

W. S. 662  
**ORIGINAL**

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 662

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 662.....

**Witness**

Michael Francis Heslin,  
St. Anne's,  
Longford,  
Co. Longford.

**Identity.**

Adjutant Longford Brigade, 1919 - ;  
Intelligence Officer do.

**Subject.**

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1919-1921.

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Nil

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Statement by Michael Francis Heslin,  
St. Anne's, Longford, Co. Longford.

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I joined the Irish Volunteers in Killoe in July 1918. This was the Killoe Company, Longford Brigade. The Company Commander then was John Denning. In 1919 I was appointed a clerk on the staff of the Longford County Council. This appointment was itself a moral victory for Sinn Féin and the Volunteers as I was opposed by the strongest forces of the Redmondite Party who then controlled the County Council. I continued in this position - cycling from my home to work each day - a distance of five miles each way. I also continued in my activities as a Volunteer.

Under the guidance and instruction of Dr. John Keenan, Dispensary Medical Officer Ballinalee, I formed a First-Aid Unit. In this work I was also assisted by the late Dr. J.J. McEvoy, who was a Volunteer and a student in the National University at that time. We attended lectures under Dr. Keenan in the Parochial Hall at Esker, Killoe. Many of the boys forming that Unit distinguished themselves in First-Aid service throughout the Brigade area afterwards.

At this time there were very few - about twelve men - enrolled in the Volunteer Force, and it took a considerable time to swell our ranks. In fact, it was not until the Conscription crisis that our strength took on any proportions. When the ranks were filled to overflowing the Officers decided that a Brigade should be established in County Longford, and, although we were not let into the secret, we felt

that there was a change coming over the organisation and that it was being moulded into a resistance or fighting force. When the Conscription crisis was over it was amazing how the ranks thinned out again.

I continued my association and training with the Killoe Company. In the evenings I spent a considerable time, before leaving Longford for my home, with Thos. Reddington on Intelligence work. Reddington, at this time, was a manual instructor with the Longford Technical Committee. The master mind behind this activity, and tagging of information of the British Forces and their activities against the Volunteers, was Thomas Bannon. Bannon was a national school teacher. He was a native of Longford and is now deceased. Many wires or telegrams in code were deciphered by Bannon in those days, and it was a revelation to watch him sit and work for hours on end on one of the police or military code messages.

Little did I think of the importance of this work at the time until later, during the War of Independence, when I was summoned to Dublin by Michael Collins. Collins was then Director of Intelligence. He kept me for a week in Dublin, instructing me in Intelligence methods and organisation, and then sent me back to our Brigade area to organise and take control of secret services within the Brigade.

Reddington's activities and organising abilities were recognised by all active members of the Volunteer Force and, from my close personal contact with him, I was able to impart considerable knowledge of this new Army to my close associates in the Killoe Company. Henry Hughes, my cousin, later to die of wounds, was one of the party associated with Bannon and Reddington.

He had a thorough knowledge of shorthand writing and I succeeded in picking this up from him. I found this very useful in later times in connection with my work for the Longford Brigade.

I continued my activities as a Volunteer until 1919 when, after a parade in Esker Hall, I was approached by Seán MacEoin and Seán Connolly, two Senior Officers. They told me they had a proposition to make to me and I was asked to accept the post of Brigade Adjutant. They pointed out to me that, as I was working in Longford town the difficulties and dangers of the post at the time and the hardships that it might entail later on. They gave me a week to consider it. I tossed the matter over in my mind, and at the end of the week they came again and I accepted the position. From then on it was really hard work.

The Brigade had been reformed and consisted of five Battalions with an outpost at Rathhaspick, near the Westmeath border. The 1st Battalion comprised the area roughly of Ballinalee, Killoe and Columcille; the 2nd Battalion - Longford town and surrounding district; the 3rd Battalion - Keenagh, Newtown-Cashel and Ballymahon area; the 4th Battalion - Ardagh, Edgeworthstown and surrounding district and the 5th Battalion covered the area in the north-west corner of the county - Drumlish, Dromard and along the Cavan-Leitrim border. The outpost or 6th Battalion comprised the area around Streete on the east side of the county on the Westmeath border.

