Tipperary men there too from Tipperary Town. They were not actually connected with the day's proceedings, but had come out with us, and included the famous Mick Callaghan who shot two policemen a few days afterwards and escaped to America. When the manoeuvres were over, our company marched back to Mitchelstown that night.

I had no idea that the Rising was to take place on that Easter Sunday, and very few indeed knew. It was a well-kept

secret, and of those in Galbally for the manoeuvres, I believe only my brother, Edmund, and a few other I.R.B. men were aware of it.

Back in Mitchelstown, it took a day or so for the news to come through about the Rising in Dublin. Somebody was sent to Limerick Volunteer H.Q. looking for news and orders. There was a lot of uncertainty. We removed the arms from the town and hid them in an old fort at a place called Gurrane, Ballylist, less than a mile from the town, as a security precaution.

There were rumours that the town was to be shelled by British forces and much similar talk, with the result that, on the advice of the priests, the rifles were surrendered to the R.I.C. This was about the worst thing that could have happened and was a most regrettable decision on the part of whoever was responsible.

Immediately after the Rising, Bill Casey, James Hannigan (Donnchadh's brother), Mick and Patrick O'Sullivan and Patrick Roche were arrested in Mitchelstown by British military and were interned in prison camps in England for varying periods.

There was very little further activity during 1916. We cut telegraph wires, dismantled telephones, raided for ammunition and did some reorganisation work. We formed a cycling club just to keep together. Some of the girls in the town, who kept company with British soldiers, used come along to where we met and start singing "Soldiers are we, who nearly fought for Ireland". The Soldiers' Song had just become popular at that time and we were in the habit of singing it.

On Christmas Eve 1916, I left Mitchelstown and returned to my father's home. I then took up business with my father, became attached to the Galbally Company of the Volunteers and joined the Irish Republican Brotherhood. I was sworn into the latter organisation by Donnchadh O'Hannigan.

Events during the early part of 1917 included arrests of prisoners and baton charges by the R.I.C. in Galbally. As these incidents, and the O'Hannigan-Manahan difficulty, which occurred about the same time, have been fully described by my brother, Edmund, in his statement (W.S.597), I do not propose to deal with them, nor with the subsequent suspension of the Galbally Volunteers by G.H.Q. following an inquiry into the latter affair, which Edmund has also covered. I might mention that Edmund was generally known as 'Ned' and, on that account, I will use that version of his name when referring to him in the course of this statement.

Some time in 1917, the arms of the 3rd (South) Tipperary Brigade, which were dumped in Mount Bruis, were in danger of being captured by British Sappers who were mapping and searching the area. They were hidden in the roof of a house. The slates had been removed first and the arms put inside the rafters, after which the slates were replaced. Thus, the arms were between the ceiling and the roof. Ned O'Brien, my brother, was asked if he could find a temporary hiding place for these arms and he made arrangements accordingly. 20 or 30 of us went, one Saturday night, to the hill of Slievenamuck where we met the Tipperary men with the arms. We took them from them and conveyed them to Galbally where we hid them in the Catholic Church. The clerk of the church, Sean Lynch, was a company lieutenant at the time. The arms remained there for about 12 months or longer.

Conscription was threatened in the spring of 1918, and everybody - of all shades of opinion and politics - was against it. It was denounced from pulpit and platform. A huge collection was made and an anti-conscription pledge signed at the church gates. All the companies filled up with new recruits. There was a lot more Volunteers at that time than at any other time. We organised locally, and new companies

were formed where there had been no companies, in places such as Emly.

We continued our drilling during 1918. Arms were very scarce. All the houses of the so-called gentry were raided for arms and ammunition. We got a good few shotguns, ammunition, telescopes, field-glasses and equipment like that. About the same time, we bought rifles and revolvers from a circus which came into Galbally. They had side-shows, rifle-ranges, etc. We bought, in all, two Service rifles, two .22 miniature rifles and two revolvers, one of which was a Colt, from the circus people.

A new dispatch system was set up; the dispatches were all timed and dated. I remember taking dispatches to Mitchelstown, Tipperary, Ballylanders, etc.

On 21st January 1919, the Soloheadbeg ambush took place in which two R.I.C. men lost their lives. I had no prior knowledge of it, but, some weeks later, the "Big Four" - Seamus Robinson, Sean Treacy, Dan Breen and Sean Hogan - who were on the run following the ambush, arrived at my brother - Ned's - place at Ardrahan, one mile from Galbally, and they remained with him for some weeks. There were only two or three of us "in the know" and we did armed guard at the house and along the road at night. From there, they went to Lackelly and we escorted them part of the way.

Some time later, the "Big Four" returned to our area and, going to the same house in Ardrahan, they discovered it vacant, as Ned had, meantime, moved into the village of Galbally. They made themselves as comfortable as they could. They brought in hay from the barn, but I don't know if they had anything to eat. Next morning, while sweeping out my father's drapery shop, the assistant found an envelope addressed to Ned O'Brien. It was nearly going into the dust-bin. Inside

the envelope was a note from Treacy saying they were "at the old haunt". Ned knew what it meant and he cycled to Ardrahan, taking a share of food in his pockets. He met them and, that night when it got dark, he brought them into Galbally to his own house which was situated about 50 yards from the police barracks. They remained there for a week or so. I remember that Treacy, by sitting at the front window of my brother's house, and with the aid of a mirror, was able to keep the movements of the police under observation. We guarded them while they were there and conveyed them on to their next destination.

The next thing we heard was that Hogan was captured on 10th May. In the early forenoon of 13th May, May Moloney of Lackelly brought to my brother Ned a dispatch from Sean Treacy - that may have been when we knew about it first - saying that they intended to rescue Hogan, and would he come and bring help. Ned told me about it and asked me would I go. I said I would, of course. Word was sent on to Jimmy Scanlon who had gone to Emly station with a load of butter, and Jimmy's reply was that he would come back "light", that is, he would return without a load, so that he could get back as fast as possible. Ned asked me could I get anyone else and I suggested Ned Foley.

Ned, Jimmy Scanlon and Sean Lynch cycled together to Lackelly to Danny Moloney's, where they met Treacy, Robinson and Breen. I went by another road on a borrowed bicycle to bring along Ned Foley. I was careful not to let Foley's father see me. They were working together near the road. It had started to rain and Ned Foley brought his father's overcoat and gave me a girl's light trench-coat. I saw that coat again some months afterwards with the mark of a bullet in it. Ned wore it that evening at Knocklong, as we changed coats before I went to Emly.

