

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1,190

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

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,190 .

Witness

Michael Pierce,
Killarney Road,
Castleisland,
Co. Kerry.

Identity.

Captain, Ballyheigue Company
Irish Volunteers, Co. Kerry.

Subject.

Ballyheigue Company Irish Volunteers,
Co. Kerry, 1913-1921.

Conditions, if any. Stipulated by Witness.

Nil .

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STATEMENT OF MICHAEL PIERCE,

Killarney Road, Castleisland, Co. Kerry.

I was born in Ballyheigue, Co. Kerry, in December, 1898. I was sent to the local national school until I was fifteen years of age. When I left school I went to work on my father's farm. My father and uncles were Fenians, Ballyheigue being at one time a centre of the Fenian movement.

I joined the Volunteers when they were formed in Ballyheigue at the end of the year 1913. Our drill instructors were ex-British soldiers named Flaherty, Sullivan and Hurley. Our strength was about 120. A Volunteer committee controlled the local company. A Fr. Allman was President and a man named James Moriarty was Secretary. The officers were John Carey, Captain; Michael Supple and Patrick Catchman, Lieutenants. After a time we managed to obtain three long Lee Enfield rifles with Morris tubes, three miniature rifles and three Martini rifles. We had target practice with the miniature rifles occasionally. We drilled in sections during the week. On Sundays the whole company met and paraded to Mass.

Sometime prior to John Redmond's speech in the House of Commons pledging the support of the Volunteers to the British government in its fight against Germany, Fr. Allman and other speakers, including Michael Flavin, M.P., of Listowel, held recruiting meetings within the church gates. They spoke from the steps of the church

and called on the young men of the parish to join the British Army. They were constantly heckled by the Volunteers and eventually gave it up. However, after Redmond's speech the Volunteers ceased to exist.

After the break-up a number of the Volunteers, about thirty in all, met from time to time and kept the Volunteer spirit alive. We were members of the local G.A.A. hurling club, of which Michael Leen was Captain. Austin Stack visited Ballyheigue about January or February of 1916 and called on Michael Leen and other young men who had been in the Volunteers. After Easter Week, 1916, with members of the G.A.A. I assisted in the national aid collection.

In March, 1917, the Volunteers were reorganised in the parish. Our first Company Captain was John Corridan; Michael Leen was 1st Lieutenant and Michael McGrath 2nd Lieutenant. I was one of four Section Commanders. Our strength when reorganised was around 100. After a short time John Corridan resigned, when Michael Leen became Captain and John Godley became 2nd Lieutenant. Some short time after the general release in September, 1917, the local company paraded to McKenna's fort where Roger Casement had been arrested. There we met Volunteers from all over County Kerry and different parts of Munster. At least one thousand Volunteers were present that day, as well as forty thousand people. Special trains had been run for the occasion. They extended along the line from Ardfert to Lixnaw railway station. The meeting was addressed by Thomas Ashe, Fionán Lynch, Austin Stack and other speakers.

About a month after this meeting Michael Leen

resigned as Company Captain and I became Captain. Our strength by this time had increased to 220, with the result that the company was divided and a separate company, which was known as Kerryhead Company, was formed. This reduced the strength of our company to 120, which comprised four sections, one in each of the townlands of Ballinclemisig, Ballyheigue, Tiershanahan and Clahanleech. I visited each of these sections during the week. On Sundays the four sections came together for drill and route marches.

Around this time, with Michael Godley and Michael McGrath I called on Fr. Allman for the rifles which were in his charge after the formation of the Volunteers in 1914. He told us he had not got them and refused to disclose where they were located. A day or two later I met a man named Supple, who informed me that the rifles were in his house and that they had been hidden there by his brother-in-law - James Moriarty - who was Secretary of the Volunteer committee in 1914. Supple would not hand us out the rifles but told us where they were hidden in his house and that we could raid the house in his absence and collect them. With James Connor, a brother of mine - John Price - and other Volunteers we raided the house and seized the rifles, -2,000 rounds of Morris Tube ammunition and 300 rounds of .303 ammunition. The following day Supple reported to Fr. Allman that the rifles had been seized. Fr. Allman was in favour of reporting the matter to the R.I.C. Supple protested. Eventually Fr. Allman agreed not to do so.