After my appointment as Brigade Adjutant was ratified by G.H.Q. I was invited to Dublin in a despatch from Collins. I was then a young man and

and knew very little about Dublin. Collins took me in hand in his kind fatherly way, and during the week I stayed with him at McCarthy's Hotel near the Broadstone Station. Collins very vividly again laid down my duties in the Secret service. He handed me over then to Gearóid O'Sullivan, who was the Adjutant General, from whom I got a complete grind in the duties to be discharged by me as Brigade Adjutant.

When I came back to the Brigade area I established a Headquarters in Longford town. Up to this time there was no organised Intelligence or administrative organisation in being. I used my office in the Courthouse at all times when necessary for work in connection with the Brigade. Acting under Collins' instructions, I selected seven houses in the town of Longford and made use of them to sleep in during the week nights. This was to frustrate any attempt by the British forces to arrest me if any of my dispatches or other documents had been captured during the day.

I proceeded to organise the Secret Service on the lines indicated by Collins, and found this work highly interesting from the point of view that many members of the public who were not actively associated with the Volunteers were very sympathetic and very helpful. I concentrated on the officials of the Longford Post Office and there found active co-operation from many members of the staff. Amongst the members of this staff whom I can now remember, and to whom I wish to pay tribute were, Miss K. Cooney, Miss M. Madden, Miss Monaghan, Mr. J. Kelly, Mr. William Byrne, and last, but not least, Mr. Joe Skeffington, all of the Longford Post Office. Skeffington had returned some years before from France where he had a distinguished record while serving in His Majesty's Forces. His

sister - Miss Ciss Skeffington - was ticket clerk at the Longford Railway Station and was my chief contact on the Midland Great Western Sligo-Dublin line for all communications. I cannot stress too highly the importance of this work and the loyalty she displayed. In this connection I might mention the great work of Guard Claffey of the M.G. Rly. in delivering all our dispatches without allowing even one to fall into the British hands. Claffey was a Dublin man and, despite many attacks by the British forces on him, he continued to carry messages at all times up to the Truce in 1921.

The British forces were very active in the county and raids were frequent. To travel over the area was difficult due to enemy patrols and searching of individuals. I felt that my movements in and about Longford would eventually come to the notice of the British and, to offset any attempt of my arrest, I decided on a plan. I met MacEoin in Treacy's house near Ballinalee, where I attended a Brigade Council meeting, and told him he must write me a letter on behalf of the I.R.A. warning me to beware as I had used language against the County Council and the I.R.A. This letter was written by him and posted to me in the Courthouse, Longford, where my office was. It bore the Ballinalee post mark and I took it to the R.I.C. Barracks and asked for protection. This is a copy of the letter: -

"To M. Heslin, Clerk County Council.

It has come to our knowledge that you have made statements of the County Council's inability to pay you. Beware! Think on Ballinalee.

Signed (I.R.A.)"

From the time I handed this document to the R.I.C. I was their 'white-haired boy'. A loyal subject of the British Crown, I occasionally had a visitor to see me in the office to enquire as to my safety. On my trips to the country, I was required to inform them and was given the O.K. by their intelligence staff as to the state of the country in which I travelled.

