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COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1710.

**Witness**

Liam Forde,  
Mill Road,  
Corbally,  
Limerick.

**Identity.**

Brigade Comdt., Mid Limerick Brigade,  
Irish Volunteers, Limerick City 1916.

**Subject.**

Mid Limerick Brigade and Mid Limerick  
Active Service Unit, 1921.

**Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.**

Nil.

File No S. 907.

Form B.S.M. 2

# ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21  
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NO. W.S. 1710

STATEMENT BY LIAM FORDE,

Mill Road, Corbally, Limerick.

I was born in Raheen Manor, Tomgraney, Co. Clare, in July, 1888. My parents came from farming stock in Co. Limerick. My mother, whose maiden name was Margaret Neville, was the daughter of an evicted tenant. My father was born near Ballyneety, Co. Limerick, where my mother, after the eviction, was reared by relatives and where she later met and married my father.

I was the tenth member of a family of twelve. <sup>Some</sup> ~~Six~~ years before I was born, my father took up duty as land steward in the Moreland Estate, Raheen Manor, Tomgraney, where, as stated, I was born. Some couple of years after the arrival of the eleventh family member, my father applied and secured the post of land steward to a wealthy Limerick merchant named Stephen Dowling whose lands were divided between Clare and Limerick. Our family then took up residence in Limerick City. The change of residence was evidently prompted with a view to affording a good education to the family. I was five years old when the change took place.

Having reached the fourth standard at the Christian Brothers' School, I changed to St. Munchin's College, where I received the remainder of my education. I left school when I was 18 years of age and entered the offices of the Irish Co-op. Agency Society, Limerick, as a junior clerk.

The tales of the evictions and the sufferings endured prior to and during the earlier years of my life were principally responsible in arousing my rebel instincts and in the shaping of my national outlook.

Having left school I joined the Gaelic League, in the rooms of which most of the winter evenings were spent. It was in these rooms I met the now immortalised Seán Heuston - who was employed in the G.S. & W. Railway office at Limerick. He and I became close companions. He was later transferred to the Dublin offices.

I cannot remember when I joined up with the Irish Republican Brotherhood, but as I was sworn in by an employee of the Irish Co-op. Agency it must have been before I reached the age of 22, as I remained only four years in the Co-op. offices.

I was one of six who met and formed a club later known as the Wolfe Tone Club - whose members, one and all, had been sworn in to the I.R.B. The intention was to use the club rooms for the holding of lectures where social intercourse could take place between the city members of the Brotherhood. When, towards the close of 1913, there were whisperings of inaugurating a corps of Irish Volunteers in Limerick, a small group of the Wolfe Tone Club members met and decided to do all that was possible to further the project and, should it materialise, to have the machinery in readiness in an effort to ensure, as far as it was possible to do so, that those whom we regarded as the "right" men - with a separatist outlook - be put in control. I formed one of this group.

On the 14th December, 1913, I was present at a conference which was held in the Town Hall (Limerick) for the purpose of considering the question of the formation of a corps. At this meeting it was decided to call a meeting for a further discussion and to have invitations issued to all shades of national opinion, clubs and organisations, with the stipulation that those who might wish to attend should do so in an individual capacity.

At this meeting it was unanimously decided to make the necessary arrangements for a public meeting with a view to launching the movement. This meeting was held, if I remember rightly, in January, 1914, and a Volunteer corps was duly formed. I was appointed Financial Secretary of the newly formed corps, and by virtue of the fact I became a member of the Committee or Council. I was also appointed 1st Lieutenant of 'C' Company.

The duties attaching to my appointment as Financial Secretary were carried out in my home after working hours. I had to keep individual records of weekly subscriptions, and as the membership was from 1,500 to 2,000 in the earlier stages of the movement, the listing of the names and addresses and the recording of the individual subscriptions without help from any source meant burning the midnight oil. I had some innocent qualms about asking for help to carry out the work.

All went well until September, 1914. During this month the Home Rule Bill received the King's blessing, with the well-known proviso that it was not to take effect for a minimum period of 12 months. The Redmond element of the Volunteer corps advocated that we should herald the occasion by having a public parade. It was pointed out to this section that to do so would run counter to the constitution as approved by all concerned. The atmosphere, however, became more and more charged, and ended in splitting the Volunteers - the Redmond section taking one side and those who adhered to the constitution the other.

At our next parade after the split, only about 250 were present. Employees of a considerable number of

business concerns were told that they must desist parading with the "Sinn Féin" section of the Volunteers or lose their employment. Consequently, the recorded average attendance in parades fell to about one hundred.