At the latter end of the year several young men from around Ballyheigue had procured their fares and obtained sailing tickets to go to the U.S.A. On arrival

at Southampton, young women in the streets stuck white feathers in their coat lapels. After they and a number of other Irishmen boarded their boat at Southampton the crew struck and refused to sail the boat until the Irishmen left. All of these young men later returned to Ballyheigue.

During the conscription scare early in 1918 the strength of the company increased to 140. Drilling was intensified during the period. Shotguns in the area were collected and were carried openly. When the scare had passed, about twelve of our new recruits left the company. They were mostly old men who were not able to keep up with the regular weekly drilling and parading at the time.

Previous to the general election I took part in canvassing the area for the prospective Sinn Féin candidate, collecting money and attending public meetings preparatory to the election. On nomination day the Sinn Féin candidates for North, South, East and West Kerry were returned unopposed. The candidates were: Fionán Lynch, Austin Stack, James Crowley and a man named Roche.

Returning from the creamery one day early in January, 1919, I saw a Union Jack floating from Ballyheigue Castle, owned by Major General James Crosby, while a victory dance and celebrations were in progress in the castle to celebrate the defeat of the Germans. That night, with other Volunteers, armed with revolvers, I approached the castle with the intention of taking down the Union Jack and floating the tricolour instead. On our way we observed three R.I.C. men who had been on duty in the grounds of the castle, go into a publichouse.

As we were about to enter the castle we met a military officer with a great-coat over his dance suit. We seized him and took his revolver and locked him and his ladyfriend into an outhouse. Tar barrels were blazing on the lawn at the time. A number of our men entered the ballroom. Two or three went up the fire escape ladder, hauled down the Union Jack and hoisted the tricolour. They obtained a ladder and tied the rope which hauled up the flag out of reach. Andrew Monson, a mechanic, dismantled a carbide engine which provided the lighting of the castle. Those who entered the ballroom seized a .32 rook rifle and two double-barrel shotguns. A Colonel Erskine, a brother-in-law of Major Crosby, was entertaining the party at the time.

Next day the R.I.C. in great force raided houses in the area, including mine. I happened to be in a field and escaped. Several Volunteers were arrested, but as the R.I.C. had no evidence that they had taken part in the raid they were all released. From this on the R.I.C. paid several visits to my house. I went 'on the run' for some time as I could not stay at home at night in case I would be arrested.

In April we raided the office of an Inland Revenue official in the area and seized a shotgun and 100 cartridges. In June we seized a rifle (the property of the Coastguards at Ballyheigue) from a boat in the boat slip near the Coastguard station. The boats were used by the Coastguards for fishing and catching seals. A couple of months later a general order was issued by the Brigade O/C to collect all shotguns in the battalion area. By the end of 1919 we had in the company area four service

rifles, ten miniature rifles, seven various types of revolvers and about fifty shotguns. A man by the name of Michael Hanlon was appointed Company Quartermaster. The rifles were kept in a dug-out. Each Volunteer looked after a shutgun. They were inspected once a fortnight by Hanlon.

In the month of October we decided to attack the R.I.C. barracks at Ballyheigue. The garrison consisted of a Sergeant and six R.I.C. The Sergeant and three of the R.I.C. lived in the barracks; the other three lived out. I went to the Brigade O/C, Paddy Cahill, to obtain his permission for the attack. We discussed the matter for three nights in the old County Hall, Tralee. He agreed and said he would send Dan Jeffers, Company Captain, of Strand Road, Tralee, with other Volunteers to help us out. On the night fixed for the proposed attack Cahill sent a dispatch to Paddy McKenna, Vice O/C of Ardfert Battalion, to which we were attached, calling off the attack, stating that he (Cahill) had received information that the barracks was to be evacuated in a week's time. We had thirty armed men 'standing to' for the proposed attack, with men from Causeway, Ardfert and Kilmoley Companies awaiting an order to trench all roads in the vicinity. I dismissed the men that night, some of whom felt very sore that the barracks was not attacked.

