

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1,683

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1683.

Witness

Patrick Coleman,
8, Ferran Terrace,
Ballina,
Co. Mayo.

Identity.

1st Lieut., Ballina Coy., 1st Battn.,
North Mayo Brigade, I.R.A.

Subject.

Ballina Coy., Irish Volunteers, Co. Mayo,
1917 - 21.

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No. W.S. 1683

STATEMENT BY Mr. PATRICK COLEMAN,
8, Ferran Terrace, Ballina, County Mayo.

I was born in the town of Sligo in the year 1895. My father was a sawyer and he and my mother were ardent Parnellites before the arrival of Sinn Féin. We later moved to Ballina of which my mother was a native. I have just a hazy recollection of my grandmother, who was a native Irish speaker, and I remember my father telling me that my grandfather, on his side, had fought in the Papal Army.

I attended the Ballina Boys National School of which I have little to note except that I was keen on Irish History, especially anything relating to Patrick Sarsfield, Ballyneety, and his dying words on the battlefield of Landen, "Would that this had been for Ireland" when he lay mortally wounded fighting for France. I was also impressed by Sergeant Custume at Athlone and St. Ruth at the battle of Aughrim. From all this I made up my mind that, if the opportunity arose, I would try to do the same and, if necessary, die for my country.

Towards the closing stages of my school days I was invited by the Principal Teacher, Mr. John McMahon, who was a particular friend of an uncle of mine who was also a National Teacher, to stand for the monitorship examination which I passed, together with two other boys, but there was no appointment in that year, and, as I would be over-age for the appointment the following year, I was obliged to leave school. This I did and served my apprenticeship at my father's trade in the firm of Isaac Becketts Ltd. of Ballina.

During this period I became a member of the National Foresters' Brass Band, of which I was the most junior member. On the resignation of the Bandmaster, Mr. Jock Campbell, a Scotsman, I was appointed to take his place, which I did until I was captured by the

R.I.C. and Black and Tans in Becketts' Mills in January, 1921.

Sometime in 1919 I procured a piano copy of "The Soldiers Song" and proceeded to arrange same for the different instruments in the Band. Shortly afterwards, for the first time in my honest belief, it was publicly played by a Brass Band in Ireland. This took place on New Year's Eve, when it was well received by practically everyone with just a few exceptions. At this time it was not the recognised National Anthem. I might mention that the complete body of the Foresters were not agreeable to the use of the Band at Sinn Féin functions; as a matter of fact, when we used the Band for the public reception of Senator Ruane, on his release from Sligo gaol, I had to have a few of my Volunteer comrades smuggle out the instruments. This we did and headed the Volunteer parade to the railway station. As I happened to be very familiar with the bugle of which I was very fond, I blew the 'fall in' before all the Volunteer route marches, playing a bugle march on the way and particularly on our return to draw the attention of the people (who were not by any means all in favour of us) to the Parade. I have been the official bugler to all the deceased I.R.A. men ever since, of whom, I regret to say, there has been quite a large number.

We used the Band after the formation of the Irish National Volunteers (Redmond's) until the split when I, with a few others, including Stephen Donnelly, Frank Flynn and Denis Sheeran, broke away and formed a Company of the Irish Volunteers in the Town Hall early in 1917. From then onwards we paraded twice weekly under difficulties, as we had no instructor, until I suddenly remembered my school days and thought of our being drilled by one of the teachers, a Mr. Patrick Quinn, and I realised he must have had some

book or manual to assist him. I decided to search the school, which I personally did, and discovered in the Principal's desk a British manual of infantry training which I took with me and closely studied, and from which I subsequently trained the Company. I made it my business to contact all the soldiers returning from the British army in order to show we were not hostile, make them sympathetic to our cause and if possible, and they were suitable, to join the ranks of the Irish Volunteers. Some of these men were very helpful, notably a Patrick Lynch who gave us instruction in signalling, also an ex-Lieutenant named Fred Quinlan who gave me signalling equipment.

There was nothing unusual to report until our activities in breaking up British recruiting meetings in the early part of 1918. We compelled them to go indoors with their meetings and even then we succeeded in creating an uproar inside although I myself and a few others were unceremoniously chucked out several times.