Prior to the split, the monies collected by the subscriptions, collections, contributions from Cumann na mBan, etc. went towards the purchase of rifles and equipment and ammunition, and it is unnecessary to remark that drilling, rifle practice, etc. went ahead energetically. Robert Monteith held classes for the officers and saw to it that they became efficient in all branches of military knowledge. Fortunately the guns purchased fell into the hands of those who remained faithful. Consequently, practically all those who were free to appear on parade were armed with rifles.

Towards the end of 1914 I was appointed Captain of 'C' Coy. The battalion was comprised of four companies, 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D'. I stressed the fact at several of our council meetings that the Limerick Battalion, having reached a high standard of military training, should direct its attention to the formation of companies in the rural areas. Subsequently I was appointed in June, 1914, <sup>the</sup> ~~as~~ County Organiser, still retaining my rank as captain. I threw my heart into this work and was responsible for the formation of units at Caherconlish, Ballybricken, Boher, Pallas and Fedamore in the mid Limerick area, and I also formed a unit at Tomgraney in Co. Clare. Having formed the companies I went for some time once each week to drill and instruct them in military matters.

The ranks of the Volunteers continued to be light  
 time as  
 until such/the British Government began to entertain  
 the idea of enforcing conscription in this country.  
 With the threat of conscription the ranks began to swell  
 rapidly - I have a clear recollection of having listed  
 the names of over 2,000 members - but with the abatement  
 of the conscription scare the depletion of the ranks  
 became as rapid as the enrolment. Suffice to say that,  
 with the approach of the great objective which was staged  
 during Easter Week, 1916, Limerick City was poorly  
 representative<sup>ed</sup> in numbers. I refer to the strength of  
 the Limerick City Battalion.

On Easter Saturday, 1916, I was dispatched to  
 Dublin with the Casement message. I was being kept  
 under enemy observation for some months prior to this  
 event. Having to travel to Dublin by train, I knew that  
 I would be escorted to my destination by the usual bodyguard  
 of two detectives. I therefore decided to book for the  
 Limerick Junction. (In this connection I would refer to  
 the following extract from the "Limerick Leader"):

" On Saturday morning the news was received in  
 Limerick of the blowing up of the German ship, "The Aud",  
 off Queenstown; of the landing of three men from a  
 boat in Kerry and the arrest of one of them, of the  
 loss of the car at Killorglin, of the arrest of Stack,  
 the Kerry Commandant. Fitzgibbon hurried to Dublin  
 for instructions, having arranged to send a code message  
 saying if the Rising was "on" or "off". Lieutenant  
 Paddy Whelan was dispatched to Tralee to find out what  
 he could of the position there. Colivet anxiously  
 waited all day for some word from Headquarters and,  
 receiving none, sent dispatches cancelling all

arrangements in his command. By an afternoon train Lieutenant J. Gubbins was sent to Dublin to convey what information was available and to ask for instructions in the light of the existing situation. To outwit the "G men", who were stationed at the entrance to the passenger platform, he joined the train through the goods yard. Arrived in Dublin, he tried to contact Eoin McNeill, but failed, and after considerable delay contacted Seán McDermott at the house where he was staying.

#### A Hive of Industry:

The place was a hive of activity. Many men were present and others were constantly arriving; stands of rifles were arranged along the walls. It seemed as if everyone in Dublin must know that an insurrection was due to take place on the morrow. Cumann na mBan girls were serving teas in an atmosphere of cheerfulness and good humour. McDermott, debonair as usual, exchanged pleasantries with those present. The scene resembled more the preparation for a picnic rather than that of preparation for the grim business of war. Gubbins delivered his message, and was informed confidentially by McDermott that the rising would take place, that the lost German ship was only one of many such expeditions. He also strongly recommended that Limerick officers should resist arrest, should such be attempted, as such resistance would strengthen the morale of Volunteers elsewhere.

#### "Books have arrived":

The code telegram, "the books have arrived", meaning "the rebellion is on" was accordingly sent to

Limerick. Gubbins then asked that as he could not now hope to reach Limerick in time for the insurrection he should be assigned to a Dublin unit. McDermott replied that his place was in Limerick, and that a lorry was about to leave Dublin for that city. (Colivet had asked for a couple of lorries through FitzGibbon).

A volunteer conveyed him to the spot from which the lorry was to start. After some delay two lorries arrived, and with a driver and another companion he set out. The slow moving vehicles did not arrive until late on Sunday morning and he reported to Colivet.

Colivet had dispatched another officer, Captain Liam Forde, to Dublin by a later train. His report shall appear later.

Late on Saturday night Colivet received news from Tralee confirming the loss of the arms, but on Saturday night also he received a message through Miss Laura Daly that "everything was all right" that "there were men and officers coming", that "we had received the Papal Blessing, and that "McNeill was splendid". No word came from Fitzgibbon. On Easter Sunday morning, The O'Rahilly arrived with orders from McNeill, which read: - "Volunteers completely deceived; all orders for to-morrow, Sunday, are entirely cancelled". He also gave news of a cleavage at Headquarters, but said a meeting had been held at which it was decided to cancel arrangements.



