

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

NO. **W.S.** 443

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S......443.....

Witness

Frank Neville,
Crosses, Upton,
Co. Cork.

Identity

Quartermaster Knockavilla Company
1st (Bandon) Battalion;

Assistant Quartermaster, 3rd (West Cork) Brigade.

Subject

(a) Growth of Volunteer Movement, Co. Cork,
1917-1919;

(b) Military activities, Co. Cork, 1920-1921.

Conditions, if any, stipulated by Witness

Nil

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AUGUST, SEPTEMBER, OCTOBER, 1950.

STATEMENT OF FRANK NEVILLE, CROSSES, UPTON,
CO. CORK.

I joined the Irish National Volunteers, as it was then known, in April, 1914, when I was sixteen years of age. The Volunteers were then partly under the leadership of John Redmond and when in August of that year the war started and Redmond offered the services of the Volunteers to the British War Office the organisation in my part of the country fell to pieces and nothing was done thereafter until 1917.

The events of 1916 passed us by and we still had no organisation. However, on the 1st October, 1917, Redmond Walsh, better known as Bob Walsh, O.C. Kilpatrick Company of the Irish Volunteers, organised a Company at Knockavilla, which I joined there and then. The strength of the Company was about forty and the Officers were:- Bob Walsh, O.C.; Patrick Coakley, 1st Lieutenant; Patrick O'Leary, 2nd Lieutenant; John Kelleher, Adjutant; Patrick O'Sullivan, Quartermaster. During the few months of the year 1917 that were left the Company carried out organising and training, but had no arms. This continued into 1918, but the Knockavilla Company came more into the public eye when early in the year it marched into Bandon town and surrounded the Courthouse there as a gesture and to give moral support during the trial of a girl, a hotel receptionist in the town, who had been charged for some breach of the Defence of the Realm Act. Then again on St. Patrick's Day the Company took part in a parade, but still without arms.

At a Brigade Convention at Caheragh the Company Officers attended and apparently as a result the R.I.C. regarded them as important and wanted men and raided for O'Leary and Kelleher. These two evaded arrest and went "on the run". During the early part of the year, too, there was some agrarian trouble near Kinsale and in an affray with the R.I.C. two of the latter were disarmed by the Volunteers.

In April, when Conscription was threatened, a number of the Company was busy making buckshot and filling cartridges. The principals in this work were the O'Sullivan brothers, both now deceased.

One night there was a dance for the Volunteers at Belrose and it was raided by the R.I.C. and two active organisers in the area - Hugh Thornton from Dublin and Liam Deasy - just managed to escape by getting out through a window.

Con Lehane, a Volunteer, who was a blacksmith from near Timoleague, made shotgun bayonets and pike heads for the Knockavilla Company during the year.

In the month of June, as the result of a raid, the Company got one shotgun.

All the time the usual training parades were proceeding and the Company was now known as 'H' Company of the 1st Bandon Battalion. It sent three members to Waterford to assist during the General Election in December, 1918.

1919.

There were some changes among Company Officers now: Redmond Walsh, the original organiser, faded out, and Patrick Coakley became Company O.C., with Patrick O'Leary, 1st Lieutenant; John Hartnett, 2nd Lieutenant; John Kelleher remained as Adjutant and I became Company Quartermaster. There were four Section Commanders - Dan O'Mahony, now deceased, Bat Falvey, now deceased; Tim Lehane, now in U.S.A., and Con Begley, also deceased.

In the Summer of this year the Company sent two men to Glandore for the Training Camp being held there. Then in December the Company O.C., Patrick Coakley, was sentenced to three months' imprisonment for the crime of having a knuckle duster in his pocket.

Patrick O'Leary became Acting O.C.; Con Begley became 2nd Lieutenant.

There were various raids for arms on the houses of Loyalists during these times, but without much result, except at the residence near Upton of a Colonel Austin, a retired British Army Officer. The raiders there secured two double-barreled shotguns, 40 rounds ammunition for same, a pair of field glasses and a haversack.

1920.

January:

Raids for arms continued but without very satisfactory results. The Company armament now consisted of 4 double barreled shotguns; 1 R.I.C. Carbine; 1 Spanish .45 Revolver; 1 .22 rifle; 12 G.H.Q. Grenades; about 100 rounds of shotgun ammunition; 30 rounds .303 ammunition; 20 rounds .45 ammunition.