We now come to the preparation for the coming of the General Election in 1918, which preparations included guards and escorts with the ballot boxes, which meant full time duty for well over a fortnight. I might also say that our numbers increased owing to the Conscription scare but dwindled down to our original numbers after the crisis was over.

Before the war ended I had a letter from my uncle, who was serving with the British Army in France, written to me from Folkstone to say: "Dear Pappy, I am leaving Folkstone. Pray for me, I am a Sinn Feiner." Sometime later I received word from the War Office that my uncle was killed at Guinchy on the Western front. As I was named as his next-of-kin, I had to submit his last letter to the

War Office in claiming his effects. I sent the above detailed letter to them and was paid in full, despite the remark about being a Sinn Feiner.

In 1919 we commenced to make bombs from the ordinary drain or down pipes and to organise and drill Companies in country districts. We had practically no arms excepting one .22 rifle and a few .38 revolvers, one of which was very defective as the striker didn't hit the cap.

In April of 1920, following an order from G.H.Q., we raided the Income Tax Offices and destroyed all documents.

We raided several houses for arms and got shotguns and ammunition. I called at the house of one of the National Teachers, Mr. Frank Currell, a former officer in the Redmond Volunteers, where I knew there was a Martini-Henry rifle (single-shot) which, on demand, was immediately handed over to me. I had a brother in the British Army who brought me 100 rounds of .303 ammunition which he smuggled home to me from the Russian front; he also instructed us on the rifle, one Lee-Enfield having been bought from G.H.Q.

About this time the Sinn Féin, later the Republican, Courts were formed and I was given the added responsibility of being the Officer attached to the Courts. The first case we had to deal with was that of two fellows named Tully and Boylan who had committed several robberies. We arrested them and recovered all the stolen property, the R.I.C. having closed their eyes to all this. We removed them to our own particular prison, which was in a bog. I would like to say that in the raid on Boylan's, his younger brother said to me, although I was masked, "I know you; you are in the Band and your name is Jordan". I told him that he was a very

clever boy and was inwardly delighted at being taken for Jordan, who was very hostile to us indeed and still is to this day. Another culprit was arrested and it was decided to deport the three, Tully, Boylan and Rafter. As the trains were uncertain in our area, owing to the railway men refusing to carry British troops or munitions, we took them by car to Castlerea. The escort consisted of Stephen Donnelly, myself and another man whose name I cannot remember. The car was driven by a man called William Hennigan of Corcoran Terrace, Ballina. As we left Ballina we had to make a detour as the R.I.C. was watching the Bridge. On arrival in Castlerea I was instructed to contact the local Company Captain. This I did in Claffey's public house. He told me one of his men was attempting to desert by train on his way to America and asked me to remove him. I agreed if he sent a man with me to identify the deserter. We went to the station where, to my consternation, the place was swarming with military and R.I.C., the railway men having refused to take them further west. However, I went to the booking office, got three tickets, gave them to my three prisoners with some money and warned them never to come back. We then went along the train and located the deserter. I ordered him out and we took him right through the military and police and passed a detective at the barrier who scrutinized us but let us through - to my utter amazement and relief to this day: I still do not know how we got through. It may have been through the railwaymen refusing to man the train for the West.

We removed our prisoner to the Workhouse where we handed him over.

We got word that a wagon of petrol had arrived at the station for the R.I.C. We proceeded to the station and commandeered a lorry, the property of Hugh Ruddy. We discovered the wagon in the Goods yard and, as we approached, we noticed an R.I.C. man named Flanagan near the wagon. I could see he was unarmed so we pretended to ignore him, opened up the wagon and started to unload the petrol which was in the usual two-gallon tins, and placed them on the lorry. As we were about to move off I noticed that the R.I.C. man had disappeared. We went to Paddy O'Hora's garage about 100 yards from the station where we had a car that we used on official operations. We put about half the petrol in this garage and only then discovered that the R.I.C. man was inside. He appeared to get very frightened and to be about to faint and went over to lean against a wall. We carried on with the job of unloading and, strange to relate, he never reported the matter, about the station or the garage, because I was closely questioned on several occasions but not a word about the petrol. We then dumped the remainder of our load in another place and returned the lorry to Ruddy's yard.