Myself and Foley arrived in Lackelly where we met Treacy, Robinson, Breen, Damny Moloney and his sister, May, the girl who brought the dispatch to Ned, my brother. Ned, Jimmy Scanlon and Sean Lynch were also there. We had a short council of war. It was arranged that Lynch, Scanlon, Foley and I should proceed to Emly station, await the train from Thurles, see if the prisoner and his escort were on the train, and, if so, board the train. We did as we were instructed. At Emly station we saw the prisoner and his escort of four R.I.C. men on the train. We boarded the train, but got no tickets. As we were proceeding along, Jimmy Scanlon called me out on the corridor. I was the only one with a gun. I had a small .25 automatic in my waistcoat pocket. Jimmy said to me: "One of your family is enough to be on this. Give me the gun", but I refused to give it to him. As the train neared Knocklong, which is about four miles from Emly, I was near the door looking out for Treacy. I opened the door as the train was coming to a halt. We all jumped out on to the platform where Sean Treacy and my brother Ned were waiting for us.

A telegram, which had confused the arrangements, had arrived at Shanahan's of Knocklong and had been collected by Ned O'Brien. It said: "Greyhound still in Thurles" which meant that the prisoner was still in Thurles. As a result of that telegram, Breen and Robinson had left the platform and had gone to Shanahan's coal-yard, about half a mile away, where we were all to meet after coming off the train.

Having told us what had happened, Treacy said: "There is nothing doing!" Then we told him that Hogan was on the train, in the next carriage, or in the carriage second from the engine, or something like that. On hearing this, Treacy - he was a fine-looking man of six feet, and wore glasses, took off his glasses, put them into the case and said: "Come on, lads!"

We followed him [redacted] into the train. Treacy led the way along the corridor. The doors leading into the carriages were the sliding-type and Treacy slid open the door of the carriage where the four R.I.C. men and Hogan, the prisoner, were. He called: "Hands up" to the police. The order in which we proceeded along the corridor was: Treacy leading, Ned O'Brien, second - they were armed; James Scanlon, unarmed, Sean Lynch, unarmed, and I was fifth, armed with my .25 automatic revolver. There was a silence you would almost hear when Treacy shouted to the police "Hands up". It was too good to last. Then the bullets started to fly. I could not see all that was happening as I was a few feet away in the corridor. Treacy was in, and Ned O'Brien with him. Enright and another constable were on each side of Hogan who was handcuffed, and two other R.I.C. men were on the opposite seat. Enright clapped his gun against Hogan's temple and shouted that he would shoot if there was any attempt to rescue the prisoner, Ned O'Brien shot Enright twice in the stomach and that policeman lost interest in the proceedings. He died, I would say, instantaneously. We were all in a kind of heap as the carriage was too small for the crowd and I find it difficult to reconstruct the scene.

One of the R.I.C. escort, Sergeant Wallace, was a huge man, about 18-stone weight, and I remember he had Ned O'Brien on the carriage seat with his fingers on Ned's throat. I jammed my little automatic against Wallace's throat and pulled the trigger. There was no report, and I concluded that it was jammed. I ran my finger through the trigger guard and, making a kind of club of the gun, I broke it on Wallace's forehead. I think it was Lynch who hit him also in the same spot, for Lynch was spattered with blood. Sergeant Wallace also received gunshot wounds from which he died, but I am not certain at what stage of the fight he received those wounds.

Apparently, Hogan got out through the window or the door. He was, as I have said, handcuffed. Somebody shouted to him to get out and he did so.

One of the policemen, Constable Ring, jumped through a window. Scanlon and Lynch, who were unarmed, were engaged with the fourth policeman, Constable O'Reilly. He had a carbine between his legs and they said to him: "Give us the rifle and you will be all right". They seized the rifle and clubbed him four or five times with it. He slumped down in the corner of the carriage, to all intents and purposes, out for the count. Treacy and my brother Ned had by that time been wounded, both, I believe, by this Constable O'Reilly. What we did not notice was that there was another carbine under the carriage seat.

Leaving O'Reilly slumped in the carriage, we got out on to the platform. Sean Lynch, Ned Foley, who had by the way not been in the carriage, Jimmy Scanlon and myself moved along the platform and had probably got to a point about five yards from the exit when Constable O'Reilly, who had got possession of the carbine which was under the seat, started firing again. The only weapon we had was my broken revolver, so we had to run. In this shooting, Jimmy Scanlon was wounded in the shoulder.

Across the road from the exit of the station was Walsh's Stores - a hardware and butcher's shop - and Hogan and Lynch ran in there. Lynch got a cleaver, put Hogan's handcuffs down on a weight and smashed the handcuffs off.

Meanwhile, Breen and Robinson had come along. Hearing the sound of the shooting, they had returned to the station. Breen engaged Constable O'Reilly who was then shooting wildly. I next remember four or five of us getting across the gate of a field, just above Walsh's. We were going across country. We had not the wounded with us at the time. We met them later in the field. We got to some house and met somebody or other there.

It was arranged that Ned O'Brien, who was wounded, Jimmy Scanlon and Sean Lynch would go to Ballylanders. Breen and Treacy had gone to Shanahan's of the Hill. These were the people who had got the code telegram previously. It was a farmer's house. Treacy had been picked up in a field, wounded. Foley and I also got to Shanahan's of the Hill. Treacy was in one chair, all blood, bleeding from the neck; Breen was in another chair, bleeding from the breast, and I think he had another wound around his lips. He was wounded in the exchange of fire with Constable O'Reilly. Mick Shanahan got a syringe and soft water, to which he added some Jeyes' fluid, and treated their wounds, which showed they were not too serious although very close to vital points. Hogan was hopping around the kitchen in great form, waving the captured police carbine.

Tom Howard - he was killed in action afterwards - came along and accompanied Foley and me to Glenbrohane. I had taken a pound note from the till in the shop when leaving home. I gave the pound to Tom Howard and sent him into a shop for a naggin of whiskey. Then I told him to bring the whiskey back to Shanahan's for the boys who were wounded. Foley and I continued on our journey through Ballylanders up to Paddy Maguire's of Glennahoughlish. Jimmy Scanlon, Sean Lynch and Ned O'Brien were already there. Ten or twelve of the Ballylanders Volunteers, including Tadhg Crowley, some of the Crawford boys and Ned Tobin had gathered to meet us. They were all great lads and were all anxious to help.

It was arranged that Tadhg Crowley should go to Dr. Wm. Hennessy and ask him to call to Shanahan's first to see the two boys who were the most badly wounded, that is, Treacy and Breen. When that was done and we had had a bite to eat, it was agreed that those of us who were not wounded should go to our homes and cover our tracks, as we would hardly be suspected.

We were told to destroy any clothes which showed signs of blood, or anything that would give us away.

Foley, Lynch and I struck off for Galbally by the old road, and arrived there at about 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning. It had been a very bad evening and we were pretty wet. Then Lynch and I had the job of telling Ned's wife that he was not coming back as he was wounded, but not seriously. It was a very awkward job for us. She had a baby of 6 or 7 months. I went home then and got into bed.