For the attack on Mount Pleasant R.I.C. Barracks bombs and gun cotton were secured from the City of Cork. In addition, home-made canister bombs were used. About fifteen of the Knockavilla Company took part in the attack which lasted for two hours, but without result, as the Garrison of R.I.C. here - the old Regular Force - held out despite heavy rifle fire from the attackers from the front and rear of the

Barracks. A mine which was placed failed to explode. The attacking party withdrew without casualties. Following this there were intensive raids in the area by the police but no arrests were made as an R.I.C. man in Innishannon gave the tip about projected raids.

February:

During this month there were raids for arms and two shotguns and one revolver were secured.

March:

The mail train from Cork was held up at Upton and the mails for West Cork were taken. There was nothing important secured, though a pair of white gloves being sent for presentation to the Assize Judge was found. This, I believe, was the usual gesture when there was no serious crime in the County.

April:

During this month there was intensive raiding by R.I.C. and British Military. During one of these raids a Volunteer named Hawkes, belonging to the Company, when trying to escape was shot in the leg but was not arrested. He was unfortunate enough to have the leg amputated afterwards.

In view of the marked hostility and activity by local R.I.C. the decision came down from Brigade that, in future, they should be ambushed whenever possible. Consequently, an ambush was prepared with five men on the job but the expected enemy did not come along. A second ambush was prepared near Upton with five men lying in wait and two as scouts. This was successful. Three R.I.C. were ambushed. A Sergeant and a Constable were killed and their revolvers and ammunition taken. A third Constable escaped with his arms. A few days after this the mail train was held up again at Upton but nothing important was got.

May:

In the meantime Upton R.I.C. Barracks had been vacated, but for fear of re-occupation by a larger garrison, it was one night demolished. It could not be fired as it was semi-detached - a private house being part of the same structure - so it had to be destroyed with crowbars and sledges, a dangerous job in the dark; however, it was done. During this month, too, £150 (One hundred and fifty pounds) in sovereigns and half-sovereigns were robbed from two miserly farmers living near Innishannon. Two suspected men were arrested by the Knockavilla Company and proved to be the culprits. After three weeks' detention they confessed and they were fined. The money was recovered from its hiding place in Innishannon Graveyard and was restored to the owners, who, no doubt, hid it away safely again instead of lodging it in the Bank.

June:

In accordance with an order issued from G.H.Q., men who were badly wanted by the British Authorities stayed together at night instead of in their own homes. In the Knockavilla Company Area there were two Columns composed of about twelve each. However, the situation eased after about a month and they returned to their homes.

While the Camps were in being the Company provided armed guards at night in case of attempted raids, but such did not happen. There was a full mobilisation of the Company to attack a British Military Convoy on the Innishannon road at this time but it was called off.

July:

Another job which did not come off was a prepared ambush for a military cycle party in Ballinadee one Sunday. This was just for the purpose of disarming the party. Word came out from Cork at this time that there was an ex-British soldier named Crowley in the Company Area who had informed on members of the party which had ambushed the R.I.C. at Upton. For this he had got an award of £20 (Twenty Pounds) and had been promised another like sum. He was arrested and executed.

The Company armament now was: 7 double barreled shotguns; 5 single barreled shotguns; one carbine; 5 .45 revolvers; 1 Parabellum; one .32 automatic; 1 .22 revolver; 20 G.H.Q. grenades; 12 canister bombs; 150 rounds shotgun ammunition; 60 rounds .303 ammunition; 50 rounds .45 ammunition; 20 rounds parabellum ammunition; 20 rounds automatic ammunition. There was also a quantity of explosives.

An attack was now being planned on Innishannon R.I.C. Barracks and was to take place on a Sunday morning. A large land mine was made. A dozen Volunteers were to rush the door under covering fire from their comrades and altogether 60 or 70 men were to be engaged. However, as a surprise the attack was spoiled by the accidental discharge of a rifle when the party was taking up position near the Barracks and nothing came of it. At this time an ambush was prepared for the military where the railway bridge crosses the road west of Innishannon. A suspicious character was observed hanging around but got away before he could be seized and the ambush party was then withdrawn and took up a position at another place, but in the long run nothing happened.

August:

For two Sundays in succession a military cycle patrol passed along the road which runs over Brinny Bridge, and so a position was taken up there on the third Sunday to ambush this party. Information was apparently given to the

British and instead of the cycle patrol coming along the road military came from Bandon across the fields and got in at the rear of the position unseen by the scouts. They opened fire on the ambush party, which, however, got away under covering fire of a party of five or six, which included myself, though there were two slightly wounded. Unfortunately, Tim Fitzgerald, 1st Lieutenant of the Gaggin Company, who was fighting with the covering party, was killed.