As events developed my work with the Brigade increased a hundredfold. The difficulty of keeping contact with the different Battalion Units, and the Flying Column at a later stage, became almost impossible and highly dangerous. The British Forces and Dublin Castle had now devised a new system of code for their messages. All telegrams were sent in five figures cypher. Through my secret service organisation in the Post Office one of my agents there who worked on telegrams took a copy, and before the British had time to decode their message I had done so and gleaned all the information therefrom. As often as not this information was sent to the Brigade area concerned by a dispatch rider before the ink was dry on either the police or military messages when deciphered by them. This was achieved by an ingenious method for collecting the telegrams. The copy of the police or military telegram was sent from the Post Office by a telegram messenger boy in the familiar British red envelope, and was delivered to Mrs. McKeon who owned a drapery establishment on the east side of the Main Street, near the Courthouse. Immediately on receipt of the message she got in touch with me through Miss May Maguire, one of her staff. Miss Maguire was a tireless and fearless worker in the ranks of Cumann na mBan. When Mrs. Keon's house became the centre of attraction for the British military and their agents Miss Bridget Cowan, another great worker in the Cumann na mBan who resided in her



brother-in-law's (Jas. Hearne's) house on the west side of the Main Street opposite McKeon's received the messages. The shop attached to this house was used for the sale of delph etc. Miss Cowan used a huge jug on which was the face of a typical drunkard on one side. This she placed in the window of the shop with the horrible face leering on to the footpath as a signal to my special courier to collect the message it contained. Little did the British Forces and their intelligence agents know that the jug in Hearne's window was one of the many means devised to break their grip during the War of Independence.

I had great satisfaction some weeks after the Truce in taking their chief intelligence officer - Captain Sterling of the Lancers, stationed in Longford, and Cadet Richardson of the Auxiliary Forces down to the window to have a look at the horrid red face on the side of the jug that sent them scampering back to England. Through means of this jug we saved the lives of many of our men in the Column, including Sean MacEoin, as when the message was decoded we were able to warn them to get out before the British arrived.

The key to the codes used in the deciphering of the messages was supplied each month by Michael Collins, and, as I continued to perfect my intelligence system through specially timed and detailed messages from my intelligence officers throughout the area I eventually succeeded in devising a key on many occasions before the official one was received. This could never have been achieved were it not for the work of my Intelligence officers in the town and country who supplied me daily with detailed reports of all enemy activities in the area. In fact, the town agents supplied at regular hourly intervals reports on the movement of all enemy

forces out from and into the town and country. In this connection I must single out the McGuinness sisters, Joe Sheerin, Joe Byrne, May Maguire, Joe Gilchrist and Miss Connolly of Bridge Street who occupied a small shop near the military barracks. These were all resident in Longford town. In the country area of the Brigade I must mention Andrew Quinn and his sisters of Cooleeney on the main Longford-Edgeworthstown road, Edward Hagan of the Killoe Company on the main Longford-Ballinalee road and Michael Murphy and Bernard Dowd on the Longford-Sligo road in the 2nd Battalion area. All these took particular care and interest in the movement of enemy forces and their operations and reported such in detail to me without any undue delay. These were all special agents of mine as distinct from the Battalion Intelligence Officers. Once a car or lorry or patrol left any of the British posts in Longford, tabs were kept on it until it reported back. This, of course, applied to enemy parties operating inside the Brigade area. By careful scrutiny and piecing together of the reports on such enemy movements we were able to verify the instructions and information they received in their code messages and, on one occasion when no official key to the code arrived, I was able to construct my own key and decode their messages. This was accomplished by carefully noting the places they raided, who they were looking for, and so forth. I took this "key" to Dublin and gave it to Michael Collins. Needless to say, he was very much surprised.

One particular source which I had tapped and used effectively, although unknown to the officers and men of the Brigade, was the note-book carried by Detective Sergt. Reidy of the R.I.C. Reidy was stationed in

Longford town. This man, loyal in every respect to the uniform he wore, was a great friend of my father and my elder brother, James Heslin. James was a well known auctioneer and an official of the Longford Board of Guardians. Sergeant Reidy confided in him, and in Maxwell's cellar, one of the principal business houses in the town, they met and had their drinks. The Sergeant disclosed very useful information which was conveyed to me personally by my brother. An extraordinary incident happened during the height of the Brigade activities regarding this man, Sergeant Reidy. Thomas Reddington, O/C. the Brigade, regarded Reidy as an arch enemy of the I.R.A. organisation and he took steps to have him eliminated. He arranged to have him shot at Longford Railway Station as the 9.30 a.m. train was leaving. By a strange stroke of luck I discovered this and made my way to the station and succeeded in taking Reidy out of there and down town, thereby saving his life and his valuable, although unknown, services to the Brigade Intelligence Service.

