

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURÓ STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 436

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 436.....

Witness

Captain James McKeon (Retired),
Rosmina House, Lisduff,
Edgeworthstown, Co. Longford.

Identity

Member of Irish Volunteers, Co. Longford 1917 - ;
Quartermaster North Longford A.S.U. 1921;
Brother of General Sean McKeon, Minister for
Justice Irish Government 1948 - .

Subject

Military activities, Co. Longford,
1917 - 1921.

Conditions, if any, stipulated by Witness

Nil

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Statement by Capt. James McKeon,

Rossmina House, ~~Cashel~~,

Edgeworthstown,

Co. Longford.

Lisduff, S. Mac

I joined the Irish Volunteers in the early part of the year 1917. My brother Seán - now Minister for Justice took me into the Volunteers. I took no oath on joining and I was not issued with a membership card as far as I can remember. Later when the Volunteers became the I.R.A. we took an oath of allegiance. As far as I can remember we paid a small weekly subscription towards expenses and the purchase of equipment etc. Membership at the time I joined was very small - about twelve to twenty all told. My brothers Michael, Andy and Seán were members, also the Flaherty and Keenagh Brothers, the "Bun" McDowell, Frank Davis, the "Bug" Callaghan, Seán Duffy, Seamus Conway, Hugh Hourican and Seán Sexton were amongst the members that I can remember then. There was very little drilling or instruction given then. Some of our members had been in the Volunteers before the Rebellion and had received a certain amount of instruction.

There was a Company organisation existing in the Parish, at this time, and there were sections in other parts of the parish as well as in ours. Things were very quiet until the Conscription Act was passed for Ireland in the English Parliament. Our strength went up by leaps and bounds and very soon we were a couple of hundred strong. When the conscription crisis was over it soon reverted to practically the original strength. During the McGuinness Election we had a busy time. We had a march to a meeting in Longford where we got a very hostile

reception from the wives and families of the men who were serving in the B.A.

We had very little in the way of arms now. I know we had one Service rifle and one .22 rifle. By 1918 our strength had increased slightly. We had parades and training more often now - I think twice a week. We got an instructor from Dublin named Pat Garrett, who had served in the B.A. and he gave us instruction on the Service rifle and bayonet fighting as well as in drill. He concentrated on musketry instruction and on P.T. We had wooden guns for training with.

During the 1918 Elections we were all working hard - canvassing, guarding the polling booths and voting boxes and escorting the boxes to Longford for the final counting. The R.I.C. also provided an escort. Mick Collins visited the area on a couple of occasions. I remember on one occasion he was in our forge with Seán.

Previous to this a Battalion organisation had come into being. The Companies comprising the Battalion were; "Clonbroney", "Columcille", "Mullinaughter", "Killoe", "Edgeworthstown" and separate sections in Streete-Rathowen. Seán was O/C of the Battalion. He had been previously O/C Clonbroney Company which comprised Ballinalee. Frank Davis was Quartermaster of the Battalion. Hugh Hourican was O/C Clonbroney Company, - Pat Finnegan - Columcille Company, Larry Kiernan - Mullinaughter Company, M. F. Reynolds - Killoe Company, O'Keefe - Edgeworthstown Company. Streete and Rathowen sections were commanded by James Killane and John Moore respectively.

I think that it was when Collins visited our forge that we became a Brigade in Longford. Reddington was Brigade O/C. Seán was Vice O/C of the Brigade and also O/C of the 1st Battalion. Mick Heslén in Longford was appointed Brigade Adjutant and Ned Cooney was Brigade Quartermaster. I will not pretend to deal with the organisation further, as I was not then in a position to know about it, and will leave it to Seán or others who are in a position to do so. During 1918 and 1919 the I.R.A. took over the policing of the county. This entailed an enormous amount of work. Arrests and detentions had to be made, and arrangements for trials before Sinn Féin Courts, as well as seeing that the decrees of the Courts were enforced - plus ordinary litigation cases.