Three nights later we met again, when about twelve of us raided the houses of the three R.I.C. living out. We seized two revolvers, a quantity of ammunition for these and a number of cartridges. Only one of the R.I.C. men was at home when we carried out the raid. As Cahill

had forecast, the barracks was evacuated about three days later. I received a severe reprimand from Cahill for raiding the houses of the R.I.C. Some of the R.I.C. were sent to Causeway; the others to Tralee. From then onwards the R.I.C. paid occasional visits to Ballyheigue; sometimes on foot from Causeway or by lorry from Tralee. All during the year we kept up drilling and field exercises.

In the first week of February, 1920, I was informed that a cycle patrol of one Sergeant and two R.I.C. had arrived in the village of Ballyheigue. I hurriedly collected about fourteen men of the local company and took up a position behind a ditch at a place called Ballyoonan on the way to Causeway. I was armed with a revolver; the men had shotguns. As the three R.I.C. came within range - they were walking up a hill pushing their cycles - I called on them to halt. One R.I.C. man dropped his revolver on the road. The other put up his hands. The Sergeant dropped his cycle and ran. After covering a few yards he turned and fired a couple of shots. When he saw he was covered and could be shot to bits, he, too, put his hands up. We collected three revolvers and three cycles. One of the R.I.C., whose name was Cunniffe and who had dropped his revolver, told us he was about to resign from the R.I.C. and did so later.

Next day a large force of R.I.C. raided houses in the area and arrested several of our men, most of whom they later released. They held on to four - Robert Daly, Edward Hussey, Patrick O'Halloran and Thomas O'Connor. These four men were subsequently sent to Belfast jail and released in the month of June, 1920, after undergoing a general hunger-strike.

About two months after the capture of the three revolvers and three cycles, two R.I.C. men - Constables Sullivan and Finn - arrived in Ballyheigue at about 4 p.m. from Causeway. As they were returning via Buncurrig ten of us were waiting for them. William Leen and I had rifles; the others had shotguns. We had taken up positions inside a fence. I was in charge. As they came to our position I ordered "hands up". They ran for a trench in a bog alongside the road where they drew revolvers and fired. We returned the fire. Sullivan was wounded in the wrist. Finn put his hands up. Leen and I went over to take the surrender. I was watching Sullivan who was rolling around in pain. Leen at the same time was watching Finn and saw him put his hand in his haversack and draw out a bomb. Finn told me. We both covered Finn and ordered him to drop it. He did immediately. On Finn we found one revolver and one dozen egg bombs. We got another dozen egg bombs on Sullivan. We could not find his revolver. It had dropped into a boghole when he was wounded. We searched the boghole for some time but failed to find it. In addition to the revolver and bombs, we collected handcuffs, whistles, belts, notebooks, holsters and a copy of the "Hue and Cry". The usual R.I.C. activity followed. Several houses around were raided and searched. On the following night we burned down Ballyheigue R.I.C. barracks which had been vacated earlier.

In May, 1920, I took charge of an attack on Ballyheigue Coastguard Station. I mobilised the company for the attack. Kilmoyley and Causeway Companies blocked roads for the occasion. I selected fifteen men

for the job which was to capture arms and burn down the building. Anchored in front of the station was a gunboat with a crew of about thirty men. The gunboat would be about 300 yards out in the water. The crew of Marines usually came into the station and mixed with the guards. We had to wait until the gunboat left on its patrol round from Fenit to Kerryhead and Loop Head and back to Ballyheigue, where it anchored.

We had mobilised at 11 p.m. When the gunboat left at 2 a.m. I detailed one section to enter the station on the west end where the single men's quarters were located. I detailed another section to rush the watch-room while I took charge of a third section which was to enter on the east end or side where the officers' and married men's quarters were located. My instructions to No. 1 section were to force the door on the west side and immediately sprinkle petrol and set fire to the building on their side as soon as they got in.

The station was built in 1852. It was three storeys high with a watch tower. It had a flat roof with a parapet all around. When the men within heard the door on the west end being broken, they rushed for the tower which all of them, except the officer in charge, succeeded in reaching. When I entered on the east end I had to climb some stone steps to reach the officer's quarters. As I got to the top I saw the captain making for the tower to join his men. I drew my revolver and ordered him to halt. When the men of No. 2 section entered the watch-room or day-room they found the man on duty asleep.