I might add that Reidy was passing this information unwittingly and would never have given information if he had not been tapped in this manner. He gave information to us about forthcoming raids and suspect persons as disclosed in the police records.

In carrying munitions from Dublin to Longford I was, unfortunately, the victim of the circumstances then existing. All the other officers of the Brigade Staff had to go on the "run", or as it is described in modern language "underground". To get to Dublin from Longford then meant travelling by train as this was the only means of transport. Cars were then very few in number and were limited by the British Authorities to

to a radius, I think, of twenty-five miles or perhaps less. All travellers by train had to undergo a scrutiny by British forces at the station and also run the gauntlet with their agents or Murder Gang on arriving at the Broadstone Station, Dublin. This line of communication was the life-line of support for the flying column for supply of ammunition. It was in this particular operation that my friend, Sergeant Reidy, was of the greatest help. Knowing me as he did he never suspected that a son of my father would tell an untruth.

I wore glasses and feigned trouble with my eyes and flung a pathetic story to my friend, the Sergeant. Occasionally I wore an eye-shade. I covered this up at the other end with my friend J.J. McEvoy, then a medical student, who made my appointments with a Dr. Joyce. This completed my scheme to defeat any attempt by the British for a check-up on my movements. McEvoy resided in digs in Eccles Street, Dublin.

The carrying of munitions at the time was a hair-raising experience, to say the least of it. In this connection I am tempted to relate the terrifying experience during one visit to Dublin for Brigade munitions and to show the subterfuge one had to resort to in order to beat the British Authorities. Collins was always helpful as far as the Longford Brigade was concerned and on this occasion escorted me to an arsenal in what was then known as Brunswick Street, now Pearse Street. We were accompanied by Seán McMahon who was then Quartermaster-General.

We entered an alley off Brunswick Street and, to my surprise, a typical country woman with a white apron opened the door of a small cottage-like building.

After some discussion with Collins, McMahon and Collins decided the amount of munitions to be allocated, by way of hand-grenades, 303 ammunition and a few Colt revolvers with .45 ammunition. Collins arranged to have them packed in two boxes and delivered to where I was staying at 144A Phibsborough Road. This was the home of James Duffy, an employee of Guinness' Brewery. Duffy was married to a cousin of mine, Maggie Claffey, formerly of Longford. Her brother, Pat Claffey, a builder, was foreman for John Good & Co., Builders, Dublin, and resided with the Duffy family. He now resides with his family at 1, Blackheath Park, Clontarf. Mr. and Mrs. Duffy died some years ago.

The two boxes of ammunition arrived by taxi under the supervision of Collins himself. We took the boxes in. The boxes were labelled and consigned to P.J. Heraty, Merchant, Edgeworthstown, who was then one of our greatest supporters of the movement in the county. A tag on the boxes bore the inscription, "Glass Ware: Handle with Care".

The boxes were stowed under the bed in an upper room in which P.J. Claffey and myself slept. About 2.30 a.m. next morning I awoke and found the room a blaze of light and heard rifle shots on the road outside. I then discovered from my friend, Claffey, that there was a Sinn Féin hall opposite and on this the British Auxiliary Forces were wreaking their vengeance. Doors were being broken in and the inhabitants were in a state of confusion.

