

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY: 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILÉATA 1913-21
NO. W.S. 440

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 440.....

Witness

Colonel Seamus Conway (Retired),
Rathowen,
Co. Westmeath.

Identity

Member of Irish Volunteers Longford 1917 - .
Commandant North Longford Column
1920 - 1921.

Subject

- (a) National activities 1917-1921;
- (b) Military engagements, Co. Longford,
1920-1921.

Conditions, if any, stipulated by Witness

Nil

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STATEMENT BY COL. SEAMUS CONWAY,

RATHOWEN, CO. WESTMEATH.

In 1917 I was living near Ballinalee, Co. Longford. On Easter Sunday night of that year I was coming from a concert with Seán MacEoin and he mentioned about the Volunteers to me. I liked the idea, and said I would join the movement, which I did some time later at Ballinalee. Seán MacEoin took me into the Volunteers. I think that we made some form of declaration at the time, but took no oath. There was the nucleus of a Unit there already, including Seán Connolly and a few from Granard. I do not remember if we paid any subscription or whether we were issued with a membership card. There was a general appeal to young fellows to join, and a parade or meeting was held in the woods in Kilshrewley, at which a number of men joined the ranks.

A Company was now formed in Ballinalee;- organisation was on a parish basis. After this section parades took place, and someone capable of giving instruction went round to the different section parades. There were no activities by the Volunteers during the McGuinness election. Either Seán MacEoin or Seán Connolly was O/C of the Ballinalee Company. There was also the nucleus of a Battalion organisation existing. There were no arms at this period. Amongst the members were; Seán Sexton, Pat Farrell, Peter McGrath, Peter Collins, Ned Tynan, Seán and Michael Tracey, Joe Keenan, Michael MacEoin and later Jimmie MacEoin and several others.

Things went on very quietly, and there is nothing worth recording at this period, but we were continuing to do what training we could and to add to our strength. Conscription was passed in the British Parliament in 1917, and with this threat over the country our numbers increased by leaps and bounds. This was the first time we came into the open. Our strength was now roughly about 200 in the Company, but when the conscription crisis died down our strength reduced again to the original numbers. I think it was about this time that the Battalion organisation came into being. Seán Connolly was Battalion O/C, Hugh Hourican was O/C Ballinalee Company, I was the second in command, Michael Tracey 1st Lieutenant and I think Ned Tynan 2nd Lieutenant. M. F. Reynolds was O/C Killoe Company, J. J. Brady - Ballinamuck, Peter Monaghan - Granard and Pat Langan - Edgeworthstown, with J. J. Killeen in charge of the Streets and Rathowen sections.

During the 1918 election we were very busy canvassing - protecting the booths and voters, and guarding and escorting the boxes after the Poll. During end of year 1918 the police evacuated some of the outlying barracks, and retired into bigger stations. The Volunteers now began to take over the police work of the country - to make arrests and detentions in "unknown destinations" as such places were then called. It was also their duty to influence and convince people who had cases for litigation, to take such cases before the Arbitration Courts, which were set up by the Volunteers. This work gradually increased in volume, and was a serious strain on all, as the Volunteers were almost all composed of men who had their own callings in life to attend to. This work continued up to 1920.

By this time a few of the officers had got hold somehow of some small arms. I also think there were a few rifles in the area. Parades for training were held very regularly now. About this time we got an instructor from Dublin named Pat Garrett, an ex B.A. man. This man instructed us in drill, musketry and associated subjects. A class was formed for N.C.O.s. This man Garrett gave us instruction on the service rifle. We had a couple of service rifles then, and that was our first instruction on this weapon.

Our strength was now about 200, but a lot of those however, were only paper strength. During the year events followed normal routine - parades, training and recruiting. About the harvest time of 1919 arrangements were made to attack the Circuit Judge's escort of R.I.C. coming from Longford to Edgeworthstown at "Goshes" cross-roads. This was called off however. O'Neill and I did not know it was cancelled and we waited at the cross roads for hours, armed with one shot gun and one revolver. No escort however, turned up.

On the 6th Jan. 1920 an attempt was made to capture Drumlish R.I.C. barracks. This was an ordinary detached house with no fortifications. This was a Battalion operation with Seán Connolly in charge. The plan was to throw in some home-made bombs of the Mills pattern through the windows and then rush the place. The bombs failed to explode and the affair just ended in an exchange of shots. A lot of glass was broken but there were no casualties on either side. Elaborate precautions had been taken to guard all roads leading into the area against the arrival of reinforcements.

Shortly after this the police vacated Smear barracks and it was destroyed immediately by burning. In May 1920 Ballinalee, Lisryan, Larkfield and Keenagh were also vacated and were likewise burned. This was also a Battalion operation.

In June 1920 an attempt was made to capture Mostrim (Edgeworthstown) R.I.C. barracks. A mobilisation was held at Kilshrewley and we moved from there via Ballinalee and proceeded to about one mile from Mostrim when we received word that the "Lancers" were coming in strength. We dispersed on receiving this information. We had started blocking the roads before the information arrived. It transpired afterwards that the "Lancers" were only out on a night exercise. Seán Connolly was in charge and Seán MacEoin was deputy. This was also a Battalion job, assisted by Units outside the Battalion.