When I awoke in the morning, my awakening coincided with the sound of lorries. I jumped quickly out of bed and, looking out the window, saw lorries of military pulling up at the R.I.C. barrack gate, which was only about 2 yards away. I dressed in a dry suit of clothes. Everything else that I had worn the previous night - boots and all - I threw into a suitcase. I went downstairs and out by the back way. The schoolyard adjoined the end of my father's back garden. I concealed myself at the school wall, and from there I had a view of the barrack. It was a turret style wall. There was a lot of excitement. I could hear the gate opening and closing, the halldoor of our house being banged and the police were in, raiding. I heard footsteps again and saw the police moving along the road. I was in the schoolhouse yard looking at it all.

Half an hour afterwards, when the police had returned to the barrack, I went back in. There was terrible excitement. "Did you hear the news? Police killed at Knocklong!". Having locked the halldoor, I secured the suitcase of wet clothes - suit, boots, leggings and all - and brought them to the kitchen and put them into the oven of the range. I was sitting down to a cup of tea and a boiled egg, when a knock came to the door. In came the R.I.C. sergeant and probably a dozen police. The sergeant faced me and asked me: "Where

did you sleep last night?". "Upstairs, where I always sleep" I said. "You were not here this morning when we called". "I was out back looking after the cattle", I replied. After a couple of more questions, he spun around on his heel and went out the door.

I finished my breakfast and, shortly afterwards, went out to the shop. I was not long there when I heard the sound of tramping feet and a guard with fixed bayonets was being posted outside the door. Another sentry with fixed bayonet was placed outside my brother, Ned's, door. After a while I saw Sean Lynch between two policemen, looking very pale, going down to the barracks. When they had passed, I went to the back door of my father's house and there saw another sentry with a rifle and fixed bayonet. The police and military were in complete occupation of Ned's house which was next door, and of Scanlon's. Jimmy Scanlon was missing. I think he remained away for two days. People who were inside would not be allowed out, and others who wanted to get in would not be allowed to do so.

On the next day, the R.I.C. came in for me and I was taken to the barracks. I was brought upstairs where the District Inspector himself questioned me - all about time - where I was at such a time. By that time I had an alibi fixed fairly well. They read out the statement to me again and asked: "Do you want to make any change?" I said I did not. That happened six or eight times in the course of the next week or two, and the same procedure was adopted with Sean Lynch. I believe they had brought bloodhounds to Knocklong, but they were of no use to them for tracking as it had rained all day on the day of the rescue. They also made a big round-up at the foot of the Galtees, but they did not capture any of the boys.

Within a few weeks, Ned Foley and Paddy Maher were arrested. The latter was a railwayman and had nothing at all to do with Hogan's rescue. Two years later, both men were sentenced to death for participation in the rescue and were executed together in Mountjoy Prison on 7th June 1921.

The raids continued on my place. I generally spent the day at home but slipped away to sleep elsewhere at night-time.

After Foley and Maher were arrested I went on the run, staying with friends along the foot of the Galtees in Co. Tipperary. Ned O'Brien, Jimmy Scanlon and Sean Lynch had gone away also. Treacy and Breen were in West Limerick. We kept in touch all the time. I met Ned occasionally while we were on the run and before he and Jimmy Scanlon went to America, but we did not go around together. We just simply kept in touch with one another.

During the months that followed, the British forces including the R.I.C. maintained their intensive search for Hogan and his rescuers, but with the sole exception of Ned Foley, failed to capture any of us. In September 1919, Ned and Jimmy Scanlon went to Dublin on the first stage of their journey to America, an event which Ned has covered in his statement (W.S.597). I remained on the run.

I attended meetings, when plans were made for the attack on Ballylanders R.I.C. barracks. Sean Forde, Tadhg Crowley and others were present at the meetings which were held probably during March and April 1920.

There was a garrison of 10 or 12 R.I.C. men in Ballylanders barracks. On the night of 27th April 1920, we assembled on the Knocklong road, about a mile from Ballylanders. Sean Forde was in charge. Donnchadh O'Hannigan and Tadhg Crowley were there also. I forget how many rifles we had, but I know that all the rifles in the East Limerick Brigade were there. I remember, too, that one fellow fired a shot accidentally before we

started, some time about 11 o'clock. Final instructions were given and we then marched to Ballylanders. We occupied positions in houses converging on the barracks from which the attack was launched with rifle fire. The garrison fired Verey lights for assistance and replied to our fire for about half an hour. Meanwhile, from the house next door, a successful attack was made on the barrack roof. Slates were removed and the rafters set on fire. One end of the barracks was burning steadily when the police surrendered. No policemen were killed or wounded, but there was one casualty on our side, as Sean Meade was wounded. We held the police as prisoners for a few hours after their surrender. When released, they made their way to Galbally. The barracks itself was completely gutted by fire. After collecting the arms of the garrison, which consisted of about 10 or 12 rifles, 500 or 600 rounds of ammunition and some grenades, we went our different ways.

The arms were taken away and put into safe places in preparation for an attack on Kilmallock barracks. Our original plan had been to attack Kilmallock and Ballylanders barracks on the same night, but, as we had not enough guns, we had to postpone the attack on Kilmallock barracks.

Prior to the attack on Kilmallock barracks, Sean Forde and I went to Tipperary - to O'Sullivan's of Donaskea - to arrange about borrowing .303 ammunition from the 3rd Tipperary Brigade for the Kilmallock attack. They agreed to give it to us, and a couple of our lads went there and collected 2,000 rounds. I often heard it said afterwards that they never got it back, but that was because we never had it to give back to them.

The attack on Kilmallock barracks took place on the night of 28th May 1920. We assembled in a field just behind the town and we were allotted our positions by Sean Forde. I forget

who was in charge of our section. Our position was right opposite the barracks, in Cleary's Hotel. We went to the door of the hotel and Jim Crawford knocked at the door. The door was opened by the late Joe Crowley who, with some other Volunteers, was staying in the hotel as "commercial travellers". We went in and took up our positions. We made a barricade at the windows with pillows and cushions and waited for the signal which was to come about midnight. When it came - it was a long drawn-out whistle - all the lights in the street were put out and the shooting started. With me were Bill Hayes (who was later a Major-General in the army), Bill Fraher of Galbally, Sean Lynch, whom I have referred to before, Mick Quirke of Galbally. We had some lads from 3rd Tipperary Brigade there too. They included Dinny Lacey, Patrick (Pack) Dalton, Paddy Power and Bill Hartnett. Others whom I remember seeing during that night were Jim Moloney, now farming near Limerick Junction, and the three McCarthys from Kilfinane - Jack, Justin and Dan.

The local Volunteers had procured a horse-drawn tanker of oil belonging to the patrol companies. It was brought to a point near the barracks from where the oil was pumped on to the barracks, the roof of which had been well broken by our men who had occupied the house next door.