The position for us was serious in view of the fact that rifle butts were pounding on the entrance door of our house. I decided to take Claffey into my confidence as he was unaware of the cargo hidden

under the bed. We found an exit at the back and deposited the boxes in safety. The 'Auxies' searched the house but nothing was found. Next day I was faced with an almost impossible task of taking the munitions to Longford through the Broadstone Station. I was under orders from Collins to have the stuff delivered to the Column without delay. I knew that the boxes would never get past the scrutiny of the searchers at Broadstone Station. I decided on another way out. I procured two large travelling cases in which I placed the stuff and sent for J.J. McEvoy and T.J. Doherty, my two student friends. They scouted Broadstone and reported that a cordon of military with fixed bayonets was guarding the entrance to the Station right up to the ticket office. My position was desperate. However, I made my plans for my journey despite the appeals of my two friends.

Two girls, one Maggie Claffey, niece of Mr. Duffy, a girl in her teens and now the wife of Detective Officer Conway and her companion, a Miss May Leech of the Glasnevin district, listened carefully to my plan and agreed to act as I intimated. The plan was: - I was to take one case in my hand, although it was very heavy, while one of the girls was to hold on to my other arm while she did the "sob stuff" with her handkerchief to her face. This was to be my first attempt to get through the cordon and put over my story on the British officer who interrogated all travellers at the top of the cordon. The girls acting under the circumstances would have put many an actress in the background. We got to the officer and were duly held up. I left my bag of 'glass ware' on the platform while my fair companion cried - I was a student whose health had broken down in the city and was now going

home to my parents in the last stages of decline.

The officer 'fell' for the story, marked my bag with a piece of chalk and insisted on placing it in my carriage and under a seat which I had selected. When I had regained my breath I told him that a friend of mine was coming along with another bag. He came with me to the entrance and James Duffy, my host, with Miss Leech attached, arrived there with the second bag which the officer chalked and duly placed under the seat also.

My companions were hurriedly sent from the station by me and I sat down in the compartment in the carriage with the cases underneath and feebly attempted to wipe the perspiration from my forehead. I cannot pay sufficient credit to the brave man, Duffy, and to the two girls and to Paddy Claffey for his words of encouragement during that awful hour of the raid on Phibsborough Road.

As I sat in the compartment, a man who was sitting opposite me looked up from behind his paper and said: "I know you; you are Heslin from Longford. I partly guess what's up, but don't worry about me. I am an ex-British soldier. I was up attending a Board. Here are my papers". I examined the papers he handed me and discovered he was one of a family named Durkin whose people were living in Longford. He was then residing in Boyle. He apparently sensed the position and as I handed him back his papers, with a twinkle in his eye, he said: "I know nothing". I was relieved, but the worst had yet to happen as six R.I.C. men with full military kit entered the compartment and looked it over, kicked my bags with their feet and inquired if they belonged to me. At the time I was unable to answer when Durkin spoke up and, before I could say

anything explained that they were left there by a British officer, a friend of mine, who was now on the platform outside. This was apparently sufficient proof of my loyalty and the officer in charge of the police pulled a cork from a half-pint whiskey bottle and invited me to have a drink.

Everything went 'O.K.' from then on until we got to Mullingar where I found the station in control of British Forces and a raid in progress. All compartments and civilian travellers were being searched. I appealed to my friend of the bottle, telling him my story of my "bad health" and once again my frightened appearance was my passport to safety. The man in charge of the raiding party, a swarthy-faced Black and Tan, kicked my cases under the seat and accepted the explanation of my uniformed friend. I only wish I knew who that R.I.C. man was, but I was too scared to enter into a conversation with him in case he might find out too much about me.

The train proceeded on the journey and the R.I.C. men got off at Streete Station. I was met at Edgeworthstown by an old friend with a car, a Ford, owned by Richard Tuite. He had been given particulars of my destination by Mr. Michael Connolly, National Teacher. Having delivered my cargo of munitions to a house near the home of the late Vice-Brigadier Sean Connolly, (who later lost his life while acting as organiser for G.H.Q. at Glassdrummin, Co. Leitrim) I got in touch with MacEoin and Conway and eventually found my way back to I.R.A. Headquarters in Longford. This carrying of munitions, despite the attention of the British forces and their agents, continued up to the period of the Truce in July 1921.