As soon as No. 1 section had effected an entry

they set fire to that side of the building. I ordered the captain to call on his men to surrender. He picked up a megaphone and told the men in the tower to surrender. They came down and at once set about removing the women and children in the married quarters to safety, at the same time bringing out a quantity of bedding. In the meantime I asked the captain for the keys of the gun-room. He was telling me the number of arms and quantity of ammunition in the gun-room when the fire in the west end crossed over through a look-out window and set fire to my side of the building. A tin of petrol had been placed in readiness on a table in the officer's quarters. This, in a matter of minutes, had the entire building in flames. We, however, collected six Verrey light pistols, seven field glasses, one telescope, two rocket guns, three morse code lamps and other equipment. We missed seven rifles and a large quantity of ammunition in the gun-room.

Before we left we emptied a water storage tank and filled it with a mixture of petrol and paraffin. We turned taps on and let it flow into the building. We had retreated about half an hour when the gun-boat turned Kerryhead and came into the boat slip. The crew got out their fire-fighting equipment and tried to put out the fire, but it was work in vain. The fire had taken too firm a hold. From the mountains at the back we watched the fire destroy the station.

Military, marines and R.I.C. again raided the Volunteers' houses in the area on the following day. A Sergeant Madden of the R.I.C., while questioning my father, struck him a severe blow in the face. A military Sergeant rebuked the R.I.C. Sergeant for his

action. On the same day a second gun-boat arrived and took away the guards and their families.

Some days later the military occupied an old wireless station in Ballymacquinn, less than a mile from Ballyheigue. Their strength was 52 men, including an R.I.C. man as their Intelligence Officer. With the help of this R.I.C. man the military intensified raids and searches in the area. One evening a party of seven of the military cycled into the village unarmed. We held them up and took their bicycles.

A week or ten days after this hold-up we held up a mail car, which was horse drawn, between Tralee and Ballyheigue. After censoring the mails we returned the mail bags to the side of the road, where they were collected by post office officials. A day or two later a cycle patrol of military arrived in Ballyheigue from Tralee. I asked Paddy Cahill for permission to attack the patrol on their next visit. He would not consent and threatened to have me courtmartialled for not obtaining his permission to burn down the Coastguard station.

Previous to the attack on Fenit R.I.C. barracks by the I.R.A. in charge of Paddy Paul Fitzgerald, I had the company out blocking roads. I took charge of twenty armed men, who took up positions on either side of the road to Fenit to prevent reinforcements by military located in Ballymacquinn going to the assistance of the R.I.C. during the attack, which took place on the night of 2nd June, 1920. No reinforcements were sent from Ballymacquinn during the attack. By this time several of our men in the battalion were 'on the run'. In early

October a Battalion Flying Column was formed. It consisted of about twenty men from the various companies in the battalion. I took charge. We were wholetime on the job.

About 10 a.m. on the 31st October, 1920, every armed man in the battalion was mobilised at Beenreigh, about two miles from Abbeydorney on the Tralee road, for an attack on a couple of lorry loads of Black and Tans and R.I.C. who came from Tralee to Abbeydorney once or twice a week. At least fifty men were present for the attack. Tom Clifford, Battalion O/C, was in charge. He divided the men into five sections and placed them on one side of the road behind a fence in extended formation. I was in charge of the Battalion Column. We waited from 10 a.m. until 5 p.m., when the proposed attack was called off as the enemy had not appeared. I had a rifle; ten other men had rifles also; the remainder had shotguns.

That night we split up, half of the men going to Causeway and the other half to Abbeydorney. I was with the men who went to Abbeydorney. The Battalion O/C had received an order from Paddy Cahill, the Brigade O/C, to carry out attacks on enemy forces in his battalion area on this particular day. In Abbeydorney our men were divided into three sections. I had charge of one section and took up a position at the crossroads in the village which commanded a view of the Lixnaw road. Paddy Sheehan, Company Captain, had charge of another section at the railway end of the village on the way to Causeway. George O'Shea, Company Captain of Kilflynn, was in charge of the third section on Tralee end of the village.

It was a very dark night when at about 10 o'clock Harty's publichouse door was opened and two R.I.C. and one Black and Tan walked out. I ordered "open fire". My section fired. Sheehan and his section fired at the same time. A few civilians on the street ran for cover as soon as they heard the shots. The two R.I.C. were shot dead, one of whom turned out to be Sergeant Madden who had struck my father in the face on one occasion when he had raided my house. The Black and Tan was wounded but ran for the barracks. From the barracks the garrison opened fire. We managed to collect one revolver. We wanted to collect the other one but could not go into the street as it was swept with fire from the barracks. We retreated to Ardfert and waited for news from Causeway. We heard later that two Black and Tans were wounded in an attack on a patrol there.