At this time the Black and Tans were in Innishannon Barracks and five men took up a position one day to account for a particularly obnoxious one but he did not turn up, though expected.

September:

The mail train from Cork was held up this time at Kinsale Junction about 4.30 in the morning. Quite an amount of correspondence for people such as Lord Bandon was seized and for members of the British Forces in West Cork, but there was nothing important in it. Tom Kelleher of the Knockavilla Company joined the Brigade Column at this time for an ambush of British Military at Farranlobbus near Dunmanway. Nothing happened there but when the party was returning it ambushed two lorries containing personnel of the Essex Regiment near Newcestown Cross. Enemy casualties were: two Officers killed and some other ranks wounded.

October:

The Company Staff now was Patrick O'Leary, O.C.; Tom Kelleher, 1st Lieutenant; John Hartnett, 2nd Lieutenant; John Kelleher, Adjutant; Frank Drew, Quartermaster. The Section Commanders remained unchanged. I now became Assistant Quartermaster of the Brigade.

There was a training camp in a farmhouse at Ballymurphy being run for Officers under Tom Barry. The whole Knockavilla Company was on duty there and acted as scouts, armed outposts, in carrying out transport, supply and administration generally. There were also four civilian prisoners here - suspected spies - who had to be looked after in a nearby house. On termination of this camp the Battalion Column was formed and for a start off took up a position on the Cork-Bandon main road at Farnahoe, near Innishannon. Most of the Brigade Staff and the 1st Battalion Staff were with the Column which totalled about 60. Three lorries of military passed every day and this particular day the Column lay in wait for this convoy but it did not come along. It was a drenching wet day and the Column was withdrawn to Ballymurphy into billets. About a week after it moved out and carried out a successful ambush at Toureen where one enemy Officer and four Other Ranks were killed and their arms and ammunition taken. Actually a total of about seven or eight rifles were got that day. I took part in the preparations for this ambush. It has been described in detail in Tom Barry's book. After the ambush the Column moved south and crossed the

Bandon River at Kilmacsimon Quay. Those members of the Knockavilla Company with the Column now returned to their own area, bringing some of the captured stuff back. They took quite a chance by crossing the main road from near the place the ambush had taken place as there was enemy activity in the vicinity at the time.

The evening of the same day I, along with Dick Barrett, Brigade Quartermaster, returned to the Company area and, being Assistant Brigade Quartermaster, I was given charge of a lot of the heavy stuff, ammunition and batteries for the mines. I brought these in a pony and trap to the dump in my own place at Raheen. The same night, too, a Section was posted as armed guard on Mahonys of Belrose, then being used as Brigade Headquarters. Some days, too, after the Toureen ambush we received information that a party of British Intelligence Officers would be travelling out around Crossbarry. Two car loads of them travelled but, unfortunately, they went in another direction and the ambush prepared for them by Tom Barry on the Quarry Road did not take place. At this time the main Brigade and the Company dumps were at Raheen. There were others at Ballymurphy and Belrose. Five or six local Volunteers were responsible for all the dumps and for looking after arms. This was no light job as all the dumps now contained a considerable amount of arms and ammunition, and rifles, shot-guns and revolvers had to be kept cleaned and oiled. In addition, there was the matter of security which made the job a responsible one indeed for these men. The principal billets in the Knockavilla area were : O'Mahony's at Belrose; Kelleher's of Crowhill; O'Sullivan's of Raheen; Murphy's of Ballincourneaning; Coakley's of Knocknatrinane; H. Forde and C. Forde of Ballymurphy; Delaney's of Ballymurphy; Begleys of Ballymurphy; O'Learys of Ballyhandle and O'Connells of Ballinphellic. The Company Intelligence Staff at this time consisted of: Denis O'Mahony, William Barrett, Stephen Moore, Patrick O'Callaghan, J. O'Mahony, P. Cronin and Tim McCarthy.

The Arms Fund Collection was going on at this time with some success. The Knockavilla Company was sometimes deputed to look after prisoners brought in from other Company areas. As an instance, the Bandon Company brought a suspected spy for detention to Knockavilla area. He was held along with another suspect named Bateman. Eventually Bateman was acquitted but the other was found guilty and executed.

Michael O'Brien, O.C. Kilbrittan Company, died of diphtheria about this time, too, and the Knockavilla Company mobilised for the funeral and marched in military formation through the Martial Law area. The usual volleys were fired at the graveside but no enemy appeared to interfere with the proceedings.