At different times during the night, we sang "The Soldiers' Song". It was taken up from house to house, all singing in loud voices. Sean Forde would ask us to stop singing every now and again and he would then shout out to the police to surrender. This continued until 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning, when two or three of us left the hotel by the front door and made our way to another house. Tadhg Crowley was there. There was a rumour that the police had retired to a lean-to building at the back of the barracks. Three or four of us went to a laneway at the Courthouse

where there was a shed overlooking the rere of the barracks. With the help of the others, I climbed up on this shed. The roof was slated, and there was a jagged hole in it which I thought was from age, but later learned that it was from a bomb. All I could see was a loop-holed window at which I fired five or six shots as best I could. Then I had to come down off it. It was most insecure with no foothold on it.

Liam Scully was killed about that time. He was not in our section in the hotel. He was a Kerryman and a teacher of Irish. He had a premonition of his death. He went to Confession some time before that and told the priest that he had a premonition that he was going to be killed.

Day was breaking, and it was getting very bright, when the attack was called off. It could have been some time about 6 o'clock in the morning. The barracks and the lean-to building were practically burned out. Forde thought it was too dangerous to keep the men there any longer, as military reinforcements for the garrison might come; so we withdrew. Again, our ammunition was almost exhausted. Two of the R.I.C. men were killed and a share of them were wounded.

We went our different ways. Some time later that morning - I was not there at the time - a couple of our fellows who had remained around Kilmallock were fired on and wounded by the police who came out and had a few pot-shots at them. Nurse O'Sullivan of Grantstown, Tipperary, and some others were in attendance at a first-aid post, in Burke's, I think, all during the attack, in case of any casualties on our side. One of these girls is now a Mrs. Fitzgibbon.

Before the attack commenced, a lot of trees were felled across the roads for a radius of 20 miles from Kilmallock, and the railway was torn up not far from Emly.

Some short time before the attack on Kilmallock barracks, I was one of a group of Volunteers who were sent to

to investigate complaints about the activities of a gang of robbers who were attacking, robbing and terrorising the people. We arrested 10 or 12 of them and kept them prisoners for awhile.

In July 1920, my father's premises and Ned's house in Galbally were commandeered by the British authorities and occupied as a military barracks until Christmas 1921. My father was arrested and spent a long period in prison.

I remained around Tipperary for a while after the Kilmallock barracks attack and was not with the East Limerick column when it was first formed. However, in July and August I was with that column for a period.

One morning in August, we (the column) were in ambush position in a place called Ballinamona. We were using District Inspector McGettrick's car, which had been taken one morning while he was at Mass. The registration number of the car was changed to read D.I.303. We found the car very useful. On this occasion we put sacks of rifles and ammunition into it and went across to Ballinamona. We were in position from early in the morning until 5 in the evening, and all that came along was a solitary soldier with dispatches, some Verey lights and a Verey light pistol. He was held up and kept there until we dispersed. These dispatches were from the O/C. Hospital, to the O/C. Pallas. I don't know what they contained. There was a big crowd of us there that day including Sean Stapleton, who had a pack on his back as big as a mountain.

In September 1920, I assisted in organising the Tipperary No. 3 Brigade flying column. When it assembled for the first time at Horan's of Donohill, there were about 15 members including Dinny Lacey, who was O/C. of the column, Jim Gilmartin who was, I think, Vice O/C., Brian Shanahan, Mat Barlow, Sean Lynch, Bill Fraher, Tadhg Crowe, Mickey Ryan (Bouleen), Tom Bellew (a Co. Louth man who had worked as a tinsmith in Tipperary), Paddy Malone and myself. We were

armed with different kinds of rifles. I had an old type service rifle. Young Paddy Malone had a .44 Winchester. Ernie O'Malley was with us on and off. He helped to train the column.

I was with the column when we waited in ambush position inside the ditch at the bridge in Alleen, below the town of Tipperary, for a few days, but nothing turned up. We then sniped Limerick Junction barracks, just firing a few shots.

Sean Treacy was shot dead in Dublin on 14th October 1920, and we attended his funeral to Kilfeacle. I was one of the firing party over his grave. There was a very large party of British military there that day and it was after they had left that we fired the volleys.

In October 1920, we went into the Parish of Thomastown, Co. Tipperary, to ambush a police patrol. We expected a few policemen and, instead, we ambushed a lorry of military which came along going in the direction of Tipperary Town. There were 19 soldiers in the lorry. While we were looking for something with which to barricade the road, a young farmer's boy came alone with a horse-cart and we brought it inside the ditch. Lacey said to one of the column: "You shove it out there!"; the young boy said: "I'll do it myself" When the lorry was signalled, he pushed the cart into the middle of the road. He next started to fill his pipe and stayed on the road for a few moments, but got out of it quickly enough when the first few shots were fired.

Mat Barlow and I were placed about 30 yards from the road, on a height at the back of a quarry. The lorry was stopped in the shadow of Thomastown wall. We had men on both sides of the road. During the shooting, Mick Fitzpatrick was wounded, and it could have been from our fire. There were a few sheep shot in the field in which we were. Apparently, another lorry or lorries were coming, so Lacey

blew the whistle for us to retreat, which we did.

Where Barlow and I were in position, we could see the top of the lorry and the soldiers falling down in the lorry. We could hear them crying - they were all young lads - about 18 years of age - from London. Of course, we were not much older. The official British report was that three or four soldiers were killed and seven or eight wounded, but I remember years afterwards meeting an ex-soldier who lived in Tipperary Town and who had been in the lorry, and he told me about the day they were ambushed at Thomastown. He told me that there were 19 of them in the lorry. "Every one of us was hit", he said. The only casualty on our side was Michael Fitzpatrick whose wound was rather serious.

In that ambush, we had some Volunteers who were not in the column at the time - Jack (The Master) Ryan, Jim Gorman, who was an ex-Australian soldier, Paddy Dwyer and Ned O'Reilly.

We retired to a place called Colley's of Goldengarden. We had our dinner and tea and then Sean Lynch started to compose a song about the ambush to the air of "Shean Bhean Bhocht". We had only one grenade at the ambush and Jim Gorman had charge of it. He threw the grenade but it did not explode. Lynch included this incident in the song: "But he did not pull the pin, said the Shean Bhean Bhocht!" This nearly led to a private war between Lynch and Gorman. Lynch was, I would say, taking poetic licence, for hardly anyone doubted but that Gorman had pulled the pin.

We returned to the vicinity of the ambush that evening to meet an expected reprisal gang, but we were late. They had already burned the teacher's house in Thomastown.

One night, four members of the column went into Bansha to shoot police. Bill Fraher, Paddy Dalton, Tom Bellew and I comprised the party. The column was split into sections for the night, and the other sections had gone to other places

on a similar quest. Our section had scouts who discovered that there were a couple of Tans drinking in the village of Bansha. It was decided not to go into the village, but to wait for them on their return to the barracks. We took up positions at the graveyard and intended to fire on the Tans when we got them silhouetted in the light from Hourigan's shop window. Hourigan's light went out at about 10 o'clock and we decided to change our plans. We moved along the railway line for about 50 yards and from there we sniped the barracks, firing two or three rounds from each rifle. They fired Verey lights from the barracks and four or five rounds of ammunition. We returned to the column.