Next day we went to Fenit for the purpose of attacking a party of Marines who called occasionally to the Coastguard station there. Due to the activity of the military, R.I.C. and Tans in the battalion area following our attacks in Abbeydorney, Ballyduff, Causeway and Tralee the previous night, we had to abandon our proposal.

At nightfall on the 4th November, 1920, the Battalion Column, with selected men from Causeway and Ballyheigue Companies, occupied a number of houses around the R.I.C. barracks in Causeway village with the intention of attacking any member of the garrison who would come out on the street. They heard we were in the village and did come out. We withdrew to Ballyheigue and occupied two houses there that night. The houses were owned by a Dr. Griffin and a man named Latchford.

Next morning at 3 a.m. we left for Causeway again. I was in charge. We again occupied houses around the barracks when we arrived at 4.30 a.m. We got the people of the houses away to farmhouses outside the village. We wanted particularly to get a Sergeant McGrath who, with the help of the Black and Tans, had burned down some farmhouses in the district and had threatened to burn down the home of every I.R.A. man in the area. At about 8.30 a.m. three Black and Tans and one R.I.C. man left the barracks and knocked on the door of a publichouse opposite the house where I was located. With me was the local Company Captain named Patrick O'Connor. I wanted to open fire but he insisted that we wait for McGrath who had burned down his house. The Tans and R.I.C. man got into the pub. After a time they left and hung around the street and were later joined by two or three more Tans. McGrath shortly after came to the door of the barracks. Between us and the barracks were a number of women and children. We could not open fire in case they would be killed or wounded. At 9.30 a.m. an ex-R.I.C. Sergeant named Roche from Macroom, who was married and had been living in Causeway for some years, passed up the street. He saw me through the window. O'Connor asked me "did that man see you?". I said "yes". He said "get out, he is friendly with the R.I.C. and Tans". I did not believe him. Roche went down the street towards his house and entered a publichouse next door to the barracks. There was only a low wall between this pub and the barracks. A short time later all of the R.I.C. and Tans on the street cleared off and went into the barracks. People on the street also disappeared in a matter of minutes. Everything in the village went dead and came to a standstill.

A short time later I received information from the local scouts that lorry loads of military, Black and Tans and R.I.C. were on their way from Tralee, Listowel and Abbeydorney. I decided to get out and managed to get the men as far as an old fort a quarter of a mile to the back of the barracks on very high ground. We took cover in the fort and surrounding ditches. The first thing the enemy did when they got to the village was to surround and enter the house where I had been located. The only living thing in the house (Driscoll's) was a dog, which they shot dead. The enemy, who numbered three hundred, divided their forces into two groups. One party followed behind, while the other party attempted to surround us from the flank. This party had a machine-gun which they mounted on a rick of corn. The machine-gun cut up the ground around us with bullets. We could not leave our cover. Our escape had been cut off. Just then an ex-navy man named John Joe Sullivan, a member of the I.R.A. who had a double-barrel rifle used at one time for shooting game in Africa, asked for a Lee Enfield rifle. One of our men handed him a rifle. He took aim and shot the machine gunner, who fell off the rick of corn. This gave us a chance to retreat. We scattered out. The military continued to fire. Nine riflemen fought a rearguard action which enabled all of us, except one man who was captured, to get away. In the first volley by the enemy one of our scouts named Archer was shot dead. The man they had captured, whose name was Michael McGuire, they shot dead that night in a ball alley. The usual raids and searches by the enemy followed for days afterwards. Several civilians and I.R.A. were arrested. From then onwards the Column

visited Causeway at least once a week, fired random shots at the barracks and harassed the enemy generally.

One Sunday evening in January, 1921, Pát O'Connor and I paid a further visit to Causeway. We had two rifles and shot dead a lone Black and Tan standing at the barrack gate. Around the end of January the Brigade O/C received an order from G.H.Q. Dublin to have all roads in the brigade area trenched. I had the company constantly on this work, while the column provided an armed guard during the operations.