On the 6th January 1920 an attack was made on Drumlish R.I.C. barracks. This barrack was an ordinary two-storied detached building, which as far as I can remember had sand-bagged windows. The garrison consisted of a Sergt. and about four constables and a few British soldiers. The attackers were mostly a selected party from the Clonbroney company and some from other units of the Battalion. We had only one rifle, the remainder being armed with shot guns. Seán had made a mine and this was a cart box filled with gelignite. With this it was intended to blow the gable end out of the building. This mine had to be dug in under the foundation of the wall. Seamus Conway's section, assisted by "Nap" Farrelly and Tom Quinn were detailed to cover off the upstairs windows on the gable end while the mine was being dug in. I was in this party and we kept it under continuous fire, each of us firing consecutively so that it was impossible for the members of the garrison to approach the windows to observe what was happening.

The mine failed to explode and our attempt to capture the barracks was a failure. We threw everything we could get close at hand, such as stones, tin cans etc. through the window. The garrison fired for all they were worth, especially when we were withdrawing. We suffered no casualties and had no losses - except the ammunition we expended. Soon after this the R.I.C. evacuated the barracks .

The next event of importance was the attack on Ballinamuck R.I.C. barracks. I helped in making the bombs for this attack, but I was not brought to Ballinamuck and therefore did not take any active part in the actual attack. I remember we plucked geese to get their feathers. The feathers were used to ensure that the bombs came down on their concussion head.

Previous to this it had been planned to capture Mostrim R.I.C. barracks. This however, did not come off, as when we were assembled and ready to move into our attack positions, a squadron of the "Lancers" from Longford came into the area and we had to withdraw and disperse. No contact was made with the enemy that night. One of our men accidentally fired a shot and this prevented us from holding on and seeing what the "Lancers" would do.

Ballymahon barracks was attacked early in August 1920 but again I was not allowed to take part. The Guard room of the top barracks in Longford had been raided the previous night and a number of rifles and ammunition secured. These were used at Ballymahon, which took place the following night. Ballymahon was a success and an additional number of rifles and arms and ammunition were captured. I think that it was considered that I was too young to take part in those operations.

Previous to these events the R.I.C. had evacuated a large number of barracks throughout the county and concentrated the garrisons in larger centres. On one night early in the year - I cannot remember the date, all these idle barracks were burned. This operation was a country-wide one and it was the first intimation we had that our organisation existed throughout the whole land. Ballinalee barracks was one of the ones that was burned.

In September 1920 Arva R.I.C. barracks was captured. This increased our armament considerably. I was not at this attack either.

On the 31st October 1920, D.I. Kelleher was shot in Granard and on the following day Constable Cooney was shot a short distance from where I live now. Cooney had been stationed in Ballinalee. His wife was still living in Ballinalee and he was scouting and spying for the R.I.C. As a result of these shootings it was feared that reprisals would be taken against Granard and Ballinalee and Seán made arrangements to meet such a situation. I will deal only with Ballinalee in which I was engaged.

My section under Seamus Conway and comprising Early, Seán Sexton, Frank Farrell were in Rose Cottage, which had been evacuated by its owners, fearing reprisals. We were joined here by Seán, who was in charge of the whole operation. There was another party of about seven to ten men under Hugh Hourican at the church on the south side of the village. The "Bug" Callaghan was in charge of another small party on the north side in Earlys'. Frank Davis was in this party. Seán Duffy was on the

Granard road with another party and M.F. Reynolds held a position on the Longford side with a big party. He would have to deal with any reinforcements coming from Longford which was the main military centre. The idea was, I think, to let ⁱⁿ the enemy, if they came into the village and then to hold them there, as they would be cut off on all sides. This plan would also allow three of the other parties to come to our assistance in the village. We were all armed with rifles and one hundred rounds of .303. We expected the enemy to come from Granard and to halt on the hill in the centre of the village. The local Catholic Curate came to us and I think tried to influence Seán to have us withdrawn. Father Munford was his name. He failed in this and he then gave us a general absolution. It was a very dark and misty night and visibility was very poor - about twenty yards in the open.