Notice cancelling parades and marches:

The "Sunday Independent", on Easter Sunday morning contained a notice from McNeill cancelling all parades and marches.

Meantime, Whelan had returned from Kerry, where he had not been lucky. He had contacted Vice-Commandant Cahill (Stack having been arrested), who would not give him any information. The situation, naturally, was confused in Kerry, and Cahill, not having known Whelan previously, may have been suspicious of his bona-fides. In any case Whelan had to be content with unofficial rumours which were floating around Tralee. Arrived in Limerick, he was immediately dispatched to Tralee again with the countermanding order.

Whelan's bona-fides being established, Cahill was more friendly, and told him that a friend was anxious to meet him. He conducted him to "The Rink", a large building packed with armed men, amongst whom he was astonished to see the unmistakably military figure of Monteith. Glad to meet Whelan, he embarked on an account of his recent adventures, and confirmed the arrest of Casement.

Spoke with bitterness of the Germans:

He spoke with great bitterness of the Germans, who, he said, were out for cheap Irish blood. He said no men were coming, and that the cargo consisted of obsolete Russian rifles and machine-guns. He advised against a Rising, and recommended Colivet to try and bluff through. He was especially virulent

regarding Von Papen, who had been German Military Attache in the United States. Von Papen was incapable of understanding the meaning of the Irish struggle, and looked on the whole affair as a civil war, rather than the uprising of a separate nation, seeking to rid itself of foreign domination. Whelan returned and reported.

Battalion Parade:

Although the plans for a rising were cancelled, and the various units throughout the country scattered, it was decided to proceed with a week-end parade of the Battalion, which mustered about 140 men, much fewer than had been expected. McNeill's public notice probably accounted for some defections. Many familiar faces were missing. Forde was in Dublin, Whelan in Tralee, Jimmy McInerney had been assigned to Newcastle West to take charge of operations there. John Grant, riding a motor cycle, was acting as communications officer between the various units in the county. And so the column set out, their shadows, the G-men, in faithful attendance. We know that five hours previously the intention had been that they were not to return. Many, particularly the members of the I.R.B., knew of the intention to rise, and many others had a shrewd idea that dramatic events were imminent. Arrived at Killonan, leave was generously granted, with the result that only some 80 to 100 men billeted for the night in the friendly precincts of Batt Laffan's farm. A feeling of anti-climax pervaded the proceedings, as the officers, of course, knew of the countermanding order.

Message that Rising was off:

On Sunday night came the message from Fitzgibbon, saying the rising was "off". On Sunday night Forde reported. He had left Limerick for Dublin by a train which started at about 4.30 p.m., via the Limerick Junction, having purchased a ticket to the Junction only, and was seen off by two "G" men who accompanied him to the carriage door. Knowing that their colleagues at the Junction would be notified and furnished with his description, he left the carriage in which he was travelling at Dromkeen and got into one in which there was only one occupant, who proved to be a soldier home from the front. They got into chat, and presently Forde explained that he was in some kind of political trouble, and asked the other if he would mind changing his hat, coat and scarf with him. The soldier readily consented, and the change was made, with the result that the "G" men were completely put off the track, and he was able to continue his journey to Dublin undetected.

McDermott in a rage:

Having been in Dublin on a demolition course a few months earlier, he had no difficulty in locating McDermott at his lodgings, to whom he confided his latest news and the suggestion that the rising should be postponed. From the outbreak of the European War McDermott's life had been dedicated to the cause of an Irish Insurrection. Physically frail, he had been working on his nerves during the previous week. Any suggestion that the rising should be postponed was intolerable to him. He burst out that the Rising should take place, even if they had only sticks and stones to fight with, adding bitterly that there were

too many philosophers in the country. In the intensity of his feelings he became physically sick. Forde slept in the house that night. Before he was dressed on the following (Easter Sunday) morning McDermott was shown McNeill's countermanding order, published in the "Sunday Independent", which drove him frantic. He rent the coat of his pyjamas to shreds, crying inconsolably that we were betrayed again. He dressed and walked to Liberty Hall, accompanied by Forde.

In Calmer Mood:

In calmer mood now, he argued that they should rise, if only with pikes and bayonets; even though defeated their blood would regenerate the Nation. Arrived at Liberty Hall, he disappeared into one of the various rooms. Forde had breakfast with Clarke, Connolly and Ceannt, and was awaited on by the Countess Markievicz. The other three left after breakfast to attend a meeting which lasted throughout the day, until about 4 p.m. Then Pearse emerged, and placing his arm affectionately around Forde's shoulder, he told him everything was off for the present, but "hold yourself in readiness for further orders". He provided a motor car for Forde as far as Cashel, in order that he would convey his message to Pierce McCann at Cashel. Forde did so, hired another car at Cashel, and reported at Killonan at midnight."