I was in Quinlan's public-house one night when I noticed two soldiers passing by the door. After a while one of them returned and came into the pub and asked me; "Would I buy a soldier's kit". I immediately thought that this might give me an opening and I invited his pal and himself to have a drink and, after having a fair quantity, I called him aside and said "While I have no use for an army kit, I could do with some .303 ammunition". He did not seem to like this idea from the point of view that there was a very close check kept on a small station, but I suggested that just a little from each of his comrades would not be missed. He promised to have a try and I arranged for him to meet me at the Foresters' Hall. Over a few

visits he brought nothing until this particular night when he arrived while I was playing billiards. I spoke to him as he came in and told him to have a seat which he did well away from anyone else. As I was about to play a shot with my back to the door I got a prod in the back and thought it was one of the boys having a joke and looked round quickly to discover a British officer with a drawn revolver. He shouted, "Hands up" and searched everyone with the exception of the soldier, who was also in uniform. The officer left and immediately Boyle of the Border Regiment (the soldier I spoke of) produced about 50 rounds of ammunition which he handed to me and I then quickly left.

On a later occasion with two other officers named Flynn and Ginty we were having a conversation opposite the Moy Hotel and, as some British soldiers passed by, Ginty clocked some coins in his pocket and one of them shouted that "One of them fellows has an automatic", and started to search us when Boyle rushed over the street saying "These fellows are alright". Boyle, who was half a Scotsman, was inclined to be helpful. I called him the Glasgow Irishman. He was shortly transferred after this to some other unit, I never could find out where.

It was arranged to have a crack at the British Coastguard station in Enniscrone which was garrisoned by about seventeen or eighteen men. I was instructed to go to Enniscrone on that Thursday evening and bring revolvers, wire cutters and ropes. With two men I put the stuff in the well of Anthony Boland's side-car and proceeded on our way. On reaching Enniscrone I was given four men and ordered to take up a position outside the main gate in order to intercept any coastguards returning from the town. After an hour or ^{so,} six of them were seen coming. We allowed them to almost pass

us when we pulled our guns and ordered them to keep going to a cottage some distance away where I placed them under an armed guard. They were unarmed. One of them turned to me and said, "If I was in there (meaning the station) with a machine gun I'd let you B . . . s have it". "You are not in there Chum, you are out here", which shut him up. Shortly after joining my other comrades we opened the attack by Paddy O'Beirne and Paddy O'Connell jumping the wall and disarming the sentry while we were rushing the building. At this stage a Mrs. Livermore, wife of the Chief Coastguard, who must have seen the disarming, opened a window and started to scream at the top of her voice. She nearly could be heard in Ballina, nine miles away. This aroused the rest of the garrison and some of them opened fire on us as we were rushing into the attack. One of our party had the heel of his boot shot off although we were rushing straight at the building. The shot must have come from an angle. We dashed round the corner to a side entrance which was open and surprised a Coastguard cooking fish at a range. The sizzling of the fish must have partly drowned the screams as we got him by surprise. We forced him with another coastguard up the stairs in front of us and disarmed the remainder of them. We then collected the arms and ammunition and took them downstairs, when one of them said to me, "Are you going to burn the station?" I said "Yes", and he asked me if he could have his box with his private papers. I agreed and said we were not going to interfere with anything private, only the property of the British Government. We went towards his room accompanied by a Volunteer from Enniscrone Company holding a lighted candle and, as we entered the room, I noticed a belt with a revolver and ammunition hanging from a hook inside the door. I said, "This isn't what you came for, is it?" He said "No, just my box". This he then took downstairs and shortly afterwards rushed in to say that "Military

were coming up from Scurmore". We got into position to defend the captured station with the captured rifles, but it turned out to be a false alarm.