Having perfected the intelligence system by intensive training of the battalion and company officers, it became part of my life at the time and in this regard my memory and that of the men concerned with this branch of warfare was rarely at fault. It was surprising to find country people coming in on business to the town taking stock of enemy movements and conveying this information to people connected with the intelligence service. Hotels and business houses which the enemy visited or made purchases in were all sources of information. Every little bit of information was pieced together to complete the 'web' to be made use of to baulk the British in their attempt to smash the organisation of the I.R.A. This secret service work was brought to a fine art in the Longford Post Office where any letter addressed to any member of the British Forces was carefully scrutinised, opened, and its contents passed to my office.

It was by this means that an individual whom I shall call Mr. "X", an agent of the British Intelligence System, was discovered. His letter bore no name, only a number. His letter was held by me and instructions given to two of my agents in the Post Office to watch all letters passing through for handwriting similar to that on the documents which I held. A week later I received a message to meet a certain person and I was handed an envelope, the writing on which resembled in every way the one in my possession.

On opening this letter I discovered a Postal Order for one shilling addressed to a firm of music publishers in London with the request for the music and words of a certain song. The name of the writer was clear and the Post Office stamp on both letters

identical. I took both documents to Dublin where I handed them over to Collins and several tests were carried out by handwriting experts. I returned to Longford with the letters and a direction to have the writer of the second one interrogated. I brought the matter before the Brigade Committee at their meeting. Mr. "X" was arrested, denied the charges, but on search, the counterfoil of the Postal Order for the shilling was found in his pocket book and in a day book in the establishment in which he worked was found missing the page on which he had written his information to the British forces in the first letter. Finally, he admitted having communicated with the British authorities and of having given the names of members of the South Longford Flying column who were at that time resting in the district after the Terlicken ambush. Mr. "X" was duly tried, found guilty and, fortified with the rites of the Church, was executed.

There were a few other such cases, one in particular in which a Madame "Y" had written her information to the British Intelligence agent at Longford on the back of two "Goose Hamper" raffle tickets. I was particularly interested in this case as I had recently cycled through the district where this woman lived, and under arms, with other members of the column in broad daylight. I knew from the information disclosed by her and of the names given that she had a good knowledge of our movements, the places at which we stayed and the particular working of the organisation in general.

I took the tickets to Collins at G.H.Q. and from a Religious Order in Dublin we discovered from the numbers the persons to whom certain blocks of tickets had been forwarded. We had investigations carried out through

the Brigade Intelligence Service, but the Truce on 11th July 1921 saved Madame "Y". The tickets in this case were also intercepted through my agents in the P.O. at Longford. These two cases will suffice to show how British agents were tracked down and brought to justice in this area.

Regarding Intelligence, I must pay a tribute to the Battalion and Company Intelligence agents of the Longford Brigade for their work in this connection and for their services. We never succeeded in making contact with any members of the British Intelligence in the various barracks with a view to using them. Ordinary contacts for the purchase of arms and so forth were made, but these were of no use for intelligence purposes as they would not be in possession of information regarding future movements or plans of the British authorities.

Strange as it may appear, I never had any ambitions to be a soldier and my call to duty at this particular time was no doubt prompted by an atmosphere in which I grew up in my home. My father was one of the leading lights in the United Irish League which was sponsored by the Old Irish Parliamentary Party. The flag of the Killoe Branch of that League hung in the entrance hall of my father's house. On one side of the flag was a painting of Robert Emmet over which were the words "Ireland a Nation". On the other side, a painting of Michael Davitt surrounded by a scroll "United we stand - divided we fall". As a child I had seen this banner carried by two stalwarts after which followed the Killoe Band. After them came a contingent armed with hazel sticks as they set off to drive the bullocks from the land of the Land grabbers. Fiery speeches were made, but always present were the

R.I.C. with fixed bayonets or drawn batons and every element helped to impress on my young mind the fact that this country was firmly held by an oppressor. All these things and the stories I heard from the old Nationalists such as Neil Frunty, Edward McGirr, John Doherty at my father's fireside filled me with the desire to do something in my own small way for Ireland. The saddest day of my life came in the early days of the troubled period when I arrived at my father's place in Cloontumpher in the parish of Killoe to find him crying, and to discover the reason - the Black and Tans and R.I.C. had ripped that flag to pieces with their bayonets. The old men of the district, who for years had carried on the fight in their way, were there with him, sobbing like children. From then on, they of their generation who had tried by constitutional means to break down the oppression were now avowed supporters of our military endeavour.