At this time a Brigade organisation was in existence in the County. Thos. Reddington (deceased) was Brigade O/C, Michael Heslin was Adjutant and Ned Cooney Quartermaster. The first Battalion comprised the area of Ballinalee, Edgeworthstown, Granard, Mullinaughter, Killoe, Columcille, with outposts in Finea - Streete and Rathowen. Seán MacEoin was O/C. The second Battalion was the area, Longford town, Clonguish and along by the Shannon up to Tarmonbarry. Comdt. M. Murphy was O/C here. The third Battalion took in the area of Lanesboro, Ballymahon, and Keenagh. Mick Ryan was O/C of this Battalion but was later replaced by Seán Gibbons. The 4th Battalion was the Ardagh, Moydow area - Leo Baxter was in charge of this Battalion. The 5th Battalion comprised the area of Drumlish, Ballinamuck, Dromard and Moyne. J. J. Brady of Ballinamuck was appointed O/C of this Battalion and Charles Reynolds as Vice O/C.

On the 9th or 10th of June 1920 an attack was made on the Ballinamuck R.I.C. Bks. This was a part Brigade job. Ballinamuck Barracks was a fortification consisting of a cut stone building with towers and loopholes. It was detached from all other buildings and surrounded by a high wall. It was a very strong position and garrisoned by about a dozen R.I.C. The plan was to scale the wall with ladders and throw home-made bombs made of cart boxes and filled with gelignite on to the roof. A large number of men were engaged on protective duties on the roads leading to Ballinamuck, which were blocked with trees, felled and covered. The arms available for the attack comprised a few service rifles - mostly shot guns and some revolvers. The attacking party was actually small. It was hoped that the bombs would wreck the barracks and that they would surrender. Seán Connolly was in charge of the operation. The bombs did a lot of damage but the R.I.C. did not surrender. There was a tunnel inside the barracks and the R.I.C. took cover in this and remained there intact. There was not much firing as there was no purpose in firing at stone walls. We continued until daylight and then withdrew. We had no casualties. Some of the Cumann-na-mBan were on duty during this attack, but I could not give any details.

On Easter Saturday night of this year all the R.I.C. barracks which had been evacuated were destroyed by fire. This was a Brigade operation.

In August 1920 the Military barracks in Longford occupied by the Lancers was raided. Some time previously an escort had taken Thos. Reddington, who had been arrested, to Mountjoy Jail. Reddington saw a clip of ammunition on

the floor of the lorry. He picked it up and gave it to a soldier of the escort, telling him to keep it for him until he came back. The soldier said he would, and get him plenty more as well. When Reddington was released he got in touch with the soldier in the top barracks in Longford. He got Reddington a good lot of ammunition and some rifles - at least two. This soldier had a couple of pals working with him. Reddington paid him for the arms he brought out. One day he told Reddington that he was under suspicion, and that he and his pals would have to desert and get out of the country. They deserted and came out to Ballinalee. There was no money available to get them out of the country and we were a bit suspicious of them. One of them named Jordy actually worked in our place as a labourer for about three months. During this time he was always telling me that it was only a matter of going in and collecting the rifles in the Top Barracks. He said that when the rifles and ammunition which he had got out were discovered missing, that all the rifles except what were used by the guard were all stored in the Guard-room being changed there. He claimed that it was only a matter of overpowering the Guard and having transport to take the rifles away.

I told MacEoin about this, and Jordy was checked up on closely about it. After long consideration, and on Jordy offering to take part in the raid himself, it was decided to take the chance. It might be a trap, and if so, it would mean the loss of reliable men and officers. Entrance to the barracks was by a narrow roadway, with high walls on either side. This would be extremely dangerous if firing

started as it placed the raiders in a lane without cover of any sort. The idea was for Jordy to go openly to the gate and get the wicket gate open, while the attackers were hiding along the road entrance ready to rush the place when the gate was opened. Jordy had an empty boot-box neatly parcelled and containing a revolver. This box had two purposes; a box he had to deliver to the barracks, and to conceal the revolver. A specially picked party of five, MacEoin, Brady, Finnegan, Seán Duffy and another. This party was to grab all the arms they could and get away in an ordinary car which was awaiting outside the entrance. On the night in question all were in readiness, and in position. Jordy proceeded with his parcel, knocked on the wicket gate, which was opened by a member of the Guard. Jordy asked for Sergt. Major Upton, stating that he had a parcel for his wife. The Sentry said he could not see the Sergt. Major, so Jordy dropped the box and covered him with the revolver. Seizing hold of him he dragged him outside. By this time the others had reached the gate and one took charge of the Sentry, the others rushing into the Guard-room. The N.C.O. in charge of the Guard made a move to get his rifle. MacEoin hit him on the head with his revolver. That was all the resistance the Guard put up, the other members making no movement. MacEoin and his party then seized all the rifles in the Guard-room. This was all the rifles available - just what the Guard was using. Some change had been made in the storing of the garrison's arms after Jordy deserted. The rest of the garrison's arms were now in another store. Had the thing been planned with a bigger idea, and the necessary forethought, I believe the whole armament of the garrison could be taken. As it was 12 rifles and some ammunition were secured in the raid.