I went to Enniscrone to get a car to remove the stuff and, while on my way there, I heard two voices on the road, one of them asking the Chief Coastguard Livermore, who was returning from the town, "Was he needed at the station as he heard some shooting and thought there might be some shot or wounded." Livermore replied, "There is no one required at the station", and the voice said, "Your station has been captured". Livermore said "Impossible" and walked on towards the station which he entered to find our boys in full possession. I crossed to find out who owned the other voice, questioned him to find he was Dr. Michael Coolican of Ballina. I asked him why he told Livermore about the shooting and capture of the station and his reply was, "I am a Doctor and thought I might have been of some assistance to either side". I suggested that he should go home until called for, which he did. His uncle was the Crown Solicitor.

I got the car, loaded up and proceeded to Carralavin, Bonniclon. On the way we picked up two guides, Tom Loftus and Anthony Kerrigan, who took us to the arranged dump where we placed the stuff (about 14 or 15 rifles), the same amount of revolvers and a quantity of ammunition. The rifles were the Canadian Ross pattern. I returned to Enniscrone and met the rest of my comrades outside Rafter's. As we were about to move off Miss Rafter asked me would I give a list to a priest. I agreed as I considered it would be good cover as the military were at Bunree bridge, our only road back.

We started on our way when the priest asked me if I saw the Coastguard Station burning. I said "No". Nor had I seen it,

the job having been completed during my absence. He then asked me if I knew it was captured and I said "No". To my complete astonishment he said, "I was in charge of it". I said nothing. We were then nearing Ballina and, after rounding a bend, we were challenged by a military party who fired over the car. I stopped and pretended to be very indignant over the shooting, the priest nearly upsetting everything by refusing to put up his hands. They made a complete job of searching us and the car. We continued on to the Imperial Hotel where we dumped the priest, whom we thought might be some form of cover but nearly ruined everything instead. The next day there was a big number of men from Enniscrone arrested who had nothing to do with the attack.

Shortly after the above attack we also decided to attack the usual night patrol of R.I.C. and Tans and selected the junction of the Moy Lane and Knox Street as a good position, even though it was close to the barracks. On the selected night we took up our positions with the intention of jumping on and disarming the patrol. After being there some time a scout came in to say the patrol had returned to the barracks by another route. We then disbanded only to discover about fifteen minutes later that the report was false and took up positions again. The patrol came down the street comprised of one Sergeant, two Constables and a Black and Tan named Barnes. Immediately they came abreast of us we rushed them, seized the Sergeant and the two R.I.C. men and pulled them down the Lane and disarmed them. The Tan broke away and opened fire through sheer fright and dashed up the street over the wall into the hospital where he was given sanctuary. A party of our fellows followed him but failed to locate him. In the general scuffle with the others the Sergeant was fatally wounded and died later. Regan, one of the Constables, was creating such an uproar at being

so close to the barracks, I had to silence him with the butt of my revolver. My mask slipped and the other R.I.C. man named Nangle said, "I know you". Despite this we let him go unharmed and when I was captured later on, he never gave me away.

The Belfast Boycott took up a lot of our time towards the end of 1920, raiding the railway station on several occasions and destroying all classes of goods, in particular large consignments of treacle.

At this time we had a dump of shotguns in a yard belonging to a man named Grimes. As we thought the yard was under observation we decided to shift them to Beckett's Mills. This we did. About the end of November, 1920, a big round-up took place which, to the best of my recollection, was general throughout the country. As my home was not raided I became very suspicious and went 'on the run' without leaving the town. A few others and myself used to sleep in Garden Street in my girl friend's house. This was a house where I used to conceal revolvers and ammunition. While these people were devoted to our side, we considered it a very safe place as my friend had two uncles in the R.I.C. I also stored our books and documents there. One of the boys of the house was subsequently interned.

We again got suspicious of the new dump in Beckett's and again decided to shift the stuff. With a party I entered the Mill and approached what was known as the red gate in order to let in the expected car for the transport. I slid the gate sideways and was surprised by an R.I.C. patrol who had been watching us through a small hole in the gate. I grappled with one of them to give time to my party to escape. This they did. The rest