I was making tea when Seán and Conway came into the cottage. I went out with a cup of tea to the sentry, - Frank Farrell, who was outside. The rest were all inside. Immediately I got outside I heard the sound of a lorry approaching. I ran in and told Seán that the enemy were coming. He ran out and told Farrell to report to Davis and Callaghan. The lorries came in from the Granard direction, and contrary to our expectations turned north towards Ballinamuck and were on Farrell's heels as he got to Earlys'.

Seán took us to the back of the cottage. He stood at the gable end counting the lorries as they passed. I had left a shot gun in the cottage and Seán told me to go in and get it. I had to sit on the steps of the

cottage while the lorries passed by. I counted eleven lorries while I was there, and at least three had passed before I went in and some passed while I was inside. When the last one had passed I rejoined Seán and the rest. We then got out on to the road in the centre of the village. This was only a matter of a few minutes. Seán Sexton and I were standing on the large stones at the bottom of the wall and at the corner and awaited Seán to give us instructions. Just then an Auxie fired across the street at us, the bullet passing between Sexton and I and rebounding off the wall between us. Seán and Conway fired at him with their revolvers. They cut the gun out of his hand. We found the gun on the street afterwards with portion of the flesh of his hand adhering to it.

Seán called on the enemy to surrender, shouting "Surrender to the I.R.A.". The response was a shot fired back at us. Seán then told us to fire. We lay down on the ground, on the crest of the hill, and opened fire on them. They replied with rapid fire from their rifles and after a brief period got their machine guns into action also. It was Lewis and Hotchkiss guns they were using. Their fire was hitting the ground a short distance in front of us, the gravel kicked up by their bullets hitting us in the face. Their fire was also passing over our heads. We seemed to be between the cones of two fires. Seán, as far as I can remember, did not lie down. I remember him walking up and down behind us, encouraging us and calling on the enemy to surrender. After about an hour of this Seán sent Early, whose rifle seemed to be giving trouble, to Hourican's position at the Church, to get him down, with his party, to help us, as our ammunition was now getting low. The enemy were beginning to surround us by now. We could feel them in the

plantation at the back of Rose Cottage. Seán sent Sexton and I down the Longford road to outflank them and hold them on this side. We had only about fifteen rounds left at this time. He told us not to use up all our ammunition but to hold some and that when we were returning back to whistle "Come back to Erin". By this he would know it was us. We got into position and as soon as we opened fire we could hear the enemy running out of the plantation. We were just in time to stop them enveloping us. We fired until we had only three or so rounds left. We changed our position each time we fired to mislead the enemy into thinking there was a much bigger force there and this seemed to have worked.

When we got back to the road again we were not sure whether Seán and Conway and his party were dead or captured, or if they were still holding the hill at the cross-roads. We crossed over the road and made for a point in the village south of the cross-roads. We got out on to the street at a point about fifty yards from the cross-roads and halfway between Farrells' and his, Seán's position and I whistled my tune. To my great delight he replied. He and Conway were still holding the hill. We rejoined them in quick time. Hourican and his party had not come up.

The enemy were now pulling out as we got back to Seán - the last lorry was actually moving off in the direction of Ballinamuck. Davis and his party had been overrun at Earlys' immediately the enemy came into the village, and did not get into action at all. When I got to Seán he immediately sent me to report to my mother that we were all alive and well, and that no one was injured. I did this. On my way to my mother's, I met Callaghan and Davis and party, beside my own house. They were on a hill. It was getting on for daylight now and I could see them plainly although they could not see me. It was a typical case of silhouetting. I attracted them

and told them we were all alive and then delivered Seán's message to my mother. I did not return to the village until later in the day. The other parties all returned to the village. In the early part of the fight Conway threw a grenade from our position. He stood up to throw it. He forgot there was a tree over our heads. The grenade struck a branch of the tree and almost landed in our position, exploding and nearly doing for ourselves. Luckily none of us were caught by the splinters. It exploded about ten yards in front of us, the splinters passing over our heads.