Tom Barry now started a Brigade Training Camp near Dunmanway. One of the Knockavilla men - Seán Falvey - went through the Course at this Camp and in the following month took part in the Kilmichael Ambush.

November:

The Brigade got information that there was a big quantity of petrol for West Cork coming down by train and a "hold up" was arranged for the early morning at Kinsale Junction. Among those on this job were: Tom Barry, Liam Deasy and Mossy Donegan. I was there myself. Three different trains were held up one morning and the petrol was got on the third train. It was in tins and we got away three cart loads of it. Mick Hurley, now in the U.S.A., and then belonging to Knockavilla Company, took part in the fight with British Military in Bandon during this month.

A porter at Upton Station informed us that there was a number of documents in an office there which had apparently been mislaid. We secured this stuff and it all turned out to be police correspondence not very important. We held up the main train at Kinsale Junction again this month but without any great result.

December:

A Battalion Column was formed in the Company area for the ambush of military travelling from Bandon to Cork at a place named Clashanimud, near Upton. The first day nothing happened as no military travelled but on the evening of the second day as the Column was getting into position the enemy appeared and a running fight ensued, the Column withdrawing without casualties. It remained in the area for two days afterwards, though no enemy appeared.

The Knockavilla Company acted as armed outposts during this time. One day towards the end of the month I was working - repairing a fence in a field - and I could hear a distance off a sound as if a tractor was engaged on Winter ploughing. Tractors were not very common at this time but I did not pay any great attention to the noise, unfortunately for myself, for the sound must have been that of a military lorry. At all events, shortly after I was ordered to put my hands up and three British Officers appeared over the fence and held me up with their revolvers unpleasantly close to me. From the description I got afterwards one was Major Percival of the Essex Regiment and another was a Lieutenant Hotblack, the man who spoke with a pronounced stutter. I did not know who the other was. Percival asked me my name and when I did not reply he told me it himself and also told me a lot more about myself, detailing activities in which I had taken part, and telling me it was no use in denying such. I was marched away by these three Officers and down and into Jagoe's farmyard where I was held for a considerable time while parties of the Essex Regiment assembled there apparently after raiding the locality. As each party came in members of it made it

their business to knock me about and altogether I received pretty bad handling from them. Two other prisoners were brought in, one of whom I recognised as a Volunteer. When all the military were assembled and ready to move off Percival ordered the other two prisoners to be put in the first lorry, saying "They are for Bandon". He ordered me to be put in the last lorry, saying "He is going to Cork". I had other views on this matter, more especially when after the convoy moving off the last lorry, of which I was one of the occupants, stopped every 100 yards or so, so as to increase the distance between it and the convoy in front. Eventually, when it was isolated it halted at the end of a breen leading up into a narrow ravine with high hills on each side and I was ordered to get out on to the road. One soldier only descended from the lorry; he was a Corporal and I distinctly remember he wore a cap instead of a tin helmet. He climbed down from the cab of the lorry, armed only with a short Webley. He ordered me to move and urged me on up the breen at the point of a revolver until the two of us were out of sight of the lorry on the road. I knew what was intended and that the excuse for what was about to be done would be "shot while attempting to escape". At the critical moment, as if by instinct, I turned sharply and he fired at the same moment. I could see a flame from the muzzle of the revolver almost touch my chest and I made a spring. Though the road was a sheet of ice I did not slip as I ran up along it before I cleared the boundary fence in one jump. As I ran up the road I could hear several sharp reports from the gun of my deputed killer. I got across several fields with the one idea of saving my life and about three fields away when clearing a fence I went over on my head and could not rise. I thought I had been shot and could feel the dampness running down my chest. I felt with my hand for the blood but it was the sweat from all my efforts. Finding I was unhurt restored my strength and I got up and moved on, avoiding the lower ground for fear the locality would be encircled and that I would be caught in the ravine. I, however, escaped and did not know if any attempt was made to go after me. As far as I could see when in Jagoe's farm-yard all the personnel of the Essex Regiment seemed to be a low evil crowd and I formed the opinion that they were mostly drawn from the London underworld.

Jagoe was a loyalist and had given information. He left the country shortly after when he found we were on his track.

Martial Law was now intensified by the introduction of additional provisions, as, for instance, the death penalty for carrying arms or even for harbouring rebels. Householders were required to have a list of the occupants of the house displayed inside the main door. Then, too, coupled with all this, was the Bishop of Cork's excommunication decree which needs no amplification here.

Another big raid was carried out at this time through the Knockavilla Company area, and John O'Sullivan of Raheen and Patrick Cronin were captured and interned.