of the patrol opened the gate, shoved me inside and ordered me to proceed down the Mill. I continued to move away from the dump when Head-Constable Wray struck me on the head with his revolver and pushed me towards where the guns were. He evidently knew where they were hidden. I was then placed in the charge of a Constable O'Rourke who said to me, "Coleman you B d if there is one shot fired I'll shoot you dead". The guns were removed to the Crossley tender and brought with myself to the R.I.C. barracks. I was pushed into the Inspector's office and questioned by at least four of them at the same time including D.I. White and Sergeant O'Brien. The latter was particularly aggressive and repeatedly struck me on the head with his revolver. I refused to disclose any information as to "what had me in the Mill, who were my comrades etc. etc". I was a kind of confused with all the blows on the head when D.I. White, who was dangling my revolver in his hand, said, "This is Sergeant Armstrong's gun, isn't it". I made no reply as the question was obviously a trap, because I was responsible for having the revolvers captured in that ambush, brought to another part of our area in case they might be got on any of our fellows in the local Company.

I was then taken back to the day-room where I was severely beaten by Black & Tans with the D.I. looking on. I was then removed to the barrack yard at about 2 o'clock in the morning, put up against the wall and told I was going to be shot for not disclosing the names of my comrades. Five or six of them took up a firing position about ten paces from me. I asked could I say a prayer and the reply was, "You so and so, you wouldn't give us much of a chance to say a prayer". I stood to attention and heard the order "Present", "Fire" and then heard what I took to be a volley

and fell to the ground.

After a little while I opened my eyes, looked up and saw the chimneys of the Imperial Hotel which adjoined the barracks and said to myself, "This isn't Heaven anyway, because the chimneys looked more like Hell". I then learnt that the rifles had not been fired at all but that the D.I. had discharged two rounds from a double-barrelled shotgun behind them. I was dragged back and put in a cell, the D.I.^a remarking, "We are not finished with you yet, Coleman". I was left there until the next evening when my mother sent me in some food from home.

I was later taken to the day-room where I was again questioned by a young man dressed in civilian clothes whom I never saw before. He seemed to be of a higher rank than anyone in the Station and I overheard two R.I.C. men saying that he was Captain Harrison of the 17th Lancers who was then in Galway. While interrogating me he threatened me with a small automatic revolver. This took about a half-hour, and the D.I. took me back to the cell, and, taking a lighted paraffin lamp with him, said, "Coleman, you white-livered F r, if you weren't going to be shot tonight I'd burn the bloody skin of you with this lamp". Later on, Flanagan, who was inclined to be a friendly R.I.C. man, came to me and said, "I'm in as much danger from our own Murder Gang as you are as they are after shooting at D.I. White from the Bank corner." Unfortunately they missed him; they evidently thought he was not pulling his full weight, but he certainly was, as I know. At about midnight I was ordered out of the barracks and placed in the middle car of three cars. We moved off past the railway station out the Pontoon road which crosses the line at Rehins, about a mile and a half from the town. I was ordered out of the car.

The night was not fully dark and I was placed in charge of a man who was in civilian clothes, as were the rest of the party, (the usual attire for the Murder Gang). As all the others had faded into the darkness I decided to jump on my escort and if possible make a run for it. I had my hands over my head and started to edge towards him; he spotted it and said, "Coleman, if you come any closer I'll give it to you in the guts". Shortly afterwards a number of them came back and ordered me to double down a narrow country road which led to Ballinahaglish Graveyard. I started to run at top speed down this road when fire was opened on me and I was hit by a bullet which struck me in the right thigh and knocked me on the road. I got up again and started to run towards an old school when I noticed a black mass on the road. This was the first car of the convoy and was drawn across the road to bar my escape. Fire was opened on me from the car. I then saw what they were about to do and wheeled sharply to run back when I received another bullet in the right shoulder. I turned and jumped the ditch with a wire fence on top. I shall never know how I managed to do so. I headed towards the Pontoon road, crossing the railway line and the road and dropped into a marshy field and made my way as best I could through flooded fields in which I was nearly drowned as I fell several times through the loss of blood. I was making for a house which was on hilly ground; it took me a long time to reach this house on account of climbing the hill. I got to the door and knocked without reply. I went a short distance away and lay down for a short time. I then got up and rushed at the door, which went in with me, where I fell on the floor in the kitchen. I saw a man standing over me with a hurricane lamp and I recognised him as John Reape of Cloonturk. I asked him for something that would make bandages and a tourniquet.