One evening we were travelling across country. We had a big fellow named Tobin guiding us. We came to a river, the Fidaughta. We wanted to cross the river, and to meet a bridge we would have had to travel a couple of miles up or down stream. "It's all right", said Tobin, "I'll take you across". He took the 15 of us, in our turn, across the river on his back.

Less than three weeks later, we were in the Glen of Aherlow, having crossed the mountain - Slievenamuck. British military were then stationed in the Grammar School at Clonbeg. We lay in ambush for two or three nights for their patrol, but they did not turn up. We had Sean Hogan with us on that occasion and Jerry Kiely, who was killed later on in the civil war. That was about a week before the Coach Road ambush.

One night, Bill Fraher and I were staying in the house of Paddy Kiely of the Glen. While we were asleep, a military patrol came along some time very early in the morning to arrest a man who was staying in the house next to Kiely's, which was only 20 or 30 yards away. By mistake, they came to the house in which we were sleeping and knocked at the door. Mrs. Kiely heard the knock and said to her husband: "Pat, these are more of the boys, I suppose. Go out". But Pat did not stir.

Next morning when the Kielys called us at about 9 o'clock, they took us out and showed us footprints all around the house, across to the other house and around the yard, which the military had left during the night. The door of the nearby house had been broken in and all the pictures and some furniture broken. The military did not find their man there because he had stayed with his father-in-law that night, so they returned to the village and found him. The two scouts, who were supposed to be guarding us, were asleep in the hay-barn. Lacey wanted to shoot them the next day, but he was prevailed on not to do so.

That day, the column went into an ambush position at a place called Inches Cross, about a mile beyond the village of Coach Road. We were all set for an ambush when we heard the sound of a lorry coming, but it proved to be only a creamery lorry. We remained at Inches Cross on the Coach Road for a couple of days in the ambush position. On this particular day, 30th November 1920, a Crossley tender came along with 8 or 9 Black and Tans and R.I.C. men. A cart was pushed out on the road to stop the tender and fire was opened. The driver was killed and the tender hit the ditch. I would say the fight lasted about 20 minutes. Six of the Black and Tans and R.I.C. men were dead. One of them escaped and ran all the way back to Bansha. We took one Black and Tan, named Burstock, a prisoner. His brother, also a Black and Tan, was dead inside the tender. We took him out of it, collected the ammunition and arms and set fire to the tender. We captured 7 or 8 rifles, 400 or 500 rounds of ammunition and some revolvers, but I don't think we got any grenades. We had no casualties on our side. The road took fire, as the petrol tank had been hit before the lorry stopped, and some of the dead Tans were in the wake of the fire. It burned their hands.

Next day, a man named Walsh was arrested and court-

martialled by the enemy and came very near to being executed. Walsh was identified by Burstock, whom we had released after holding him for a few hours, as having been one of the attacking party. Actually, Walsh had been transacting business in a bank in Tipperary Town at the time of the ambush, and, fortunately for him, the bank manager was able to testify as to the time he was in the bank.

The enemy burned a lot of houses on the following night in Tipperary Town, as a reprisal, and they also burned some places in the country near the scene of the ambush.

That evening (evening of the ambush) we marched along by the banks of the Aherlow river with our booty.. After proceeding a couple of miles, we met a man with a bag on his back. He was a poacher and the bag contained a salmon. We asked him for the salmon and added it to our booty. We took it to Dranganmor, a few miles from Cahir, into O'Gorman's, and they cooked the salmon for us; they were after threshing the same day, and we got a few cups of porter each to wash it down.

Soon afterwards we were in Donohill. Jack Shanahan, brother of the late Phil Shanahan, T.D., came along to guide us to Kilcommon. We went there to assist in the proposed attack on Kilcommon barracks. We were positioned on the hill outside Kilcommon on the Newport road to deal with the Lancers if they came out from their station in Newport. We were there four or five hours when a dispatch arrived saying that the attack was postponed as an old lady, Mrs. Ryan, was seriously ill in the house next door to the barracks. She was the mother of Packy Ryan of Doon who was active in the Volunteers.
So we withdrew and came back to Hollyford. There we met an old man, Sean Oge Ryan. "Well", he asked, "did you take the barracks We said: "No". "God help poor old Ireland when an old woman kept you from taking a peelers' barracks!", he said.

The column disbanded for about two weeks around Christmas 1920, and we went to spend the festive time at the houses of friends. On 1st January 1921, when the column was assembling, Seamus Robinson, Denny Lacey, Tadhg Crowe and five or six others met at Doherty's of Seskin near Limerick Junction. One of that family, Jim Doherty, was a member of the column. They were surprised by a party of Auxiliaries, 15 of whom dismounted from lorries at the gate and approached the house. The boys got out of the house and a running fight developed. Bill Fraher and Sean O'Meara were crossing fields on their way to Doherty's at the time. Fraher had a rifle and O'Meara had a revolver. Seeing what was happening, Fraher opened fire on the Auxiliaries - the range was too long for O'Meara's revolver. The Auxiliaries swung round, lost interest in the first party, and a second running fight developed between them and Fraher and O'Meara. Holding their guns above their heads and under fire from the Auxiliaries, Fraher and O'Meara waded breast high through the river Mulkeen which was in full spate at the time, re-engaged the Auxiliaries from the opposite bank and later safely rejoined their comrades.

Within a week, this same party of the column had another narrow escape from capture. They were at Tullamaine, near Fethard, and went to Major Morell's residence, Tullamaine Castle, and asked the lady of the house for food. She first said No, and, on further thought, said yes. After waiting an unduly long time for the meal, the boys became suspicious and left the house. They were gone only a very short distance when they saw lorries of military drive up both the front and back avenues and surround the house. A member of the column then recalled having seen a boy riding a pony leave by the back avenue shortly after Mrs. Morell had agreed to supply the meal. It was plainly evident that she had sent a messenger to Fethard for the military. No one would agree to take

retaliatory action against a woman, but it was fortunate for Major Morell that he was not at home at the time, or Lacey would have dealt severely with him.

It is difficult now to recall the events in order of sequence after the column re-assembled, but I remember that we sniped New Inn R.I.C. barracks, and Golden R.I.C. barracks before going on to Drangan where we occupied an ambush position. We were there from 9 o'clock in the morning until dusk that evening. It was a market day. We held up most of the market-goers and kept them prisoners, but no enemy forces came along. When we left Drangan, the enemy came out in strength to look for us. We lay in a cabbage field alongside the road, and, although they fired Verey lights, they did not see us.