The story of what transpired, or the part played by the Limerick Volunteers as set out in these "Limerick Leader" articles as compiled by Seamus Gubbins, I would point out that I was one of the six members of the council who strongly advocated taking part in the fight for freedom.

I also strongly opposed the surrender of arms. I personally did not surrender my rifle. I retained it, and I also got hold of the rifles of six other Volunteers who were not prominently identified with the Volunteers. It transpired that there was no serious effort made in the way of a check-up of the number of rifles surrendered. The rifles were later used by the Flying Column of the Mid Limerick Brigade. I am aware that Commandant Colivet, in his statement to the Pensions Board, referred to me as the one and only exception who did not comply with the order for the surrender of arms.

On 11th May, 1916, a detachment of military with bayonets fixed called at daybreak to my home and placed me under arrest. I was taken to the Ordnance Military Barracks in Limerick. I found on arrival that some of the other officers of the City Battalion were already there, and for a couple of hours the number was increasing - finishing with a total of 24 arrests. This number included the battalion officers and individuals who had prominently identified themselves with the movement. Later in the day we were removed to the gaol. A number were later in the week courtmartialled. In the course of my courtmartial the two detectives who saw me off at the station on Easter Saturday stated that, while I booked for the Junction I did not arrive there. My description had been sent on but the detectives at the Junction said that there was no one on the train answering the description.

The year 1917/18 was more or less uneventful. I devoted a good deal of time during those years to the work of organising units in the rural areas, raiding for arms, attending Volunteer council meetings, drilling, etc. In the 1917 election I accompanied Eamon de Valera on his

first visit to Clare and was one of the speakers at the meeting held at Scarriff which proved to be a monster meeting.

On Easter Saturday, 1918, my home was raided with a view to placing me under arrest, but I managed to escape. It later transpired that there were two warrants for my arrest, one for a speech at Killaloe<sup>oe</sup> - the charge being that some of my statements were interpreted as inciting to crime; the second warrant was for illegal drilling. I was 'on the run' or avoiding arrest until the middle of September, when I got word from a fairly reliable source that the warrants had been withdrawn. I returned home but on the following morning, about 6 a.m., we were all awakened by the unmistakable knocking at the hall door. I got a sister to enter my bed, and clad in a pyjamas coat and knee breeches I got away for a second time by scaling walls at the back of the house. It was spilling rain as I made my way in the dark of the morning to Thompson's, funeral undertakers, Roches St. I gained entrance to Thompson's and was standing on the mat inside the door when again, to my amazement, the familiar banging of the door knocker resounded. I moved upstairs quietly and a small ladder was pulled from under a bed in one of the top rooms which enabled me to get up through the attic door. I was able to reach the skylight from the floor of the attic. I opened it and went through to the roof of the house. Not feeling safe, I moved on to the roof of the second-next house. The rain was drenching. I worked slowly down from the parapet to the eaveshoot. I hung from the eaveshoot with a hand on either side of it where it joined a down-pipe, and I got down the down-pipe to the yard. I got on to the yard wall and was proceeding

along the wall which bounded the yards at the rear of Roches Street houses, when a terrier dog in about the sixth yard from Thompson's brought me to a halt, so I was forced to drop into the yard of a butcher named O'Malley. (These are all three storey houses). I remained there until about 8 a.m., when a bolt in the back door was drawn and a young lady emerged. The poor "drenched rat" also emerged from one of the outhouses. There was, however, only a slight feminine exclamation, but I had escaped arrest. Thompson's is a corner house with no yard; hence my line of retreat.

While I thought this incident worth recording, I had several subsequent escapes, as a result of which I was referred to as the "Seamus O'Brien" of Limerick in an issue of "Spark" which was printed in a hide-out in Limerick and appeared every other week. About April, 1919, I returned home believing that by this time the warrants for my arrest had reached the scrap-heap, but to my consternation, however, the back door of my home was sledged open while the front door was well manned with rifle-carrying members of the R.I.C., and I was arrested. I was pulled by the heels with my back being torn along the stones and mud for a distance of about 140 yards to John Street Barracks. I was later in the day removed from there to William Street R.I.C. Barracks, and in the removal I was doubly handcuffed - one half of the second half-cuff around my wrist and the second half on the wrist of a member of the R.I.C.

I was removed the following day to the R.I.C. Barracks, Ennis - again doubly handcuffed. As I emerged from William Street Barracks a crowd quickly collected. I was linked to a member of the R.I.C. - one link of a handcuff on his wrist and the other around mine. It was amusing to see both of us mount the lorry on planks provided for the purpose. A rousing cheer went up from the crowd as the lorry moved off.