Playing as a soldier during this period was for me something of the spirit of adventure. I was in the movement as an ordinary Volunteer and now found myself the Adjutant of the Brigade and Collins's special Intelligence agent. I was surrounded with comrades many of whom were bloodthirsty, while on the other side, the forces of the Crown were steeped in blood. The position for me whose mind was developed from the organisation side and the perfect running of a machine to help in the movement, was at times, to say the least of it - a dream - a nightmare.

Notwithstanding this, I felt some peculiar urge within me to have a go and to ally myself with the fighting forces of the Brigade. It was here that Collins stepped in and in a manner almost threatening directed me to stick to "my gun" which was a

typewriter and, as he stated, "The pen which is mightier than the sword". Withal I knocked in a time with Captain M.F. Reynolds and the Killoe Company at Doherty's Crossroads near Ballinalee where Comdt. MacEoin had decided to strike his biggest blow at the British forces. Doherty's Cross was selected as a strong outpost on the main Longford-Ballinalee road and everything was made ready to meet the might of the British forces there.

It was at Doherty's Crossroads that the first field telephone service was used by the I.R.A. in the war with the British. James McGoldrick of Emmybegs had returned from America and, having worked on telephone systems there, volunteered his services and, with the late Jim Boles, I helped him cut the wires of His Majesty's telegraph service and pull them through Doherty's window and in a short time he had his instruments connected and it was "Hello, Ballinalee" where MacEoin had taken over possession of the Post Office.

All this time Captain Reynolds was placing his men in position around the crossroads and for many a weary night I helped and enjoyed keeping guard with the men of my old company. The connection for the telephone was made to an ordinary post office telephone as we had not got telephones of the military type.

If my nerves were not up to standard at that time I soon discovered that the morale of the British was suffering on somewhat similar lines, if not worse. One day on my way back to Longford I had to cross a wide trench which had been cut in the road to obstruct the passage of British forces. In a nearby farmyard I discovered an unused skillet or small metal pot. I took this and placed it upside down in the bottom

of the trench and from it I attached some yards of copper wire on to the main road and embedded the ends over which I placed a flat stone. I came back to Longford and from the post office there I had a call put through to the British forces informing them of a mine laid on the road in the trench at Rhine. All the forces at their command were promptly lined up in lorries and the area was surrounded, but not one inch beyond that would they go.

Their engineers suffered headaches. Shots were fired into the trench and hand grenades crashed into it until eventually all the force retired back to Longford. My "Skillet Mine" was there intact some days later when I went to examine it.

Having discovered this "Mine complex" existing in the British forces I concentrated on similar methods and when faced with a shortage of dispatch carriers and knowing from my intelligence reports that a British search party was bound for a certain area in the county, I successfully halted their advance on various roads around the town of Longford by using this copper wire attached to a tree and the other end sunk in the centre of the road. On one occasion I held up the main body of the King's Own Lancers on the Battery Road at Longford. They stood guard over "the mine" until Engineers had arrived from the Curragh to remove fourpence worth of harmless copper wire. Information of enemy movements was obtained through the interception of their code messages which, as previously stated, I always received from my agents in the Post Office in advance of the enemy. Such messages usually related to the location of MacEoin's column and to areas which were to be searched for arms and to men who were to be arrested or maybe shot out of hand "while trying to escape" as was generally

stated later in the British press.