Around this time several prepared ambushes failed to materialise owing to the strength of enemy forces. Convoys of eight or nine lorries of military and Black and Tans were the usual practice. The garrison at Causeway was isolated for weeks at a time as the roads around were continually trenched and blocked. The military and Tans would come along and fill in the trenched roads with the help of civilians rounded up for the job. Each time they were filled in we trenched them again. This was kept up for months.

Tom Clifford, Battalion O/C, had prepared a large scale attack on Causeway barracks for the night of the 3rd March, 1921. It appears that this attack was cancelled on the order of a man named Byrne from G.H.Q., Dublin, who was in the area at the time. Next night, the 4th March, with members of the Battalion Column I occupied three houses right across the street from the barracks. The houses were two storey thatched buildings. Pat O'Connor, Company Captain, with another section occupied a position at the back of the barracks, and William O'Leary, Battalion Engineer, in charge of a

third section, occupied a house twenty yards from the barracks on the same side. Tom Clifford was in charge of our men, who numbered about sixty, including men on outpost duty. The garrison strength was forty-two men. We were armed with about twenty rifles, a few revolvers, Mills bombs and shotguns. O'Leary's equipment consisted of a large quantity of petrol in milk tankards and barrels, and a number of porter bottles in which socks soaked in petrol had been inserted. William O'Leary's instructions were to break out through the roof of his building, get behind the chimney and spray the petrol on the roof of the barracks in the first instance.

When all was ready Clifford gave a signal. O'Leary in a few minutes had got through the roof and with a force pump sprayed the roof of the barracks with the petrol, which we followed up with a couple of Mills bombs to break the roof. This was followed by the lighted socks in the porter bottles. The bottles set fire to the roof but the fire did not penetrate to the barracks. In the meantime a heavy shower of hail fell and a strong gale blew the petrol being pumped on to the barracks across the road on to the roof of the house where I was located.

Clifford called on the garrison to surrender. They replied with rifle fire and at the same time lit up the sky with Verey lights. It was 1 a.m. He ordered me to direct my fire on to the roof so as to break the slates. Firing became general and had lasted for two hours when a number of Verey lights fell on to the roofs of the three houses occupied by the column. The three houses went on fire. *The man* in one of the houses had to retreat immediately, as it was a mass of

flames in a few minutes due to being soaked with petrol. At 5.30 a.m. our scouts reported that reinforcements were on their way from Tralee. Clifford ordered us to retreat. In the engagement I received a bullet wound in the shoulder. Another of our men, McCormack, was wounded in the hand.

Immediately after our set-back at Causeway on the 5th November, for which we blamed an ex-Sergeant of the R.I.C. named Roche, inquiries into his association with the enemy were intensified by the Battalion I/O. A night or two previous to our attack on Causeway barracks on the 4th March, Tom Clifford, Battalion O/C, informed me that Roche had been sentenced to death by the Brigade Staff as a spy. He ordered me to have him shot. The order was carried out during our attack on the 4th March by members of the Ballyheigue Company. He had lived in a house known as "Sandford House" and was shot dead in front of his own door. Sergeant McGrath, R.I.C., it appears, had accidentally conveyed the information that Roche had saved his life on the morning of the 5th November. In Causeway barracks at this time were two R.I.C. men named Beirne and Tully who were regarded as friendly towards the I.R.A. Beirne, in particular, sent me word of impending raids on several occasions.

Early in the year 1921 Ballyheigue Castle had become vacant and in the month of February was occupied by a garrison of Auxiliaries for about a week or ten days, during which time they raided several I.R.A. men's homes in the area. On the night of the 4th March, in company with about five I.R.A. men I returned home on the occasion of my sister's marriage. That night our house was surrounded by the Auxiliaries. I had just left when

they came. They fired a number of shots through the windows. After searching the house they arrested six of our men - John Pierce, James Connor, Tom Connor, Michael Godley, Michael McEgan and Michael Mahony. They were held for a week at the Castle, then sent to Cork jail and from there to Spike Island. Three weeks later the Auxiliaries, while masked, raided the farmhouse of my sister's husband and burned it down.