A couple of days after my arrival at Ennis I was tried by two Resident Magistrates and sentenced to three months imprisonment in the County Gaol, Limerick. In the prison at the time there were between seventy and eighty political prisoners. In the course of a week or so I was appointed their O/C., and, while I do not propose to go into detail about the fight that was put up for better treatment for the prisoners, I will say that I was primarily responsible for having brought about in a general way very much improved conditions.

On my release from gaol I resumed work in the offices of the Condensed Milk Company of Ireland, where I filled the post of cashier.

It was, I think, early in 1918 that Ernest Blythe, accompanied by Peadar McMahon (late Chief of Staff, National Army), and a Peadar Dunne, (who later became O/C of the Mid. Limerick Brigade) came to Limerick and became engaged in the work of forming a second Volunteer Unit in the City - ignoring the existence of the 1st Battalion of which the late Michael Colivet was the O/C. In this recruiting campaign the officers of the 1st Battalion were severely criticised for not having joined in the fight during the 1916 Insurrection - suffice it to say that recruits were quickly forthcoming principally from junior hurling clubs that were being tapped in and about the City. Five Companies were duly formed, one in each of the five different districts in the City. These five Companies merged and became the 2nd Battalion. While this Battalion was being built up the activities of the 1st Battalion began to diminish, as it ceased to be recognised by G.H.Q., and after some time ceased altogether to function. The organiser of the 2nd Battalion continued the work of forming Volunteer units in the County, and succeeded in forming three Battalions -(Castleconnell and Murroe, 3rd Battalion), (Caherconlish and Fedamore, 4th Battalion), (Patrickswell and Adare, 5th Battalion). All four Battalions became



the Mid Limerick Brigade. Peadar Dunne, who, as I have stated came from Dublin with Ernest Blythe, became the O/C. of the newly formed Battalion in Limerick City and when the Brigade was formed he became the Brigade O/C.

I personally made serious efforts to merge the first and second Battalions but failed - I then called in prominent citizens to help towards this objective one of whom was the late murdered Mayor, Michael O'Callaghan. The officers of the 1st Battalion, however, definitely refused to link up - it serves little purpose to set out the reasons put forward by the 1st Battalion officers for their attitude in this matter only to remark that having failed to link up the two Battalions and realising that the 1st Battalion was a 'dead letter', I joined up with the 2nd Battalion. This was in February 1921. I was straight away co-opted on the Brigade staff. In March, 1921, the Brigade O/C., Peadar Dunne, was arrested by Crown Forces and I succeeded him as Brigade O/C.

When I took over command I found that things were not too happy with the Brigade in its relationship with G.H.Q., and Headquarters were about to insist that the Brigade would merge with and form part of the East Limerick Brigade. I wrote requesting Headquarters to stay its hand and give me a chance of tightening up the general looseness that was so apparent in the carrying out of the duties of the Brigade. My request was granted and with the proverbial 'New Broom' energy I set to work, and, having filled key positions here and there with men of the right calibre, the work of the Brigade ran smoothly and in a short time we had the good will and respect of G.H.Q.

I do not propose to set out in detail the activities of the Mid Limerick Brigade as this has already been accomplished in "Limerick Fighting Story". I regret to say, however, that the recording of

certain engagements subsequent to my appointment as Brigade O/C. are not historically correct, and no reference is made to a couple of engagements in which I took part - I shall deal with this matter later.

When one considers that Limerick was a concentration Camp for military, R.I.C. and Black & Tans and surrounded by a flat country that did not lend itself to the carrying out of successful ambushes, as it afforded scarcely any appropriate positions for attacks on the enemy, the fighting record of the Brigade was reasonably good. Having regard to the disadvantages we suffered, as referred to in the foregoing, I had a dispatch sent out to the three adjoining Brigades (North Tipperary, East Limerick and Clare) suggesting that in any future ambushes that might be contemplated in any of the four Brigade areas, the Active Service Unit in the area in which the ambush was to take place might be reinforced by officers and soldiers from adjoining units. Donneacha Hannigan, O/C., East Limerick, was the first officer to take advantage of my suggestion. He requested, in a dispatch to me, ~~for~~ the co-operation of the Mid Limerick Active Service Unit with his, for an attack that was contemplated on a Flying Column of Black & Tans, known as the "Green Howards" that were moving around his area on bicycles. By arrangement with Donneacha I moved into the East Limerick area with about twenty men all armed with rifles and were met on arrival by Liam Hayes (late Adjutant-General National Army) who arranged billets for us. On the following morning we received instructions (1st May, 1921) to proceed to a point near Shraharla Chapel - the spot chosen for the ambush. A guide was sent to lead us to the spot. We had just reached the main road that led to the Chapel, when around a close-by bend on the road shot two lorries of enemy troops. Some of my men had actually gone over the ditch and on to the road, but before the soldiers were in a position to open fire they were able to get back over the ditch again. Around the bend of the road there were five further lorries making a total of seven with ten soldiers

armed with rifles and machine-guns in each lorry.