He got me strips of cloth, helped me to strip and get into bed where I made the tourniquet for the thigh wound but could not do anything for my shoulder. As the bedclothes were soaked in blood I told him to burn all the clothes, which he did. I then asked him to get me to a priest. He said he would carry me to one at Rathduff. I said he wouldn't be able and to get me into some out-house as I feared for their safety in case I was followed.

But the Murder Gang evidently thought I was dead. He took me to a small stable where I lay down on the hay. I asked him to get in touch with Patrick Flaherty, who lived about a mile away, to let the boys know where I was. He covered me with hay and left. I fell asleep and the next morning I heard a noise at the door. Someone came in and commenced to fumble through the hay. I lay quiet, thinking I was about to be captured again when a man's hand pulled the hay from around my face. I then recognised him as a Ballina man named Paudge Sweeney who was not a Volunteer but was in sympathy with us. When he saw the state I was in he started to cry and produced a bottle of brandy of which I took a good slug. Sweeney was good enough to make his way out to me through the round-up cordon with a bridle on his arm on the pretext of looking for a stray horse. He was a horse trainer and a fearless horseman. He took considerable risk in coming out to me. Reape came back and told me he had a cart to take me down to the Crossmolina road where Denis Sheeran was to pick me up for removal to Dr. John Crowley at Ballycastle. Owing to the fact that all the cars had been commandeered that day, no one turned up and I was brought to Frank Curran's of Gortohar who put me up in his own bed, sending his wife and children to Ballina. Curran was a Volunteer.

After sleeping for some time I woke up to see a man in a trench coat in the room. Again I immediately thought that the Murder Gang had caught up with me. I must have looked very wildly at him as he said, "Don't you know me?" I recognised him then as Dr. David Rowland of Ballina. He proceeded to dress my wounds and, as there was no anesthetic available, he gave me plenty of brandy during the operations. The Doctor said I was very lucky as both bullets had gone right through. He left and the following evening, Denis Sheeran arrived with a car and conveyed me to Dr. Crowley at Ballycastle who dressed my wounds again and told me, after examination, that one of the bullets had just missed the femoral artery.

I was then taken to the home of the Company Captain of the Lacken area and later removed to Corcoran's of Doonadoba where I was attended over a period by Dr. Crowley.

Towards the end of February I attempted to walk which I did after some time. I went to the Fair in Ballycastle in order to meet some friends who would assure my mother that they had seen me. I was afterwards brought to Patsy Kennedy's at Barn Hill where I remained for some weeks and used to call at a house called Kelly's of Barn Hill. Mrs. Kelly was a trained nurse and a member of the local Cumann na mBan. She used to examine my wounds. As Doctor Crowley's house had been raided for me, we guessed that they knew I was in the area. I was in Kelly's one evening when Thomas rushed in to say they were coming over the road. I went out the back door, running across the haggard and making for a point on the hill where I had hidden my rifle which I had previously borrowed from the local Company. I also had a revolver which Sheeran gave me

when removing me to Ballycastle. After securing the rifle I took cover and saw the Tans pointing in my direction from the three lorries which kept moving slowly towards Ballycastle.

That night I decided it was time to move on although I had been training the local Volunteers in the use of the rifle. I then went to the house of a man named Moyles who lived the other side of Killala. He was another Irish Volunteer officer. I decided to rejoin my comrades whom I knew were around Culleens in the County Sligo, and on our way to Ballina I saw the lights of three lorries in the distance. I dropped off the sidecar we were using and let them go through and learned that they had gone direct and raided Michael Kelly's of Barn Hill which I had left. I spent a night on the way in Anthony Clarke's of Coyne's of Carragary and from there went to Leonard's of the Griddle.

There was also a man there called Ronan from Clare, who was 'on the run' and had been badly beaten up by the Ballina R.I.C. We were informed that a local attack was pending on Easkey R.I.C. Barracks and, as it was well fortified, it was decided to try to effect the capture of it by a ruse. This was to be done by setting fire to a garage belonging to Dr. Scott to draw them out of the barracks. This was done but failed to get them out and, after a prolonged exchange of rifle fire, we withdrew. One of the local fellows named John McGowan said to me: "The night of the attack on the Coastguard station there was one bastard from Ballina I would like to meet, the fellow who made me hold a candle to give him light while he went up the stairs with a Coastguard". I said, "What was the matter with that you were only holding a candle?" He replied, "I lived beside the Station and I was afraid he would recognise me".