Early did not deliver Seán's message to Hourican. I understand he got to Hourican and told him that Davis and Callaghan and that party had been wiped out - all had been killed. Early and Gormley and another man named Keenagh handed in their rifles that morning and left for Scotland that night. Hourican was courtmartialled for failing to carry out his orders, but had Early's message as a defence. Those three men subsequently returned to Ballinalee after 'Bloody Sunday' and with the exception of Early proved themselves to be good men. There was I understand, an amount of 'loot' from Granard (which the enemy had burned previous to coming to Ballinalee) picked up on the street that morning when it became daylight. I did not see any of it however.

After this Ballinalee was occupied by us physically for about a month. We took over houses and the Post Office in the village. Seán set up his headquarters in the Post Office. All roads leading into the village were strongly held. Men who were on the "run" were whole time on service, and these were augmented by Volunteers from the Battalion who came in and took their turn of duty, taking over the rifles and ammunition from the

regular men. One day a party of military came into the village to take over Constable Cooney's belongings and to take Mrs. Cooney away. Seán I understand sent a message to them that as long as they acted peacefully they were at liberty to transact their business and to depart in peace. They put out sentries, and we did likewise, but nothing untoward happened. They took away Mrs. Cooney and her furniture and effects and departed. It was, I understand, known beforehand that they were coming and we had instructions that unless Black and Tans arrived we were to do no shooting, or if the military started raiding or looting.

It can be said that the North Longford column or Active Service Unit came into official existence at this time. Seán was in charge of the column. Amongst the members I can bring to mind at the moment were, Conway, Davis, Sexton, Callaghan, McDowell, Cooke, Brady, Gerraghty, Pat Finnegan, Jim Sheeran, M.F. Reynolds, Jack Moore, from Streete, Seán Duffy, Nap Farrelly, Tom Reilly, ~~Andy~~ ³ Wes ~~MacEoin~~, ¹ sales (Kot) Larry Kieran, Michael Mulligan and myself. Others joined the column at later periods.

After a lengthy period in Ballinalee the column pulled out and proceeded to Ardagullion on the Granard - Edgeworthstown road. The Tans were using this road via Edgeworthstown to Granard and bye-passing Ballinalee, which was on the direct route. I was not at Ardagullion but I know that nothing happened there. I was at home in Ballinalee. It was the 6th December 1920 and I was cutting timber beside our forge when I heard lorries coming. My brother Andy was with me at the time. We lay down

behind a ditch in the plantation. Each lorry as it passed opened fire on the plantation. There was no one there except ourselves. When they had passed by I proceeded home to my place - Andy going to his place. The plantation goes to my mother's house. As I was about to step out on to the road and into the garden I saw my brother Michael on the road on his knees and surrounded by Tans with their rifles pointed at him. I could hear them asking him where was the gun that shot Constable Cooney. My mother was on her knees also. She was praying for Michael. I had to lie low for a while. I then crept back through the plantation. I could hear Michael telling them he would bring them to where the gun was. He afterwards told me it was his intention to go in the lorry with them and drive them to the ambush position at Ardagullion where he knew the column was and take his chance of being shot. I crept back through the plantation and made for Andy's house. As I was crossing the road, to my surprise I saw Michael coming towards me - running. He told me that the Tans had released him and sent him for the gun that shot Cooney. He came over the ditch with me.

We immediately sent a message to Seán at Ardagullion. The Tans took over Farrell's shop and converted it into a barracks. The column now pulled out of Ardagullion and proceeded to Drumeel, putting up at James Kieran's place. I joined the column there and was issued with a rifle and ammunition. Seán released some of the column to have a rest for a while as they had a very strenuous time at Ardagullion, the weather being very unfavourable. He divided the column into sections and prepared to attack Farrells' that night. I was put under Conway and had Nap Farrelly, Larry Kieran and Seán Sexton as comrades. The plan was to

blow the gable end out with a mine and capture the house. My section proceeded to the school-house on the Granard road, that is the old school-house now. When the mine went off we were to get on to the road and to shoot our way into the village, and by bayoneting and shooting to take the hill in the centre of the village at all costs. We were lying outside the old school-house for about four hours. It was a cold frosty night. Conway and the others who had been at Ardagullion were very tired and I had an awkward job trying to keep them awake, particularly "Nap" Farrelly. A few times he did get "snoring" on me and I am sure he could be heard a considerable distance away. I had wheaten bread with me and I gave them some of this to chew and this helped to keep them awake and seemed to put strength into them.