Needless to say that shots were immediately exchanged.

We had only fourteen men; the remainder of our unit had billeted some considerable distance away or closer to the men of the East Limerick Column. I can never understand why the enemy did not rush our small unit; it might be due to a faint-hearted officer, or, perhaps, they were not in a position to gauge our numerical strength. We extended behind the road ditch, and the enemy extended behind field ditches on the opposite side of the road. We kept moving in an orderly fashion towards the arranged scene of the ambush, shots being exchanged all the time. We had no casualties (two of our unit were wounded - one slightly, and the other had a bullet through his wrist) until we reached a point near Shreharla Chapel that afforded no cover whatever for the continuation of our movements. As we had hoped to contact the East Limerick unit near the chapel, and as the enemy were making an encircling movement to outflank us, it was imperative that we should move on. We, therefore, decided to spring across this open space, one at a time, where we were wide open to enemy fire. About twenty-four yards, if I remember rightly, had to be crossed to reach cover at the other side. While the different individuals were crossing, an incessant fire was kept up by us in an effort to keep the enemy under cover. It was while crossing here that two outstanding soldiers, Paddy Starr and James Horan, were killed. Tim Hennessy was wounded here also and captured, and Volunteer Casey was taken prisoner. We soon reached a point where the land sloped up behind us - a gradual upward gradient that afforded good cover and gave us a decided advantage over the enemy on the level plains at

the other side of the road, and negatived their outflanking movement. Contact was not made at this stage with the East Limerick unit, and, worst of all, our guide had disappeared.

We took advantage of our new position by carefully retreating uphill. As none of us knew the lie of the land, we were in a quandary as to what to do: we might reach a point where we would again find ourselves a target for the enemy or rounded up by enemy reinforcements. I entered a farmhouse and asked a young man who was seated with his aged father in the kitchen, to lead us in what he regarded a safe direction. He pleaded that he had not the courage to do so. The father jumped up, put on his coat and said: "Come on, I will lead you, boys". He led us to a point where we made contact with the East Limerick unit. We saw no more of the enemy from the moment we reached the sloping ground. I think it is only fair to say that, while my name is not mentioned in connection with this engagement in "Limerick's Fighting Story", there are plenty living witnesses to verify that it was I who marshalled and led the column in this engagement, and it was I who made all arrangements for the bringing of the column into the East Limerick area.

In "Limerick's Fighting Story", it is stated that there were four lorries of enemy troops in the surprise attack at Shreharla Chapel, whereas it is positively certain that there were seven, with ten soldiers in each lorry. Definite information in regard to the number of lorries and the numerical strength of the enemy was found among a number of enemy dispatches or communications that were transmitted to Bgde.H. Q. by Volunteers from

*the* Caherconlish Company. An enemy plane had a forced landing near Caherconlish - the two occupants (the pilot and assistant) hurriedly took closely bound bundles of communications from the plane, poured petrol on them and set them on fire, and then quickly decamped to make good their escape. Some of the local Volunteers arrived and took possession of the parcels of communications and had them conveyed to me. Among the papers were communications in regard to the Shreharla and Lackelly engagements, which set out the strength of the enemy engaged and the supposed strength of the I.R.A. *and an exaggerated account of the number killed* Reference was made to every (I.R.A.) Active Service Unit in the country, and we transmitted to G.H.Q. most of these papers, which contained most valuable information of a general nature. Only the verges of the parcels were scorched.

After the Shreharla engagement, we moved on to Lackelly, where we billeted. On the following morning, we were alerted that the enemy flying column was in the vicinity, moving around on bicycles. I had just mobilised about 16 of our unit when we heard the cracking of rifles about a quarter of a mile away. Seán Carroll and a small section of our unit had billeted with a few of the East Limerick unit where the shooting was taking place. It transpired that four of this section were chatting in a farmyard when they were taken completely by surprise by the enemy column, and the four fell mortally wounded. Seán Carroll and a few others who were some short distance away, were fired on and had to fight a retreating fight against the enemy column, which was comprised of 17 soldiers or Tans. They were very closely pressed when the section under my command, who had gone at the double to the scene of the shooting,

*in the nick of time*  
 arrived ~~on the scene~~ and engaged the enemy. We captured their seventeen bicycles, and a fight, lasting five hours, ensued.