The following night Ballymahon R.I.C. barracks was attacked. This was a Brigade operation and Seán Connolly was in charge. We were using the arms taken out of Longford Bks. the previous night. The barracks was an ordinary semi-detached house, with steel shutters on the windows and barbed wire on the back. It was garrisoned by fourteen R.I.C. men. The plan of attack was to get into the house next door and break through the roof of that, and then on to the roof of the barracks. Entrance could not be got into the house next to the barracks, as this would warn the police, so entrance had to be made from the second house from the barracks, and to break through from that into the one next to the barracks. It was decided to start shooting to keep the police attracted during the time this work was proceeding.

The plan worked, and the destruction party got on to the roof of the barracks, removed the slates of a portion of the roof, and through this hole they threw bombs of the cart box type. One half of the barracks was practically destroyed, but the police held out in the other half, which was intact. Bombs containing sulphur and brimstone were now thrown into the barracks and this compelled the police to surrender and they came out with their hands up. We searched them and collected all their arms, about 14 rifles, 14 revolvers and several boxes of egg bombs and rifle ammunition. One policeman who knew me quite well, denied that he did so, and he lived up to this afterwards, as on one occasion he saw me in Longford, but did not give any sign that he did so. That night I threw a half dozen approximately of the bombs supplied by G.H.Q. and made by them. These were detonated by the impact of a nail on the

igniter and had feathers to ensure that they dropped on the nail. Only one of the number that I threw exploded.

Elaborate precautions had been taken to safeguard against reinforcements arriving, and widespread blocking of the roads leading to Ballymahon had also been done, leaving one or two open for our retirement. These were also blocked when we withdrew. There were no casualties on either side. The Cumann-na-mBan had a first-aid post established in the town, but I do not know where, or who manned it.

In September 1920 Arva R.I.C. barracks was captured. It had been arranged to attack Arva, Granard, Mohill and Ballinamore. For various reasons all were called off except Arva. Pat Finnegan was originally in charge of this attack. We were left at a kind of a loose end, so we decided to give him a helping hand. This party consisted of Seán MacEoin, Seán Duffy, Frank Davis and myself and some others. Columcille company was principally engaged and there were also small parties from the Arva area. When MacEoin turned up, he automatically took charge. The barracks was an ordinary house - detached with a passageway at both ends. The plan was to get into the adjoining house and to break on to the roof of this. It was then planned to throw a large rock from the roof of this house across the intervening passage on the roof of the barracks, and to smash a hole in the roof. Through this hole it was intended to throw bombs. While the party were at this work, I was at the back of the barracks. I was close up to it, being not more than twenty feet away. I was there to control the rear of the barracks, and if possible to throw bombs into it.

I had a supply of the Mills type and percussion egg bombs, captured at Ballymahon. I noticed that there was no protection on one window over the kitchen, although I knew the front had steel shutters and netting wire. I sent a young local lad to contact the working party in the house and to inform them that it was possible to get bombs in from the back. I threw the first Mills bomb through the window, and it did not explode. I then threw another one and it failed to explode also. I then checked up and found that there was no igniter sets in them. An ex-B.A. man, who was supposed to have experience of grenades had prepared them for throwing. He had not put any igniter sets in them. I then threw one of the egg bombs. I heard the "crack" where it hit something, but could not say if it had hit the floor inside, as I could not hear it roll like the others. It seemed to explode on the window sill.

There was still no shooting from inside the barracks, but great activity prevailed. I next heard a lot of shouting out in the front. The first thing I could distinguish was Seán MacEoin shouting, "Come out singly with your hands up". Apparently the police were surrendering. I then went round to the front of the barracks. The police came out with their 'hands up'. There were about nine police altogether. The Sergeant asked MacEoin to do some damage to the barracks, as he said he could not stand over handing it up in such good condition, and he wanted to hang on to his pension.

We collected the rifles and ammunition and also some nine revolvers, and then set the place on fire. We put the police into Elliotts' next door. Most of the Volunteers

now dispersed. The roads leading to Arva in all directions had been thoroughly blocked by the local Volunteer companies. MacEoin and I and some of the locals stayed in Arva until next morning to see what would happen. We went to Mass there. Nothing happened. We went back that night to see how things were. Still nothing had happened and no one had come to the assistance of the police. It was Tuesday before help came to them. The arms and ammunition that was captured in Arva was brought to Columcille and placed in safe centres there. There were no casualties on either side.

The Brigade had now approximately forty rifles and a fair supply of ammunition. Some of the rifles were taken from us and sent to the Leitrim area.

In October 1920 an ambush was planned for Dohertys' Cross-roads, on a party of Military travelling from Longford to Granard. I was mobilised but did not get the word in time and what little happened was over when I got there. It appears the Military went a different road to Granard and I think only a few distant shots were fired at them with no effect.