Eventually the mine went up. We jumped out on to the road immediately, Conway leading. We immediately opened fire ~~to~~ ^{the} clear the road. It was not very dark - being a frosty night. There was no reply to our fire. We charged into the village and secured the hill at the cross-roads without any resistance and opened fire on Farrells' from there. The garrison replied to our fire. Our big job was to prevent any help coming to the garrison from the Longford-Granard or Ballinamuck areas. The other sections of the column were in action from other points. We called the enemy some lovely names and they replied in equally bad language, shouting up "Kilmallock" and the names of other places they had burned.

The enemy sent up numerous Verey lights of all colours, some of them illuminating the country-side around for a considerable distance. Eventually Seán signalled the "Cease fire" on a whistle, and we withdrew. I understand that three of the enemy were killed and some wounded. We

had no casualties. I was supposed to have been killed in this action and as I went on the "run" from that time onward, and the neighbours not knowing this, they believed that I was killed.

The column now moved out to Aughagreagh a few miles outside Ballinalee and billeted in houses there. The following night the Tans burned our forge and it was also on that day they burned Herratys', Hannigans', Brackans', McGraths', Seán Duffys' and Seán Connolly's fathers place. Farrell's shop was no longer tenable, so the Tans evacuated it and took over the schoolhouse as a barracks. They also took over Father Muntford's house, which was close by. Several times we came into the village to see if we could get a patrol of the Tans, but could not contact any. On several occasions also we fired a few shots at the school-house just to harass them and keep them in barracks. One night we succeeded in shooting their searchlight out of action. They usually opened up and fired for protracted periods with everything they had, using up an enormous amount of ammunition.

In January, 1921 the column was billeted in Auggreah in Cahills' and Billy Kelly's houses. Callaghan was in charge here. Seán had stayed on in Ballinalee to observe the enemy movements. Jim Sheeran and M. Gormley were with him. About 4 p.m. in the evening I was just going into Kellys' when I heard shooting and voices. I recognised Seán's voice. I grabbed my rifle and made for Martin's cottage accompanied by the "Bun" McDowell. I knew that Seán was in Martin's cottage at this time. It is a very considerable distance across country. We ran the whole way without speaking. When we got to the

garden of the cottage someone fired a shot and shouted "Halt". It was my younger brother Peter and my sister Kathleen that the Tans had halted. They screamed. Peter was then a mere boy. I could see a Tan's cap appearing over the hedge. The Tan challenged Peter to know where "McKeon" had gone to. He apparently thought Peter was one of the Martins. This gave me all the information that I wanted at the moment. I knew then they had not got Seán. We could not fire, as we were afraid we would hit the children. The Tans now fired another shot and used very foul language to my mother and the Miss Martins who had come back to the cottage. He put all of them under arrest, but Peter and Kathleen escaped while he was dealing with my mother and the other women. I knew that Seán would have made back to the column and that he would ambush them as they came away from the cottage. I was afraid that my mother and the others would be shot as he or the column did not know that they had been arrested. I ran back to ^{CAHILL'S 5th W/ce} ~~Callaghans~~ which was Headquarters of the column. Seán had arrived there and was gone with a party to ambush the Tans as I expected. I had to pursue him again and I caught up with him as they were getting into the ambush position. As a result of my information he had to pull out and let them go with their prisoners or else run the horrible risk of shooting the women. It was then dark. I cannot say how many of the Tans were in it at this time. They took the women prisoners into Ballinalee. They released my mother next morning but kept the Miss Martins for a month or so. They subsequently burned Martin's cottage and our haggard, but did not burn our house. I think the idea in leaving the house intact was to use it as a trap to catch us. However, it never worked.