When I discovered that those "mine" methods had got outworn it was time to devise some other means of harassing the enemy. In this I was ably assisted by the late Bernard Keenan of Lamagh, Newtownforbes, who was a shop assistant in the Midland Warehouse Co., Main St., Longford. The Lancer Regiment stationed at Longford made many night raids into the country occupied by the flying column and as they went on horseback they were able to take short cuts across country. Having discovered from my agent in the Post Office, through a deciphered telegram, that a raid was due to take place near Drumlish on a certain night, I duly warned the column and I.R.A. personnel there. I then set out to teach the Lancers a lesson they would never forget. I went to Bernard Keenan who supplied me with a number of five naggin bottles and a hammer. I spent some time in smashing the bottles and, having filled two large bags with the broken parts, Keenan had them conveyed by the Midland Warehouse van to a spot I had selected on the main road from Longford to Drumlish on the Battery Road near Longford. Knowing the time of the departure of the Lancer patrol and assisted by Keenan, I placed the broken bottles over the road after darkness set in some minutes before we heard the heavy bolt on the barrack gate being withdrawn and the clatter of horses' feet. We had covered the road for a distance of about ten yards and, as they usually did on these days, the Lancers galloped in file towards their destination. We took up position in a field nearby and awaited results. Hell broke loose amongst men and horses as they galloped into the trap. Horses' hooves were cut to pieces, men mangled, and that was the end of the Lancers night patrol. Those little acts of playing

at war were sufficient to satisfy my desire as part of what may be described in to-day's language as the "cold war" against the British, as I had my job to keep for the few pounds which the Co. Council paid in those days. I was whole-time employed and as often as not worked the twenty four hours of the clock in my position as Local Official and later, as we were then known, as "Bloody Rebels".

To my sisters and brothers who helped me out financially and otherwise, and to my local agents, in particular Miss Peg Keenan, who was then Relieving Officer under the Longford Board of Guardians; Miss May Maguire and Miss Kate McGloughlin, who were employed in the drapery business of Mrs. McKeon of Main St. Longford: Mrs. McKeon herself, Miss Cowan and the Hearne family, Mr. and Mrs. Michael Doyle, Miss K. Cooney, Miss Madden, Miss McGee and the male members of the Longford Post Office whom I have already mentioned, I pay particular tribute. Also to Miss Kathleen Waters and the McGuinness sisters and last, but not least, Miss "Babs" Newman of Clonrollagh, who through Mr. Joseph Beirne, one of the best soldiers of the brigade and who was employed in the leather trade by Mr. Bernard Ward of Ballymahon Street, Longford, for having saved my life the day before the Truce was signed, by contacting me at the Longford railway station where I was sending my despatches to G.H.Q. To these and many others I owe a deep debt of gratitude for the assistance and encouragement they gave me during that trying period, and last, but not least, the good people of the county who were ever ready to offer a bed and a meal to me and the men of that period. They were, to my mind, "our first line of defence".



At this time all the concentrated forces of the British were raiding my hideouts in the town searching for me. A raiding force of R.I.C. and Auxiliary police had captured some photographs in the house of Mr. Patrick Brady, N.T., of Gaique Cross, Ballinamuck. In one photograph I appeared with some officers of the Brigade. His daughter, Elizabeth, heard the raiders use my name when examining the photographs and taking her bicycle set off for Longford, 12 miles away, where she contacted "Babs" Newman who, in turn, informed me of the raid and the photograph. I had time to escape by the railway line into the country. Two days later came the Truce. Later I married the girl who saved my life - Miss Elizabeth J. Brady, N.T., of Gaique Cross, Ballinamuck. Her brother, James J., was an active member of the North Longford Flying Column and Comdt. of the 6th Battn. Longford Brigade.

Signed:

*Michael F. Heslin*  
 Michael F. Heslin.

Date:

*25/3/1982*

Witness:

*Matthew Barry Comd't.*  
 (Matthew Barry) Comd't.

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