On the 1st November 1920 the Active Service or Flying Column was officially formed, and was commanded by Seán MacEoin. I think I was second in command. The column consisted of Seán and Michael MacEoin, Seán Sexton, Frank Davis, The "Bun" McDowell, Michael Kenny, Hugh Hourican, Michael Mulligan, Larry Geraghty, Pat Cooke, Tom Brady, Michael Tracey, James Farrelly, John Moore, Paddy Lynch, Seán Lynch, M. F. Reynolds, Seán Duffy, J. J. Brady, Paddy Callaghan, Ned Tynan, Tom Early, Frank Gormley and Michael Gormley, Jack Hughes, Pat Finnegan, Barney Kilbride, James Sheeran, Frank Reilly, Frank Martin and some others. Most of these were on the "run" at the time and were officers of

the different Units. I was also on the "run" at this time.

We went on an active basis right away and saw little of home again until the Truce. We usually billeted in an area being supplied with food and clothes and cigarettes by the local people. There was of course no pay. We usually provided our own protection also, and placed our men in billets, so that if one part of the column was attacked the remainder could come to its assistance.

On the eve of All Hallows day, District Inspector Kelleher was shot in Granard, and next day Constable Cooney was shot. This was done on receipt of an order from G.H.Q. that all police were to be shot consequent on the death of Lord Mayor McCurtain of Cork. It was feared that reprisals would be taken for this and measures were taken to meet such a contingency. Fourteen of the column moved into Granard on the night of the 2nd November. Some time that night some police appeared on the street around Markeys' corner in Granard. Fire was opened on them and they dispersed. I do not know if there were any casualties amongst them. The Tans were in the country in force now. Some of the rifles were left with the Granard company and full instructions from MacEoin with the plan to meet any reprisals. The remainder of the column moved to Ballinalee on the following night and occupied it, assisted by some of the local Volunteers. All the roads were manned by parties. Ballinalee is built on a cross or four road junction. There was a party in the centre of the village at this cross roads. The plan was to allow them into the village and hem them in, so that no matter what way they came

they would be held and four of the parties could advance to attack them by moving into the cross roads in the centre of the village. Paddy Callaghan and Seán Duffy were on the Granard Road, about a half mile out, with six or eight men. M. F. Reynolds, with a similar party, was on the Longford road. On the Mostrim side of the village was H. Hourican, I think, and on the Drumlish side, Frank Davis. In the centre of the village my party were positioned;- Seán MacEoin, Seamus MacEoin, Seán Sexton, Tom Early, and myself. We were in behind a wall at the junction and on the Longford side.

We were expecting the enemy to come from Longford, and that they would turn towards Mostrim, which they usually did. We got word that they had passed through Edgeworthstown and after doing some wild shooting there, had gone on towards Granard. As the night wore on we could see the glare of the fires in Granard. It was an awful wet and dark night and visibility was only about fifteen yards. About 2 a.m. in the morning we saw the lights of lorries approaching from the Granard direction. We were still inside the wall at the cross roads, in the centre of the village, on the Longford side. The lorries came on and turned right on entering the village, towards Ballinamuck. One lorry stopped for a few seconds at the junction, but then moved on after the others and came to a halt. The last lorry halted about twenty yards away from us.

They dismounted from their lorries and we could hear the noise of petrol tins being collected. The odds against us were much greater than I had anticipated - there were eleven lorries of Tans and Lancers. Someone in the enemy party - probably the officer in charge ordered ten men to take possession of the square. A number of men were coming in that direction when MacEoin called on them to halt. They halted and a voice asked "Who

challenges". MacEoin answered. "The I.R.A., put up your hands". The other replied, "Not to you, you" MacEoin said here goes, and he opened fire with his revolver. We then came out on to the road and opened fire on them. They replied and brought their Lewis and Hotchkiss guns into action immediately. When the Hotchkiss gun was firing for some time I decided to throw a bomb at it, on the lorry. I warned MacEoin and the others that I was going to throw a grenade. I made my way down along the back of the wall until I got opposite the lorry and dropped the bomb into it. This put the Hotchkiss out of action - much to our relief. I then came back to our position at the cross-roads. We were lying down and kept up a continuous fire. One could not see any target to fire at and could only aim at the flashes from the enemy rifles. This went on for about 2½ hours. We were running out of ammunition and our fire was slackening, but then luck was with us. The enemy suddenly made off in their lorries just as our ammunition gave out and we could not engage them. They made off in Ballinamuck direction, and went astray in the bad net work of bye roads in that area. Some of them did not get into Longford until the following evening. Originally we had a party in the village, in a house in the Ballinamuck end, but as it turned out when the enemy turned in that direction, they overran this position immediately, and this party had to pull out without coming into action. They got across the river and proceeded to Kilshrewley.