That night we went to Martin's cottage. There was a pool of blood where the D.I. had been shot and a hole where the hand grenade had exploded. We removed the clothes and provisions we had in Martins'. We fired a few shots across at the schoolhouse and jeered at the Tans to annoy them. They sent up several Verey lights. Evidently they thought they were going to be attacked again. After this the column moved to the Columcille area.

I now became ill and was sent away from the column to rest and recuperate, and as a result I missed the ambush at Clonfin. I was staying in James Dorris's of Aughakieran, Aughnacliff when I heard the explosion of the mine at Clonfin. I jumped up immediately and made for the direction of the explosion which was about six miles away. I met the column at Greer Pettits of Ballinlough, Bunleathy. At this time they had shaken off the enemy, who had pursued them. I was delighted to see them again and to learn that there were no casualties, also that they had captured an amount of arms and ammunition, including a Lewis gun. I rejoined the column then and proceeded with them to the Columcille area and billeted there. A few days afterwards the enemy surrounded the area with some thousands of men and thoroughly combed it for us. Seven or eight of us got through their lines and crossed Lough Gowna in a boat into the County Cavan where we stayed for a day or so and then came back again to the Columcille area. The column now moved to Crott Smear which was a mountainous district.

About this time Seán was arrested at Mullingar when returning by train from Dublin. Callaghan now took charge of the column. Seán's arrest was a big blow to the morale of the column. The men got disheartened and for a short while the column became inactive. Mulligan and Geraghty I think went

to Dublin to see Collins and returned with a sealed order from Collins appointing Conway to take charge of the column. "Nap" Farrelly was appointed Adjutant and I was appointed Quartermaster.

In the meantime Seán Connolly who was in Leitrim and was to return to us to take over the column was killed by the enemy, he and his column being annihilated. This was another severe blow to our morale.

Our column got going again now and tried to do something. We went into Arva on three occasions and sniped the Tans' Barracks. On the 1st May the column moved to Fyhora and billeted in two houses, one of which was Reillys. I was in Reillys. I awakened early (we had got to bed about 3 or 4 a.m.) and looked out an upstairs window. I saw two girls belonging to the house on the street outside getting firewood and started talking to them. We were having some "back chat", at which they proved best. I turned round to call the "Bun" McDowell who had a good "glib" tongue to come to my assistance. As I pulled back from the window I could see over a cow byre and to my amazement saw two Tans walking across the field towards the house. I shouted at the lads "Here are the Tans". They thought I was joking at first. I grabbed my rifle and pulled on my boots, the others pulling on their clothes also. The Tans (two) were now in the street in front of the house. The woman of the house shouted to us "For the few minutes you are here, here are the Tans".

The "Bun" McDowell, Pat Cooke and I shot the two Tans from the window. No more appeared and there was no return fire. We rushed out of the house and took cover behind a ditch until we saw that there were no more of them around. We then returned and took the dead Tans' revolvers. They

were not carrying rifles. The rest of the column joined us now and then all moved to Tom Kieran's and other houses around Crott. That incident finished any hope of bringing off an ambush that day. It appears the Tans had come to Reilly's to arrest a lad named Kieran who was staying there and little did they realise they were walking into a column. The Tans came out that evening and burned Reilly's house.

Before this affair two of our lads had misbehaved themselves in Carrigallen - committing a small robbery. They were dealt with in a disciplinary manner. We were at this time at McKeown's of "Molly" Aughnaclif. At the same time a consignment of ammunition had come from Dublin in a red lead ^{Shot} and was being given out to be cleaned by the lads. Davis who was still acting as Quartermaster spotted a rifle standing against a wall. He told Keenagh to see was it loaded. Keenagh took the rifle and started to unload it by the bolt action. Davis called out to him "Do you want to shoot some one, take out the magazine". Keenagh closed the bolt and on trying to remove the magazine pressed the trigger instead of the magazine catch and fired a round. Gormley fell wounded in the knee. "Nap" Farrelly dressed him and we got Doctor Keenagh from Ballinalee to attend him. The Doctor said he would have to be got to hospital somehow. It was not for a couple of days that we succeeded in getting him to a hospital in Dublin. By this time gangrene had set in and poor Gormley's leg had to be amputated.