The enemy column was certainly made up of a brave band of fighting men - perfectly trained to take advantage of every bit of cover, and, on this account, were not an easy target. Towards the end of the engagement, we had them surrounded in a meadow. The uncut hay was very high. One ditch was held by me with two others - *Volunteers* Ringrose and Dinny Hayes. For some time none of the enemy was visible. Then, suddenly, two of their heads were raised out of the high grass, in line, but about four feet apart, and scarcely ten yards from us. We opened fire on them. I fired only one shot and could not fire a second because the pin of my rifle had snapped. At such close range I could not have missed putting the bullet through the head of the Tan I fired at, and I saw ~~him~~ *his head drop* prostrate after the shot. I rushed over to Ringrose and took the rifle out of his hand and told him to move off, only to find that the bullets in the magazine of his gun were jammed. I then asked the enemy to surrender, but the reply was "No b..... surrender". All this happened in a split second, and I am prepared to swear as to the truth of this statement, as it sounds far-fetched. The enemy, realising that there was something amiss, rushed ~~on~~ our positions, and we had to get out of the way as fast as possible, running zig-zag for a bit and then rolling over a ditch in an opening in the hedges. I saw six of the enemy column in the forward rush. Several shots were fired at us before we made the opening, and had we made ourselves a stationary target for a split second, our chances of escape would have been negligible,

what remained of the enemy column <sup>22.</sup>  
~~Casey~~ having broken through at this point.

Consequent on the fact that it was a long drawn out fight, which added to the danger of the arrival of reinforcements, no attempt was made to follow them up.

Two of the four who were shot in the farmyard belonged to the mid-Limerick unit, and the other two to the East Limerick unit. We had lost six men in the two engagements, Shreharla and Lackelly.

I should have stated that in the Shreharla engagement, the bodies of the two who were killed (Starr and Horan) were removed by the enemy. Tim Hennessy, who was badly wounded, fell into their hands also. He was removed by them to Cork, where he died. Casey was captured and removed to Cork, where he was courtmartialled and shot. The bodies of the four were handed over to their respective families and were buried in their family graves.

After the Lackelly fight, the mid Limerick unit, or what was left of it, started out on the journey to our own area. We were supplied with two horses and traps, in which we carried the bodies of the four Volunteers who were killed at Lackelly - two in each trap, wrapped in sheets. Having arrived at Killculane, near Herbertstown, we buried the bodies side by side in a ploughed garden, with the permission of the owner, where they remained until the Truce.

We had been travelling all night, and having arrived some little distance from Caherconlish, we disbanded the column for a temporary period of rest. Five of us remained together and put up at Blackwell's farmhouse at Hidepark, near Caherconlish. This party was made up of

Seán Connolly, Paddy McDonnell, Paddy Ryan (Lacken), Dave Hennessy, and myself. The following morning, a detachment of military knocked up the residents of the farmhouse in the adjoining farm. The owner (Purcell) was ordered out, and the officer in charge used him, Mr. Purcell, as a bodyguard while he and some of his troops entered the house. One of these was seen to have a few carrier pigeons in a pigeon basket. One of the daughters of the house, being aware that we were billeted in Blackwell's, managed to get out the back door and hurried to inform us of the impending danger. We had time only to pull on our pants and rush out with our guns. We had the remainder of our clothes rolled up in our arms. We reached a double ditch about 150 yards to the rear of the house. Here we loaded our rifles, donned our clothes and took up position. We had not long to wait when we saw the soldiers move towards the farmhouse. Having carried out the raid on the house, they started to move in our direction. The officer was hailed by an old, cool and well balanced workman who was in the field outside the farmyard. He told the officer that if he wanted to reach the road, he would have to face towards a castle which was a few hundred yards away to the right of the rear of the farmyard. There he would see a car passage which would lead him to the road. We could well understand this old man, whom we knew quite well, delivering the information in a casual and friendly manner. The officer headed his men in the direction indicated. We are quite sure that the old man's presence of mind saved us a lot of trouble, as we would have to try the almost impossible task of defending ourselves against about forty soldiers.



Fedamore Engagement:

On the 13th April, 1921, a small detachment of the flying column (about 12 men) under my command went to Fedamore, having received information that Power's licensed premises there was a nightly rendezvous for Tans from the local barracks. Having arrived at Power's, I sent a young scout, who had accompanied us, into the shop to purchase a packet of Woodbines and report if there were any Tans inside. We were quickly informed by him that there were five, Tans and R.I.C., drinking there. Having placed my men, I rolled away, on tip toe, two bicycles that were laid against the front wall of Power's, and put them over the ditch at the opposite side of the road. I had three men covering off the barracks, which was some short distance, on elevated ground, at the rear of Power's, with instructions to open fire on the barracks immediately we opened fire on the enemy emerging from Power's. I placed four men armed with rifles behind the ditch facing the house. A wall about  $3\frac{1}{2}$  feet high ran from the left gable end of the house (left side when facing the house) outwards for about 5 yards. Behind this wall, which was only about ten feet from the front door of the shop, Johnny Lynch and I, armed with two shotguns, took up position. The light from the shop window proved an advantage when three of the enemy emerged. A shot from my gun was to be the signal to open fire. Two of the three started searching for their bicycles. I hesitated opening fire in the hope that the remaining two Tans would join the three, but this did not happen, so fire was opened and two fell mortally wounded. The third, who managed to re-enter the pub, badly wounded, recovered later from his