I quietly said, "I'm the Bastard from Ballina" when he immediately walked into a deep hole in the river which we were crossing at the time and I had some difficulty in fishing him out.

We returned to Leonard's, Ronan and I, and on the following Sunday we heard a noise in the early morning, and Leonard noticed the Glengarry cap of an Auxiliary at a window. He came in, ordered us out of bed and searched the room. As he was leaving an R.I.C. Sergeant came in and said, "I think, Sir, you should bring them in. They might be 'on the run'." He ordered us out to the tenders where we found a number of other prisoners. We moved into Easkey where tea was brought to us by Mr. Jim Devanny of the Hotel. We were then taken into Easkey Barracks where we were questioned. I gave the name of Michael Walsh of Carragary. Someone said to bring the policeman for that district. He came in and said he is not from Carragary. I then said that my name was Coleman. They jumped to their feet and rushed me to a cell by myself. After a while an Auxiliary came in swinging a cosh and said, "Why did you give a wrong name?" I replied, "If I could evade arrest by giving a wrong name, I am justified". He agreed and left, to my surprise.

Shortly after I was brought to the barrack yard and a number of them scrutinized me closely and said, "You are the so-and-so who took the despatches from us at Kilfree Junction". They were confusing me with another Paddy Coleman.

We were then taken to Ballina and on the way this Auxiliary leant back to me and said, "Coleman, are you in the I.R.A.?" I said "Yes". "You would be a damn fool if you were not", he replied - rather a very strange remark to my mind.

After arriving in Ballina I was placed in a cell. When it seemed that our escort had left, the door of the cell to which Ronan

and I had been brought was opened by an R.I.C. Sergeant called O'Brien and two Black & Tans. One of them was named Ross. They came in and proceeded to kick me round the cell, never interfering with Ronan at all. The Auxiliaries came back and we were brought from the cell which was in total darkness out into the light. One Auxiliary raised his hand and, thinking I was in for a blow, I ducked. He said "Has anyone been beating you?" I said "Yes". He ordered a parade of both R.I.C. and Tans and said to me, "Point out the men that beat you". I refrained as I did not know I was being moved and naturally I would get a lot more beating when the Auxiliaries were gone. He said that if he knew the man or men he would have great pleasure in shooting him. He then ordered us out to the lorries and we proceeded for Tubbercurry. On arrival there some of them who had been playing Cricket in a field came over and one of them went to strike me with a stump when another intervened and prevented him. I was double handcuffed at the time.

Before being taken to the R.I.C. barracks, Major Davies, O/C. of the Company of Auxiliaries, called me aside and said, "Coleman, you may consider yourself damn lucky as we had orders to shoot you if we knew who you were this morning". I might add that at all times I was well treated by them.

On entering the R.I.C. barracks I was accosted by a man in civilian clothes who said, "Coleman, we have you for the shooting of Sergeant Fallon of Ballymote", and then, after tearing my shirt, he started to hammer me. Ronan and I were removed to separate cells. One of the Auxies brought in a meal as we were still their prisoners and he asked Ronan, "Are you the dangerous fellow?" Ronan replied, "No". That night a hand came round the door with

a plate of bread and cheese with a revolver lying on the top. I removed the food leaving the revolver on the plate and handed it back. This man then appeared at the door laughing and said, "Coleman, is that not any use to you?" And my reply was, "Not under the circumstances". He went away smiling broadly.

Some time later I was again brought out to the day-room; it would be about 2 o'clock in the morning. There was a man there in civilian clothes who asked me did I know him. I said, "No". He kept repeating this question for some time, changing it to "Did you ever see me before?" I again said, "No", although I knew he was the same Intelligence Officer who closely questioned me in Ballina. He was Captain Harrison who had come from Galway and I heard later he was travelling in an armoured car. A few days later Ronan and I were handcuffed and taken out in the custody of R.I.C. and Tans when a Black & Tan named Ross said to me, "You won't escape this time, Coleman, we've had a special course in musketry since the last time". This was said in the hearing of another Black & Tan named Foster who had been friendly with Ronan, and he informed Major Davies of what he had heard with the result that a tender of Auxiliaries followed us all the way into Ballina from Tubbercurry.