After Fyhora the column moved to the area of Clonwhelan near Rathowen to ambush a patrol of Tans. It was learned that the Tans in Rathowen had not been paid for six weeks and that they were going into Edgeworthstown to draw their money. The column billeted at Dick White's of Clonwhelan.

White was a local Commandant in the I.R.A. White's house was in the fields well off the road and approached by an avenue. At about 11 a.m. in the morning after our arrival, about twelve Tans were noticed coming in the direction of the house. They were then a considerable distance away. Conway immediately started to place the members of the column in a position to deal with them. Callaghan and some others suggested that we should not attack them unless they came into the house but wait until the following day when we could get them with the money on them, which we badly needed at the time. A discussion on this proposition took place and a vote was taken as to whether they should be let go or not provided they did not try to enter the house. The proposal to let them go was carried by one vote. The Tans came up to the door, and Dick White, the owner, went out and talked to them. Meanwhile we had them well covered from the windows. There were about twelve or fourteen of them there and the column was about twenty-five in the house. They were a sitting target for us. White had a revolver on him and had arranged that if the Tans were going to enter the house he would fire at them and then dive indoors.

The Tans had only come to check up on White about some dogs and departed peacefully. Little did they realise that while they were there, each man was covered by at least one or two rifles ready to fire and that they were so close to death.

The next morning we took up positions for the ambush on the Rathowen side of Edgeworthstown. The local I.R.A. men had arranged to block the road on the Mullingar side of Rathowen to prevent any reinforcements coming from that side to the Tans. They had a large tree, ready for felling, across the road. This was partly sawed through during the previous

night. Unfortunately this tree fell during the night or early morning, blocking the road, and instead of the Tans proceeding to Edgeworthstown they went out on the other side of Rathowen to clear the obstruction and none came our way. The result was that we neither got the Tans or the money - much to the disgust of us all but particularly Callaghan and his pals who had voted the previous day to let them go.

S. M. H.
By this time, Fred Aherne, who was from the Cavan area, and ^{Harry} ~~Bobby~~ Flaherty had become members of the column. We now moved back again to the Columcille area. We could not remain around Clonwhelan as we did not know the people there and therefore could not rely on them. Some short time before the Truce the whole column moved to White's of Clonwhelan again, and on the evening we arrived there we moved on again to the village of Streete. We were going to ambush a "curfew" patrol of Tans that used to come from Rathowen to Streete. The patrol came out somewhat earlier than usual this night and only some of the column had got into position when it arrived. Jack Moore was in charge of this particular party. He had to open fire before the remainder could get in. The column had to cross the road to get into position but before we could do so the patrol arrived. Two Tans were wounded, the remainder took cover in the houses and returned the fire. We could not hope to deal with them in that position and even if we tried we would endanger the lives of the people in the houses, so we had to withdraw. We had no casualties.

We returned after this to Aughtnaclyf again and a few days after the Truce came into force. The column now disbanded

and we all made for home taking our arms with us. We were all glad to be back home and to get a decent rest and regular food. We were after going through a rough time and were in pretty bad form, feeling tired but still game to carry on the fight if necessary. We still had about one hundred rounds of .303 each. It had become increasingly hard, if not impossible at this stage to make a capture from the enemy. From the time Seán was arrested we did not seem to have the same "luck" in our operations and the enemies morale had gone up. They had become increasingly bold now, and were putting the pressure on very severely since they had got Seán behind the "bars".

Signed; *Seamus Mac Eoin* Capt.

Date; *11th Oct 1950.*

Witness;

Matthew Barry Capt

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