wounds. The other two Tans got away through the back of the house to the barracks. Verey lights went up from the barracks one after the other, and for about a quarter of an hour we directed our fire to the barracks before we withdrew. On the following day, there was a leading heading in the "Irish Independent" which can be seen on the paper files, but, as well as I can remember, it ran something like the following: "Determined attack on Fedamore Barracks etc., etc."

Carter's Bridge, referred to on page 196 of "Limerick's Fighting Story", is wrongly recorded, and certain individuals who are mentioned as having taken part did not take part, and the names of ~~a number~~ other individuals who were there are not referred to. Having forgotten the date, it was, I am reliably informed, during the first week in June, 1921, we received information that the Auxiliaries were to vacate Killaloe on the following day, and that they were to travel on the morning train from Killaloe to Limerick, en route for their destination. We decided that we would make an attempt to blow up or wreck the train by derailing it at a point known as Carter's Bridge. All arrangements were made under the supervision of the Divisional Engineer, the late Bob de Courcy.

In the early morning of the day they were to leave their Killaloe station, I was one of a party of about 10 armed Volunteers who accompanied Bob de Courcy and his assistant, Power O'Mara (a son of the world famous tenor), to Carter's Bridge. A section of the line between the rails was carefully trenched, and the mines or explosives were laid and covered in. The wires

leading from the mines to the battery were concealed in the high grass on the downward slope of the railway line. We took up position behind a ditch that ran parallel to the line, and separated from the line by about ten yards. The only visible difference between the section of the railway line where the mine was laid and the adjoining sections, was the damp appearance of the gravel where it was disturbed.

About an hour before the train was due to move out of Killaloe, it transpired that each mile or so of the line between Killaloe and Limerick was patrolled and inspected - six soldiers being allotted to each section. We did not expect this form of inspection and we were naturally surprised when we saw six uniformed men coming along the line and carefully inspecting it as they moved along. When they arrived at the spot where the mines were laid, they became suspicious that there was something amiss. They halted and started in a casual manner to confer with each other, but after a minute or two one of them moved down to the side of the line and discovered the cable leading to the battery. They immediately took cover at the other side of the railway line, and while they were in the act of doing so, we opened fire on them. As we were only three miles from Limerick City, and as we rightly concluded that there were lorries of enemy troops in the vicinity to reinforce the patrols on the line if needs be, we decided to retreat. Having gone about 50 yards, I missed Power O'Mara and four of us returned to look for him. He had gone through a cattle opening under the railway line to the other side before the firing took place, and, not being armed, he took cover in the opening when he heard the shots. He emerged from

the cattle opening just as we got back ~~to the place~~  
~~we had vacated.~~ Having found our man, the five of  
us (Seán Carroll, Bob de Courcy, Paddy Barry, Power  
O'Mara and myself) retreated in the direction of  
Lisnagry bog. Due to the delay in our search for  
O'Mara, we lost touch with the remainder of the unit.  
Having reached the bog, we were met by a man who  
was working in the bog. He roared at us to get  
down flat and crawl after him through the heather,  
which, fortunately, was unusually high in this  
portion of the bog. Having crawled on our hands  
and knees for about 150 yards, he told us to drop  
down through a small square opening, and, having done  
so, we found ourselves in a "room" about 10 feet by  
8 feet by 8 feet high. He placed a half sheet of  
corrugated iron over the opening, and built a stack  
of turf on top of the corrugated iron. As we were  
moving towards this dug-out, he told us that there  
were lorries of military and police all around the  
place, as if heading for a round-up. Having  
completed his little stack of turf, he moved off  
but reported twice within an hour as to the  
movements of the enemy. He gave this information  
through a ventilation hole, over which ~~there was~~ <sup>grew</sup> a  
tuft of heather. ~~They~~ <sup>They</sup> for about three hours ~~we~~  
we had no word as to what was happening, and we  
began to entertain all sorts of doubts as to the  
wisdom of what we had done and, if we happened to  
be discovered, what grand work a little hand  
grenade could do if dropped amongst us. After the  
three hours of silence, we heard a dog snorting at

*hole*

the ventilation, which we concluded was a police dog, but how relieved we were to hear the voice of our friend, who had come to liberate us. *with his Blue Terror*

This was our last escapade prior to the calling of the Truce.

Signed:

*Pain Torde*

Date:

*3/12/57*

Witness:

*Mumma Carthy*

(Investigator).

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S.