We were kept about a fortnight in Ballina and while there an R.I.C. man called Nangle told me that D.I. White, on his way back from visiting a Major Ormsby, had been fired at and wounded. There was terrific commotion in the barracks that night and my cell door was hammered on with the butt of a rifle by an R.I.C. man named Ryan, who said, "Coleman, you so and so, I'll shoot you tonight anyhow". He came from Portumna. I then heard a voice ordering him away from the door. I recognised the voice as a Black & Tan named Earl who was very friendly towards me and I would like to say that another

Black & Tan named Glover (who later married a Ballina girl) said, "Ryan, you will not be allowed to interfere with a prisoner".

When speaking to them later they told me they both drew their guns on Ryan. Glover also told me he was on the raid where a Volunteer named Tommy Howley had been mortally wounded and while dying on the lorry D.I. White, who had his arm in a sling from the slight wound he got earlier, ground his foot into Howley's wounds. White was a native of Strokestown, County Roscommon.

I was shortly afterwards removed to Eglinton Street R.I.C. barracks in Galway and placed in a room where a number of men kept filing by me. I recognised some of them as belonging to the Murder Gang who tried to shoot me at Rehins Bridge. After about two hours I was taken to Galway jail. As I was being taken in the gate an R.I.C. man said to me, "Coleman, you B . . . D, you are not sorry to be going in here."

After some time I was taken to Renmore barracks for Courtmartial where I remember seeing five officers with a Colonel presiding. A Major Sherry was prosecutor. He commenced his statement about me being found in possession of a revolver. I had already refused to recognise the Court. The Colonel interrupted Sherry, saying, "As the prisoner does not recognise the Court you cannot examine him". I asked permission to speak, which was granted. I immediately charged D.I. White and a number of police in Ballina with beating and ill-treating me while in their custody. The Colonel said "I'll adjourn the Court and have these people summoned as witnesses on another occasion".

I was again brought before the same Court about a fortnight later when the same Colonel said, "I cannot get these witnesses to attend. Have you anyone who can bear out your statement."

I said, "Unfortunately, I have not, but I would like to thank you and the Court for a fair hearing."

I was then taken back to the jail where I was later informed by a Major Splendid that I had been sentenced to two years hard labour. After some time I was told by a warder that a new prisoner had arrived and, as by now we were practically running the jail ourselves, I went down to see him. He turned out to be a hotel-keeper from Lisdoonvarna; I think his name was O'Connor, who was in for a trivial offence. He asked me was there anything doing at all here. I asked him did he know anyone in Galway. He said he could get anything he wanted in Toher's Hotel in Eglinton Street. I got him to write a note which asked for a quart of whiskey and I took it to a warder named Dan Renihan who, after some time, returned with it. I procured a thin bottle from the hospital, broke the lamp hole in the door of the cell and gave O'Connor the full of the bottle. I met him next morning when he claimed I had saved his life. I, with the warder and my comrades, also enjoyed the remainder of it. I just mention this to show how well we had matters in our own hands.

Later on we became very discontented and decided to burn the jail. We put up barricades at all entrances. The warders handed up the keys. There were about fifty of us (Volunteers) there at this time. We broke into the paint store and spilled turpentine and other liquids to start the fire. We had the fire going well when the military and R.I.C. surrounded the jail. They had to send for the Engineers to force a way in. Among the military I noticed Captain Harrison of the 17th Lancers for the first time in uniform. The Police rushed in and proceeded to

beat us up. In consequence about six of us were removed to hospital where we were until our release in January 1922.

Before concluding my statement I have asked Captain Briody to allow me to add the following:- I claim to be the only prisoner who succeeded in making my escape from the notorious Murder Gang, who were based in Galway City.

SIGNED: Patrick Coleman

DATE: Sept 16th 1957.

WITNESS: [Signature]
Capt

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