None of the other parties on the other roads came into action either. The darkness was so intense that it

led to confusion and the different parties of ours did not know what way the fight was developing. We could not spare anyone to contact them and bring them in. When the enemy cleared off we remained there and the outposts came in by parties. As daylight dawned we found the street strewn with groceries, bottles of whiskey, hardware and goods of all description, including a Melodeon. This was all portion of the articles looted out of the shops in Granard. They also left an amount of ammunition behind, which was very useful. This included a lot of Hotchkiss ammunition. We also picked up a few rifles and revolvers. We had no casualties. There was a large amount of blood on the street where the enemy had been. I am sure they shot a number of their own men in the dark. We got a report afterwards that a special train from Longford to Dublin carried twenty four dead and wounded.

We continued to occupy Ballinalee for about ten days afterwards, to see if they would come again. They never did. One day a party of Military arrived in two lorries. We had outposts on the roads, but they did not interfere as we had instructions that as the Military were inclined to be friendly we were not to engage them unless it could not be avoided. This party halted in the village, and the officer in charge apparently realised that he had walked into something. He immediately collared a number of civilians as hostages, and so ensured that we would not fire on his party. He posted Sentries, but most of these were captured and disarmed. MacEoin sent one of the captured men to his officer with a note informing him that his position was hopeless, as he was surrounded, but that he was prepared to allow him to leave if he did so peacefully via Moatfarrell. The officer accepted these

terms and bundled up and departed. We gave back most of the rifles we had taken off his men, and he would have got them all back if he had not been in such a hurry to get away. After this the military always behaved decently in carrying out their duties on raids and so forth. All roads were covered and blocked strongly except the road by which they had come. Apparently the officer had made a mistake in the roads and had arrived in Ballinalee unintentionally.

EDG. NORTHSTOWN - ²⁶
About the 14th or 15th November we moved out of Ballinalee to Ardgullion ~~or Edgeworthstown~~²⁶, and to the Granard road to ambush a party of Tans who had travelled from Longford to Granard via Edgeworthstown. We placed mines in the road and took up position on the sides. This gave us a good position, covering the road, which ran through an open bog. We remained there for 48 hours without food or sleep. No Tans came. At the end of this period we could hear shooting, and see the glare of a fire or fires in the sky in the direction of Ballinalee. It was now night time. The Tans had arrived in Ballinalee in our absence and set fire to four houses - HarriKys', Earlys', Hannigans' and Earlys' two houses and Seán Duffys'. They also burned Connolly's house and premises and shot all the animals on the land. We lifted our mine and withdrew towards Ballinalee. We rested that night, and the following night continued our march. The Tans had evicted Pat Farrell, who owned a Grocery and Drapery shop, and set up a barracks on his premises. MacEoin decided to attack this place that night.

The plan was to place a mine on the window sill at the end of the house, which was a detached one, and thus blow the gable end out of it. We succeeded in getting the mine on the window sill. This was a concrete mine, and exploded by means of an electric detonator connected to a charger. The remainder of the column took up positions covering the barracks. We intended to rush the place if the mine did sufficient damage. The explosion did considerable damage, but not sufficient to make them surrender or we to charge the place. Fire was opened on the barracks. Petrol was placed with the mine, but the floor being stone, it did not catch fire. A fire did start, but they either put it out, or it burned itself out. Rifle fire was kept up on the barracks for some time, and eventually we withdrew. We were informed that the Tans had two casualties on their side. There was none on ours. The house was not habitable any longer, and the next day the Tans evacuated it and took over the National School, which they converted into a barracks. They strongly fortified it with sand bags, barbed wire, loopholes and M.G. positions and land mines attached to Trip wires. Cattle were blown up by these mines. The following night there was an attack on the Tans in the village. A patrol from the column moved into the village, to see what was doing there. One patrol under MacEoin spotted Tans on the Hill cross roads in the centre of the village and opened fire on them. One Tan was wounded. Only a few rounds were fired. The Tans run for the barracks.

Along with the School house taken over by the Tans, the Military from Longford took over Fr. Muntford's house and were preparing it for occupation. About eight or ten

of the column under MacEoin moved into the village with the intention of burning the priest's house to prevent its' occupation. A covering party was detailed off to cover the school house. We had no intention of opening fire on the Tans, but apparently they observed some of our movements and opened fire on us with a Lewis gun. The Tans were using a serachlight, but Tom Brady put this out with a well directed shot. We were then able to leap-frog back to cover, about 150 yards, and we got away. We set Fr. Muntford's house on fire. It was kerosene we used instead of petrol, and the fire burned itself out. They never occupied the house afterwards. There were no casualties on either side.

On the 22nd December 1920 the column moved into Ballinalee for an attack on the school-house. It was really an attack to demoralise the enemy;- it was not intended to seriously attack it. We took up positions and opened fire. There were a few Tans on the road around the school. The engagement was short, and we only fired a few rounds each, and then withdrew. There were no casualties. The enemy as usual in such cases, kept up fire for a long period after we had withdrawn.