We went on to Glenbower. We were told that the police used to practise throwing weights in the barrack yard. The place had been scouted and the police were alone in the barrack. We saw one policeman come out of the barracks and walk up and down. When he turned, Lacey called: "Fire". The policeman dragged himself into the barracks. He died afterwards. They opened fire with machine guns from the barracks, but they could not see us in our position on the hill. When bullets started coming from another direction, we observed two Black and Tans who were up on the hill, rabbit-shooting. The boys fired but did not hit either of them. All we got was one of their uniform caps. That was on 27th January 1921.

We marched on, two-deep, on each side of the grass margin. We were crossing the Carrick-on-Suir road when one or two motor cars came along. One car pulled up and we threw ourselves flat. Then the car, or cars, proceeded. We did not know until afterwards that the car was bringing a District Inspector to Glenbower to investigate the shooting.

We went to a farmer's house. They were Protestants.

Lacey asked for food for the boys, but they refused, saying that their consciences would not allow them to give it. We locked them up in a room. The boys got busy, put a kettle on the fire and cooked a meal of rashers and eggs.

We proceeded to the bank of the Suir and reached it about midnight. The fishermen were there waiting with their boats to take us across to Co. Waterford, to Clonea. We were about three weeks in that area and waited in ambush position at different times for a party of Black and Tans who were due to enter the area for the purpose of dismantling a big car. While we were in the area, no enemy turned up, but we met Dan Breen, George Plunkett and some others there. I might mention also that Black and Tans subsequently burned some of the fishermen's boats that brought us across the Suir.

After three weeks, we returned at night to Carrick-on-Suir. There were eight of us including Bill Fraher, Packo Ryan, Paddy Dalton, Sean Fitzpatrick, Sparkie Breen, Dinny Lacey and myself. We were armed with two revolvers each. We took up positions in the streets to attack a street patrol. We got no shooting to do, but had to clear off pretty quickly out of the town, as the enemy were searching the whole town for us. I don't think the local Volunteers wanted us there. Fraher and Packo Ryan were in one place, with a local Volunteer. A man passed by their position and the local man told them he was a policeman, but it was too late then to do anything about him.

We proceeded along the bank of the Suir to a house called Arrigan's and stayed there for the night. Our column had increased to 21 men with the coming of the Butlers, Ned Glendon and Pierce Tobin of Grangemockler, who had joined us on our way to Glenbower. Later, we were in ambush positions at Ballyporeen, Toorkill Cross, Alleen, Kilcommon, Goold's Cross Fethard and Tullamaine without encountering any enemy forces.

I remember, too, that we went to arrest a spy, a man named Rutland, in Tipperary Town. Paddy Moloney, Sean Fitzpatrick, Sparkie Breen and myself were in the party that went to his house, but he was not at home that night. He was shot at a later period, but I was not connected with his execution, as I was back in Co. Limerick at the time.

Towards the end of February 1921, we were around New Inn when a dispatch arrived requesting the Limerick men to return to their own brigade area. The Limerick men were Sean Lynch, who had been appointed commandant of the 6th Battalion, East Limerick Brigade, myself, who was appointed vice-commandant of the same battalion, and Bill Fraher. We returned to East Limerick about the end of February or early March.

When we arrived back in East Limerick, we wanted to join the East Limerick Brigade column straightaway, but they were in West Limerick and we could not contact them for a while. Meanwhile, we lived mostly in some of the dugouts in the Galtee Mountains. It was early in April 1921, before we contacted the column.

During the period we were waiting to contact the column Bill Fraher, Sean Lynch, Mick Joe Bourke and I slept one night at Ryan's of Ballyanahan on the slopes of the Galtees. We had scouts out during the night who went off duty at 7 a.m. They returned almost at once to warn us that a party of the Green Howards from Galbally, with their officer "Shaky Head" in charge, were at that early hour of the morning, raiding the house nearest to Ryan's. I was in a deep sleep at the time and the other three got out before me. When I went to look for my clothes, they were missing. It was a cold frosty morning, and I had to run out of the house with nothing on but my shirt. In a trench or narrow ravine on the mountain side I found the other three boys with our clothes. We

dressed there. Within five minutes, a deep mist which enshrouded the mountains suddenly lifted and we had a grand-stand view of "Shaky Head" and his party raiding the house we had just left. The military continued raiding and searching and we remained watching them until they withdrew about midday. The good people of the house did not forget us. They came along with hot tea and food which we certainly relished after our morning on the mountain.

Sometime later in April, the East-, West- and Mid-Limerick columns were at the foot of the Galtees, in Anglesboro', where there was a big range of mountains. I reckon that there were 130 of us there between the three columns. We were expecting to carry out some big operations over East Limerick. We lay in wait for the infamous Galbally patrol, the Green Howards, for six days. Our position was on the mountain road from a place locally known as High St. Crossroads to Anglesboro', a lonely road, but nothing came while we were there. It was said afterwards that they knew we were there. It would have been difficult to capture us in that place, as we had the mountain at our back and we could get away safely.

We moved off from there and proceeded to Shraharla, on the Co. Cork border. We were there some time before 1st May. On a Sunday, it was decided to lie in ambush for some lorries that used to pass. The three columns were there, but were scattered over a wide area. I was with Dan Allis, who was a section commander in the column at the time. We were probably half a mile away when we heard some shooting. Two lorries had come into the area and had engaged some of our men, more or less taking them by surprise. Four of our men were killed, and one, Patrick Casey, was captured and executed in Cork on the following morning. One of the men killed - Tim Hennessy of the Mid-Limerick column - was a

second cousin of mine. He was an only son, about 21 years of age, and he was killed outright. A man named Patrick Starr from Nenagh was also amongst those killed.

There were about 10 or 15 of us in the section and, when we heard the shooting, we went immediately towards the scene at the double. The lorries were on the retreat when we got there, and we opened fire on them, but they got away. They had the prisoner and the dead men in the lorry and took them away. What the enemy casualties were, I don't know. There were some of them hit, I know, and some of our lads were slightly wounded.

Late that same evening, we moved off again and arrived at Lackelly in the parish of Emly at about 6 o'clock next morning. About noon that day, a military cycle patrol from Galbally, the Green Howards, arrived in the vicinity and, taking some of our lads by surprise, shot four of them dead - Tom Howard, Willie O'Riordan and two Mid-Limerick men named Fraher and Ryan.

Dinny Quish (a County Councillor now) and I were some distance away, and when we heard the sound of the shooting, we went in that direction, linking up on the way with other column men. The military, observing our approach, opened fire and we replied. After a short exchange, they retreated. As they proceeded along the road, they were fired on, for about a mile, by some of our men coming towards the scene and I believe some of them were wounded. They left behind them 17 soldiers' bicycles which we captured.