A few days later the largest round-up so far by the enemy was carried out in the area. A line of military extended from the Cashin river to Killflynn and from there to Carrahane Strand, Ardfert. They searched the area field by field. The column and a number of battalion officers - a total of twenty-eight men - were trapped in the peninsula. With the assistance of some members of the Cumann na mBan named Sheila O'Leary, Agnes Kidd and two Miss Connors, who engaged an officer in charge of a squad of soldiers in conversation, we managed to escape through the ring by making a gap in a hedge. At least three hundred civilians and a number of I.R.A. were arrested in the round-up and held in the Castle. While there, the prisoners were taken out to fill in trenches in the roads and were allowed visits by their relatives, who took in food to them. One of the I.R.A. prisoners was a man named Daly who was attached to the column. One of the Cumann na mBan girls helped him to escape by bringing in a second shawl over her shoulders which she passed to him. With this shawl and a skirt, he walked past the sentry at the gate and escaped. After screening, which lasted for some days, all the prisoners were released. While the round-up was in progress two patrol boats patrolled the coast to

prevent escape by sea. A number of the I.R.A. got into caves at Kerryhead and remained there while it lasted. After our escape we went to Stack's Mountain and Killflynn areas and billeted in farmhouses in the neighbourhood.

On May the 12th I took the column to Causeway again, where we met a number of I.R.A. from other companies in the battalion. We surrounded the village. I was in charge of the column. Pat O'Connor was in charge of the other men. Our strength was about 40 men; half had rifles, the others had shotguns. We were determined to ambush a party of R.I.C. and Tans who usually spent the evening in a publichouse there. Around 10 p.m. two R.I.C. left the publichouse. As they approached the barracks they were fired on and wounded.

In the month of June we lay in ambush for a military cycle party for about seven days at a place named Liscahane, Ardfert. They had come out one day previously searching for one of their members who had deserted and was living in the area. After seven days we called it off. They never returned to look for the deserter.

Apart from the activities in Causeway and other places, the column from its formation visited Abbeydorney at least once a week and sniped at the barracks there or fired at single R.I.C. men and Black and Tans. By June Ballyheigue Castle had been let to a man named Palmer. He was proprietor of a number of creameries in North Kerry. Early in June Palmer sent word to me that he wanted to see me. I met him near the Castle. He told me that the Castle was about to be occupied by the military. I told the Brigade O/C, who ordered me to have

it burned down. With the help of the local company the Castle was burned down a few days later.

Shortly after the burning of the Castle the local company blew up Shannon Bridge, Abbeydorney. An I.R.A. man named Billy O'Leary, who was an engineer, carried out the job and was successful after the third attempt. The mines used were made from cart wheel boxes filled with gelignite. That night I took the column to the vicinity, where we stayed in local farmers' houses. Next morning, in the hope that the enemy would come out from Tralee to inspect the damage, we took up positions near the blown bridge at about 7 a.m. We were assisted by men from Abbeydorney and Killflyn Companies. Other I.R.A. men had been posted on hills around with instructions to light bundles of straw as a signal when the enemy were approaching.

After an hour or two we heard the noise of approaching lorries and in a few minutes saw a number of Auxiliaries and military on the opposite bank of the river which is called Shannon river. Due to a heavy fog that morning we could not see the signals sent up by the men on the hills. The enemy spotted a couple of our men moving into position and opened fire on them. We returned the fire, which lasted for about half an hour. Two Auxiliaries in the meantime waded into the bed of the river to cross to our side where, they thought, they had shot one of our men. As they did so, they were fired on by the man they thought they had shot. He wounded both of them. His name was Lyons. They suddenly broke off the engagement and returned to Tralee via Abbeydorney. We withdrew to Mountcoul and Stack's Mountain. It was now the last week of June. At the end of June we

paid another visit to Causeway for another attack on a patrol or individual R.I.C. men. They were not to be seen in the streets and appeared to be confined to their barracks.

On the eve of the Truce we received an order from the Battalion O/C to keep 'standing to' and on the alert in case the enemy would take us unawares.

During the Truce I was in charge of the Battalion Training Camp at Ardfert. The whole column attended and received instruction in the use of the machine-gun. Dick Dowling from Boherbee Company, Tralee, was the instructor.

Signed: Michael Pierce
(Michael Pierce)

Date: 15.6.25

Witness: John J. Daly (John J. Daly)
(Investigator).

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