In January 1921 the column moved into South Longford. The idea was to get things moving in this area, and to draw them off and ease the situation in the Northern area. The column moved to Lissglassig near Keenagh on the Ballymahon side. A regular patrol of two lorries of Tans used to travel from Longford to Athlone via Ballymahon. It was decided to hit them up at Terlicken. Two mines of the concrete type were placed in the road and the column took position covering the road. Three houses covering the road were occupied. The Tans turned up to

the minute, but alas, our mines failed to go off. It appears they were wrongly wired up. Fire was opened on them with the rifles. The failure of the mines made our position untenable. The Tans pulled up and took cover immediately they were fired on. We fought them for about half an hour, but there was no hope of dislodging them. We then pulled out and retired. They followed us some distance and we had to fight a rearguard action. The enemy however, broke off the engagement. We lost two rifles and our own exploder and of course our mines. We had no casualties and the enemy had none that I know of.

After that engagement we returned to North Longford-coming most of the way that night. We rested that night in the Edgeworthstown area and the following night we moved to the vicinity of Ballinalee. We travelled most of the time across country. Nearly every night a few of the column would proceed into the village and fire a few shots at the Tans' barracks or at Tans on the street. This was just a war of nerves to keep the Tans jumpy and keep them indoors.

In January of that year the column moved to the vicinity of Arva to attack a patrol which came out from the barracks nightly and patrolled the town. Positions were taken up covering the barracks and other positions in the town from which we could ambush a patrol. The patrol appeared and was engaged by fire. The strength of the patrol was about six men. One fire being opened they scattered and withdrew. We had no casualties and I do not know if they had any. It was a very dark night, and the party which were covering did not see the patrol leaving. The column returned to Ballinalee again after this.

In the meantime the Auxies had occupied Reynolds' house in Ballinalee, and a small attack was delivered on them by portion of the column to keep them "jumpy". After an exchange of shots the sub column withdrew. No casualties.

The column was billeted pretty close to Martin's cottage near Ballinalee. Seán MacEoin, Mick Gormley, Jim Sheeran and I think some other man were in the cottage. MacEoin had gone there to meet his mother. I was near the house. The others were acting as an escort to MacEoin. A patrol headed by D.I. McGrath arrived at the cottage. The D.I. went up to the cottage, leaving the rest outside. MacEoin met him at the door and shot him dead. He then threw a bomb into the party waiting at the gate and made his escape to the column. The other men also got away. Sergeant Ryan was wounded by the bomb. Some members of the patrol followed MacEoin, and fired some shots at him. As soon as MacEoin got in touch with the column, he mobilised them and moved immediately on the cottage. By that time the enemy had withdrawn and collected the remains of the D.I. We moved in on the barracks then and kept up sniping them most of the night. They tried hard to call assistance, but we were determined they would not get out. They sent up dozens of "S.O.S." Verey lights. We carried on our sniping until about 5 a.m. in the morning, and then withdrew. There were no casualties as far as I am aware. Mrs. MacEoin, Seán's mother was in the cottage with Seán when they arrived, also Miss Martin. They did not take any action against Miss Martin. I think they burned the cottage afterwards.

In February, 1921, we were still lying around Ballinalee. Information was received that a troop train was travelling from Boyle to Kildare accompanied by a heavy military escort. The column moved to attack this train at Clonwhelan. As the column arrived at Clonwhelan the last of the trains had passed, and the whole affair proved abortive. I believe that the dispatch containing the information was delayed in transit.

An ordinary patrol of two lorries of Tans had begun to travel between Granard and Longford via Ballinalee. They were gaining confidence in themselves now. It was decided to ambush them. It was planned to blow up the first lorry with a road mine, and to concentrate rifle fire on the second. The lorries were wont to travel about 11 a.m. in the direction of Longford. The column went into position at about 6 a.m. at Clonfin, and the mine was placed on the road. The positions taken up were about 150 yards from the road on either side. No houses were occupied. We all were armed with rifles, and had a good supply of ammunition. Seán MacEoin was in charge. A large area around the selected position was covered by local Units on outpost duty.

The morning passed, and no enemy turned up. Things wore on until nearly 4 p.m. About this time we heard Machine gun fire a couple of miles away in the Granard direction. This gave us warning that they were coming. In a brief space of time two lorries of Auxies approached. The mine on being exploded blew the front part off the first lorry up, bringing it to a standstill and throwing out the occupants. The second lorry pulled up behind this and concentrated rifle fire was brought to bear on it. Its

occupants jumped, and dived for cover, a good many of them being knocked out as they did so. Cover at this point was scarce. They got their Lewis gun into operation immediately, but after a few bursts, the gunner was knocked out and the gun did not get into action any more. Firing continued by both sides. MacEoin was shouting at them to surrender. After about half an hour they surrendered - standing up in their positions and putting their hands up. One of them made a race to get away, and although he was slightly wounded, he succeeded in doing so. We closed in on them and searched them. Each man had a rifle and two revolvers, a .45 in the equipment and a .38 in the pocket. In all we collected about 14 or 15 rifles and about 40 revolvers together with a Lewis Gun with ammunition supply almost complete. There was very little rifle ammunition except on the casualties. They had a good supply of revolver ammunition. They had no hand grenades. In their possession we also found one Repeating shot gun.