Donnchadh O'Hannigan now arrived on the scene and took control of the column men who were scattered over a wide area. We got two horses and trap cars and placed the four dead bodies of our comrades in the trap cars, with the legs out, and the drivers sitting between them. I think one of the

Howards of Anglesboro' was driving one of the cars. With 17 of our men mounted on the captured bicycles as an escort we took the bodies down to Lough Gur. Amongst those who rode the bicycles were Donnchadh O'Hannigan, Liam Hayes, Davy Clancy, Billy Burke and myself. The bodies were wrapped in sheets, numbered and interred in a shallow grave in a corner of a field near Lough Gur. It was midnight. We had a priest there to administer the last rites of the Church. He was, I think, a Father O'Carroll.

On Tuesday, we proceed on our cycles to Kilteely. In addition to the 17 cyclists, there were a good number of the column men on foot. We were practically surrounded at Kilteely in a huge round-up by the enemy. I think, only for all the trees that had been felled along the roads, we would have been completely surrounded. They had an aeroplane flying over the area to assist them. Some of the lorries actually drove into the yards of houses during the morning where column men were in bed.

I was staying in a house owned by the Fitzgeralds and with me were Mick Burke (a Co. Clare man and then employed in East Limerick as a creamery manager) and Mick Joe Burke of Galbally. We were cleaning our rifles when we heard shooting. We had taken them asunder and had to assemble them again as fast as we could. We rushed outside and, in the next field, we observed, about 150 yards away, some of the enemy. We exchanged a few shots with them and they retreated. We learned afterwards that, in this shooting, Mick Callaghan of Ballinahone, Tipperary - a second cousin of mine and a member of the column - was wounded and captured.

We contacted the rest of the column, or most of them, and got cover in a big double ditch. These double ditches belonged to the roadways used long, long ago. We were hidden

there for some hours. For some undefined and unexplained reason, the military changed their plans and surrounded the Hill of Derk, about two miles away, scattering their fire on it.

We got breakfast at about 5 or 6 o'clock that evening - buckets of tea and hard boiled eggs. It was very welcome. Some of our men had captured a post office worker who had climbers for getting up telegraph poles. They thought he was a spy. We held him for a while, but released him when we moved on again. The cycle unit which was formed after capturing the soldiers' bicycles then went to a place called Coolnamorna, near Doon, Co. Limerick, where we got billets. Bill Hayes and a few of us stayed at Jack Maher's. Next day, we moved into Co. Tipperary to a place called Newtown, Annacarty.

I should have mentioned that, one or two days previously, we had been joined by the Brigade Commandant, Sean Wall. The Brigade Staff were to attend a Divisional meeting in the Kilcommon area. Wall, with some of the others, was on his way there and we were accompanying them.

On Friday, 6th May, we were billeted in three houses in the vicinity of Newtown. I was in Carey's house. Also staying in Carey's house with me were Sean Wall, the Brigade O/C., Donnchadh O'Hannigan, the vice Brigadier and Column O/C., Liam Hayes, Brigade Q.M., Seamus Malone, Brigade Intelligence Officer, Bill Burke of Ballindangan, Davy Clancy and Dinny Quish.

I was out early in the morning, about 6 o'clock, on scout duty with somebody else. I don't know what time exactly I was relieved and had some food. About midday, I was in a field some short distance from the house when I had a premonition that something was about to happen. I ran towards the house to get my guns and met some of the boys of the house, running from it. "Run, run!" he said, "they are landed".

I kept on running towards the house and he kept running in the other direction.

I got into the house and joined the others. Donnchadh O'Hannigan said to us: "I propose that we defend the house". Hannigan had been outside the house and had observed a mixed patrol of Black and Tans and R.I.C. men coming at a distance of a couple of hundred yards. I was told afterwards that there were 17 of them, but I could not see that number of men myself. We were allotted our stations in the house, some to the kitchen and some to the rooms. The kitchen was at one end. My station was in the sitting-room. I lifted up the window, took some cushions from the couches and started to barricade the window.

What I believe happened next was that one of the boys of the house ran out - he was probably frightened - and Sean Wall, who was unarmed, ran out after him to bring him back. There was a byroad running alongside the house from which the patrol turned in, crossed to the front of the house and pulled up outside the window. Wall had just run out at the time. We got no order to fire, but anyway we could not fire on account of the danger of hitting the Brigadier. For some reason which I do not know, both the patrol and Sean Wall suddenly disappeared to cover around an outhouse. Then one of the Tans - I did not see him - showed himself, and Hannigan ordered Davy Clancy to fire. He blew out the pane of glass with his shot and the Tan disappeared out of his view again. We got the order to evacuate and, as there was no backdoor or back window in the house, we went out by the front door at the ready. Up to that time only one shot, Clancy's shot, had been fired. We had four rifles and two revolvers. Hannigan and Liam Hayes had the revolvers. Malone, Clancy, Burke and myself had the rifles. We got away from the house without incident.

When we had gone a couple of hundred yards, we held a

brief council of war. Hannigan said: "I propose that we ambush these fellows on their way back to Cappawhite and rescue Wall". In order to get between the enemy and their barracks, we had to pass through Parson Seymour's lawn at Newtown. We were probably 50 or 60 yards in from the road when, suddenly, we got a volley of rifle fire from the road accompanied by shouts of "Hands up". Hannigan, Hayes and Malone, who were a bit in front, got away. Burke, Clancy and I dropped down on the lawn and replied to their fire. They cut the daisies out of the field. I remember it was a glorious summer day. This went on for some minutes. Clancy's ammunition ran out as he had left his bandolier behind, so Burke and I each threw him a clip of five rounds. We could see their hats over the ditch while they took aim at us. I was nearest the gateway which was about 100 yards away. I told Clancy I was leaving, and I sprinted to the gate, where I met Hannigan, Hayes and Malone. I asked them had they seen the patrol from their angle, but they had not. So I went out, carefully, on to the road and observed the patrol, blazing away at the two boys who were still on the lawn. From the prone position I took aim at the fellow nearest to me and fired. I heard one of them shout, "Run for it", and I fired five or six more shots into them before they turned a bend of the road. I saw one of them staggering. I did not see Wall, but he should have been there with them. Sergeant Kingston of the R.I.C. was found shot dead around the bend. Sean Wall was found dead near the sergeant. He had been shot by the patrol with shotguns. That was on 6th May 1921, and, by a strange coincidence, Sergeant Kingston was the man who arrested my brother Willie in Cobh on 3rd May 1916, almost exactly five years before.

There were no other casualties except Brigadier Wall and Sergeant Kingston. We had to mend punctures on some of the

bikes. We got on our bikes and, that night, we stayed at Coolnamorna. We had scouts out, but saw no more of the patrol

The next day, I think, we got back to Ballycahill, near Elton. On our way, we saw Carey's of Newtown - the house where we had billeted the previous night - burning. We billeted that evening at McCormack's of Ballyvalode near Oola.