MacEoin was speaking to the officer in charge, who was mortally wounded. They had about six killed and fourteen wounded. Only three escaped injury. We dressed the wounded men as best we could, and gave them cigarettes. They had no first-aid equipment. We burned the damaged lorry and left them the good one to get back in. We had now collected all the arms and equipment, which had to be manhailed, giving each man a treble load. The column now retired in the direction of Bunleathy. Four of us delayed in getting away, and got cut off from the rest of the column by enemy reinforcements which were now arriving. They had us three parts surrounded. However, the column now had the Lewis gun set up, and when this opened up it silenced the fire of the enemy, and we were able to get away.

and join the rest of the column. The reinforcements continued to engage us until dark, when the enemy broke off the engagement. The secondary portion of the fight took place about a quarter of a mile from the original ambush position. During this, one of our men, Brady, got slightly wounded. He was hit over the hip but was able to continue with us.

The column moved to a place about four miles north from Ballinalee, to Aughtnaclyff and billeted in that area. We had to abandon some of our stuff the previous evening when we were engaged by the reinforcements, as we were too heavily loaded. One of our men, Patk. Finnegan, left his rifle (Carbine) behind him in this discarding. Unfortunately he had put his name on it. Up to this he was not even on the "run". The enemy apparently picked this up, for on the following day they raided his house, shot his father and burned the house. They also shot an old man at the scene of the ambush the following day. Patk. Finnegan's mother went mental from this treatment. The surplus arms and materials were distributed out to the I.R.A. units in the County. We kept the ammunition to replace what we had used.

Shortly after this MacEoin was arrested when returning from Dublin, where he had been visiting Collins. We were all very downhearted at this,; Paddy Callaghan and I went into Mullingar to look for him when he did not turn up, and it was there we learned that he was wounded and arrested. It was now decided to let them see that his arrest did not mean the end of everything. Portion of the column, armed only with revolvers went into Granard, to hit them up if we got an opportunity. There was what appeared to be a patrol formed up outside the barracks, and also some Tans on the street. It was night time

and dark. There were no street lamps - only the lights from the windows of the houses. Fire was opened on the party assembled at the barracks. They dispersed. There was return fire from the barracks immediately. I was standing in an archway watching two Tans approaching. I was waiting until they came into range, when I was suddenly stuck up by a Tan who had come out of a side door of a public-house at my back. He stuck a gun on my chest and said; "What's up", "Who's there". I answered; "Friend" and he moved his position to have a better look at me. I had a revolver in my left hand and a grenade in my right. As he moved I fired with the revolver, catching him apparently in the "guts". He must have fired at the same time - the bullet passing under my arm pit. As he fell he fired again, the bullet this time grazing my leg and slightly wounding me. I collected his gun with three rounds in it and moved to the far side of the street. I stayed there for some time. There was no possibility of getting any more of them that night, so we all pulled out and returned to our billeting area.

After MacEoin's arrest I took charge of the column until Seán Connolly should return to it. Unfortunately Connolly was shot on the night he was coming to join us. I arranged to ambush a cycle patrol of Tans and R.I.C. at Ballyurien, Browns' Cross-roads. We had got information that they had gone to Ballinalee and we had to move into position in a hurry. We took position in the side of the road, ready to open fire. We were just in position when they arrived. We opened fire, and the engagement was only a short time on when reinforcements for the enemy arrived from Granard, so we were forced to withdraw. As we withdrew we had to fight a withdrawal action for about half an hour. The enemy then broke off the engagement. A couple of them were killed, but we had no casualties.

They used a Lewis gun against us. We returned again to our billeting area.

In May 1921 about fourteen of the column moved to the Arva area, with the intention of bringing off something there. The enemy were moving in smaller numbers in that area than in the Ballinalee area, and there was the possibility of making a capture here, especially as our ammunition supply was getting very low. We billeted in two houses less than a mile from Arva, about 5 a.m. on Sunday morning. Some time about 8.30 I woke up and looked out. To my utter surprise I saw Two Tans approaching. I shook up Seamus MacEoin and we shot the two and secured their rifles, revolvers and ammunition. I then roused the column and occupied an ambush position, expecting them to come out from Arva. We remained in position until 6 p.m. but none of the enemy came, and we then decided that we would withdraw. Half an hour after we left a party of eight Tans arrived - our bad luck this time. Thos. Reddington, the Brigade O/C, had joined us on our way to Arva. The shooting of the Tans took place in the Fyhora district. After this we returned to Bunleathy. Reddington and I went to South Longford that night.

We went to Rosses of Newport near Legan and found a South Longford Column there. This column consisted of about 14 men, all armed with rifles and ammunition. They were moving to an ambush position at Ballycorkey, so I volunteered to go with them. The ambush took place but only one policeman was wounded. The position taken up was a bad one. The ambush was on a cycle patrol of R.I.C. and Tans about eight strong. Our position was behind banks a short distance from the road. The road was not fenced at this point. The enemy took cover and after half

an hour's engagement we had to withdraw. We had no casualties. Ned Cooney was in charge of the column for this operation.