Next evening we arrived at Howardstown, Bruree. We were alerted in the morning at about 7 o'clock. I remember that Hannigan, Hayes and others were there, and some of our 'foot' soldiers who had no bikes. We were alerted and informed that Sergeant Collins and a patrol of Black and Tans and R.I.C. men were raiding houses in the vicinity. So we decided to ambush them. We crossed the railway bridge to get into a position and, at another railway bridge, we saw a bunch of fellows who, we thought, were our own men, but, actually, they were Black and Tans. They recognised who we were and went away. We remained in the ambush position for a couple of hours. The Tans returned to Bruree from where they telephoned to the military stations. As a result, 84 lorries of troops and armoured cars proceeded to Bruree to carry out an encircling movement. The local scouts warned us that the patrol had returned to Bruree, and we moved off. We did not know at the time, of course, about the military encircling movement which, with lorries, cars and an aeroplane was about to commence. We cycled through boreens, double ditches and fields.

Some time that evening, we got into Bennett's of Grannagh. We were sitting down to our breakfast at about 7 o'clock in the evening, when the scout came in from the gate to say that there were two lorries of military at the crossroads, about 300 yards away. Filling our pockets with

whatever food we could manage, we retreated. We got into some house - I don't remember where - at about 3 or 4 o'clock next morning, and had some food. It was further back, west.

In the meantime, we had cycled through a place where the enemy had waited in ambush for us, and had opened fire with a machine gun on 3 or 4 local Volunteers who were escorting a suspect, an ex-soldier. Having shot them, they had left the position about an hour before we cycled through it.

We were drinking water later that evening when a scout reported to us that the military were coming at the crossroads. We took the rifles off our bikes and took up a position behind the ditch, but it was a false alarm.

Within a few days we had cycled back into East Limerick. One morning at about 4 o'clock, we got into Ballycahill, between Knocklong and Elton. I remember we pulled branches off the trees and brushed away the dust marks on the road so that the enemy would not know we had turned in there.

This was a very friendly area. A party of us were sent to an unoccupied farmhouse belonging to a family named Crowe, and we put it into a state of defence as best we could. We remained there for about a week. Donnchadh O'Hannigan borrowed a clerical suit from, I think, Father O'Carroll, and went to Dublin to make a report to G.H.Q. and to try and get a supply of ammunition.

About that time, too, Sean Forde rejoined us after his escape from Spike Island. One part of the column met him and he was riding a motor cycle, and another part of the column met him and he was riding a hunter horse.

Early in June 1921, part of the column was in Tiermoor, Kilfinane, which would be roughly half a dozen miles away from where we were at Ballycahill. A dispatch was sent from Forde or Hannigan to Dan Allis, who was in charge at Tiermoor, and the messenger was captured with the dispatch outside Elton.

I think that the dispatch gave the enemy the position of our section of the column and also that of the section at Tiermoor. At any rate, it brought to a close the career of the East Limerick Brigade flying column.

At about 10 or 11 o'clock that night, the column was disbanded. Our section was demobilised from where we were in Ballycahill, and the other section from Tiermoor. I think it was Hannigan who gave the instructions - Hannigan and Forde. At that time we had only 13 rounds of ammunition for each rifle and we had no hope of getting any more. From a military point of view our position in East Limerick was then a very serious one. Next day, over 4,000 British troops with numerous Auxiliaries and R.I.C. surrounded and searched the Ballycahill and Tiermoor areas, but, of course, the column was then gone.

After the disbandment of the column, Liam Hayes and I remained together for a couple of weeks. We were armed with revolvers. We had dumped the rifles for the time being. Then I made my way to the Galtees where I met a few of the old members of the column who had taken refuge in dugouts up on the Galtee mountains. Our orders were to carry on as sniping parties. We sniped one lorry of soldiers near Ballywire, Galbally, about mid-June. We sniped Galbally police and military barracks, maybe a few days before the Truce, which actually meant that I was firing on my own house, but we did not do any damage as it was at 300 or 400 yards range.

On 10th July 1921, the Mitchelstown Volunteers carried out an ambush on a military patrol - a transport party - taking horses to water. There was some shooting and two of the Mitchelstown crowd were wounded - Leo Skinner (now a District Justice) and William Gallagher. At that time, we were on the southern slopes of the Galtees - Kilbehenny.

We were staying in a dugout on the Galtees at a place called Black Hill. We were on our way down to the road when a British army aeroplane came up through Glenacurrane. We had no knowledge of the ambush in Mitchelstown at all. We were near Kilbehenny Castle when the 'plane came our way, and we lay flat on the grass. We had no arms, as we had left them in the dugout. At about the height of a tree, the 'plane flew over us, and the pilot, in a leather coat, looked over the side at us and apparently decided that we were innocent fellows, and flew away towards the east. They were combing the mountains. We raced back along the mountains to the dugouts and got our rifles. We were hoping that the 'plane would come our way again and as near to us. We set fire to a clump of furze and heather, thinking it would be a good idea to attract him to the spot. It did. It brought him within 500 yards. I was in charge. I thought he would come nearer, but he did not. I would have ordered fire, but he turned the 'plane away at a distance of 500 yards.

I was still living in the dugout on the Galtees on the day of the Truce, 11th July 1921.

During the Truce, our comrades who had been killed in Lackelly were disinterred at Lough Gur and given military funerals. We brought the remains of the two East Limerick men, Willie O'Riordan and Tom Howard, to Ballylanders. There was a huge crowd present. I was in charge of the firing party. I was not at the other funerals as I think they were held on the same day.

At that time, July 1921, my rank was that of vice-commandant of the 6th Battalion, East Limerick Brigade. I attended the brigade training camp at Sunville, and the divisional training camp at Galtee Castle during the Truce. The late Commandant Billy Walsh was the O/C. Training. Our instructors included two ex-American army officers - Colonel

Prout and Captain Quinlan, and an ex-British army officer, Lieutenant Delaney. Jack Kennedy, formerly of Tipperary Town, brought us our first Thompson machine gun from Dublin and instructed us in its use. My own battalion, the 6th, had its own training camp at Trench's of Castle Oliver and we carried out sham battles with them as part of the training.

The late Ernie O'Malley, then the Divisional O/C., frequently visited the camp on inspection. To test our progress in training, he told us on one occasion to carry out, unexpectedly, of course, an ambush on himself and his party, but to use eggs instead of grenades. We collected all the bad eggs we could lay hands on around the countryside, but never got the opportunity to use them in the sham ambush.

In the camp at Sunville we had with us a Black and Tan named Osborne. I believe he had sold ammunition to some of our men, was suspect by his own, and came to us for protection. He remained with us for the duration of the camp and was then given a money grant together with a letter saying that he had been held against his wishes - the letter to make things easy for him with his own authorities. He returned later, married a local girl and lived for some time in East Limerick.

Signed: Jack Joe O'Brien

Date: 16 July 1954

Witness: J. Grace.

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