We now proceeded towards Newtowncashel and billeted around that area for some time. There was a skirmish at Listreena with some Tans, by portion of the column. This was a meeting engagement without previous planning. The sub-column was proceeding across country when they were fired on by the Tans. Fighting lasted about half an hour. It ended by both sides breaking off the fight simultaneously. There were no casualties on either side. Leo Baxter was in charge of the sub-column.

Information reached the column that a patrol would be likely to move out of Lanesboro. Such patrols were a regular feature of the activities of the enemy garrison at Lanesboro. We had no information as to what route the patrol would take so we decided to take up a good ambush position on the ~~Walough~~^{Walough} road and hope for the best. The complete column was employed for this operation. Ned Cooney was in command. The position was an excellent one for an ambush. It placed us behind, before, and on one flank of any enemy that would come that day. It had a five foot wall on one side and no cover on the other side.

At about 6 p.m. in the evening a patrol of about fourteen Tans arrived and proceeded into our trap. However, things did not work out as planned. Our party which was to cut off the head or advanced elements of the enemy had instructions to let them well into the position before opening fire. They failed to open fire at all and I realised that the enemy were being allowed through the

position and out of range. I quickly took up a position with two others and opened fire on them. They immediately dismounted and took cover which was available at the position they had reached. The engagement lasted about ~~half~~ an hour. We tried to get around them and dislodge them, but it was impossible as the enemy had been allowed to get too far and had got into good cover. We were forced to break off the engagement. We had one man slightly wounded. The Tans had three killed and a number not known wounded. We captured three rifles, one revolver and two cycles. They made no attempt to follow us up as we retreated.

We returned to the Ballymahon side of Newtowncashel and billeted there that night. About six of us were billeted in Mrs. Feeneys of Ledwithstown. The following morning I observed two lorry load of "Auxies" coming up the drive to the house. I immediately placed the men in fighting positions to engage the enemy if necessary. We did not want to start a fight, on account of the woman in the house, unless it was forced on us. The enemy only came looking for tools to clear the roads or barricades. They made no attempt to search and withdrew quietly after a conversation with the lady of the house.

About a week or so after this incident we moved to the Ardagh area. All the column except Ned Cooney and I were there when the whole area was surrounded by British forces over a thousand strong, including troops, - Police and Auxies. The column had to be low all day. The enemy combed the district very thoroughly but found nothing, and that night withdrew to Longford leaving outposts covering all the advantage points in the area, with the intention of resuming the search the following morning. Cooney and I

who were outside the roundup area decided to join the column at all costs when it got dark. We were not aware however, at this time that the enemy had left a ring of outposts covering the area.

Our route led through Carrickboy. There is a steep decline leading into the village. We were cycling, but decided to walk ^{up} down the hill. I said I would cycle on ahead and see how things were at the cross-roads. Just as I arrived at the cross-roads I was halted by three sentries in British uniforms. I had my revolver drawn, and in my hand, and resting on the handle bar of my cycle. I fired immediately, dropping the first sentry. I fired again and apparently missed as the other two ran away. I fired several shots and I saw the second man fall. I was about to follow up when I saw what appeared to be about thirty enemy taking over. My revolver was empty so I returned to where the first man, who now appeared to be dead, was lying and took his rifle and ammunition. By this time I was joined by Cooney. We fired a few shots in the direction where the enemy had taken cover. They returned the fire and we decided to get out of there. Under heavy fire we retired. We had to dump our cycles and take to the fields. We headed for the Inny River where we knew there were two boats. We got to the boats alright and collected them. Having rowed across the river we hid the boats and after travelling a mile we came to a house and went to bed there. The following night we returned across the river and succeeded in joining the column. The British spent two days searching the area, but did not get the column or make any arrests.

I now got an order from Mick Collins to return to North Longford and take over charge of the column there. I returned and found the column in the Columcille area. It was still in existence but inactive. It was now down about six in strength from the time I left it. It had plenty of rifles but very little ammunition. The column was pleased to see me return to them. I decided to move the column in the direction of Streete - Co. Westmeath and to carry out a small scale engagement there with a view to luring a Transport patrol from Castlepollard to Rathowen. There was good ambush positions available in this part. We ambushed a cycle patrol of Tans at Streete - wounding one of them. This was only the "bait" to catch a larger fish, and was just what I wanted. This incident took place on the 9th July 1921. The Truce took effect two days later and that finished our operations.

I disbanded the column - each man retaining his arms. The Truce found us all still in fighting fettle but very short of ammunition, bombs and explosives. It had become increasingly hard to keep up the ammunition supply. There were no easy captures to be made now, and the enemy only moved in large numbers.

We were all glad when the Truce arrived - glad to get back to our homes to have a decent and regular supply of food, your own bed to sleep on and to be able to relax and get away from the feeling of tension and always being on your 'Guard'.

Signed; Seamus Conway Col.

Witness; Matthew Barry Capt
13-10-1950

Date; 13-10-1950

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