John Falvey, a member of the Company, took part in a Column Ambush near Gaggin where a running fight ensued. The Black and Tans and R.I.C. were the opponents and they captured one of the Column Scouts - McClean from Schull - and murdered him then and there. He was armed with a revolver but he was not killed in action; he was taken prisoner and then shot.

About 20 rifles were removed from the Company Area to Kilmacsimon Quay in preparation for an attack on Kilbrittain Barracks. This was during the last days of 1920 and we had a walk of nine miles each way on a Sunday night bringing these rifles along to the Quay and returning again.

1921.

January.

The Raheen Dumps during this period were holding at least 30 rifles, together with small arms, ammunition, mines and explosives. News came from Bandon that the Essex had secured information about the location of these dumps. Myself and a couple of others hurriedly prepared new dumps and in one night the three of us shifted everything from the old dumps to the new ones.

The way we constructed a dump was by selecting a passage-way from one field to another between the earth banks of a fence. These passages were generally blocked by an old gate or a furze bush and got much usage from cattle being driven through, and on that account in Winter weather were very muddy and did not, to our mind, attract much attention. We dug away a big hole in the end of the bank and stored in there a large box full of arms, ammunition, etc., walled it round with stones and packed in the earth, making the outside then as natural as possible. The night we prepared the new dumps and shifted the stuff to them was Little Christmas Eve and the following day, the holiday morning, 6th January, 1921, a mixed party of the Essex, Auxiliaries, Black and Tans and old R.I.C. came and raked through the lands of two farms, actually coming on four empty dumps. All they got, however; was a 'Peter the Painter' in a small private dump of my own.

One night a quantity of ammunition and explosives was brought from the dumps in a farm cart to Quarry Cross, where 60 or 70 of the Battalion mobilised. Six were from the Knockavilla Company and were nearly all Company Officers. Men were in billets from early morning and throughout the day, and in the evening there was a hurried assembling of all when a party of 60 military from Bandon came very near the billets. Except for a few volleys fired by the enemy at some of our scouts nothing happened and as the darkness set in the military withdrew. The Column moved on to Newcestown where everyone had a meal. Early the following morning an ambush position was taken up at Mawbeg on the Bandon-Dunmanway road. Enemy lorries passed through nearly every day. By now there was well over 100 in the Column and two mines were laid in

front of the ambush position. Nothing happened, however, and after waiting all day the Column withdrew northwards after dark. After a short rest another ambush position was taken up at Mallowgaton. A spy who had been captured a couple of nights previously was shot and his body left on the roadway. News was sent into Bandon about this to try and draw out the military. The day passed but they did not appear so the Column withdrew and had a meal in the locality. Another spy named Bradfield, a loyalist landowner, had been arrested and he was shot. There is an account of this in Tom Barry's book.

The Column now crossed the Bandon river at Baxter's Bridge and marched away in the Clonakilty direction, going into billets at Cashel between Bandon and Ballinascorthy. It rested there for the remainder of that night and all the next day, which was a Sunday. On Sunday night the Column divided in two and entered the town of Bandon. One party crossed the river by the footbridge near Castlebernard and took up positions around the Military and Black and Tans' Barracks. This party was under Charlie Hurley. The remainder of the Column entered the town from the south side and took up positions in Shannon Street with a section of ten men on the railway bridge overlooking that street. All approaches into the South Main Street and to the R.I.C. Barracks at the further end of it were held. The object was to ambush a large Curfew Patrol which came out of the Military Barracks and paraded through the town every night. The Column waited in this position until 2 a.m. on Monday morning but no Curfew Patrol came out. The party masking the Military Barracks eventually opened fire on it and both military and Black and Tank from their respective quarters replied with a terrific opposing fire. Eventually the Column withdrew, one man with the north party - O'Reilly of the Kilbritten Company - being killed. The men of the south party withdrew about three miles and billeted at Knockrowe. The following night they crossed the Bandon river in boats at Collier's Quay and marched into the Knockavilla Company area and joined up with the remainder of the Column where they stayed all that day. In the evening I was sent with six others to raid Castlemore Lime Works, about six miles away, for explosives but we found nothing.

The Column moved off at night for an attack on Innishannon Barracks. Most of the local Company were out during the night acting as scouts. The Column moved into the village about 11.30 p.m. A mine was placed against the wall of the Barracks and a storming party deputed to rush the Barracks when the mine went off. Another party was stationed about 200 yards on the Bandon side of the village covering the Bridge in case of enemy reinforcements from that direction, while a section was on the Cork side with the same mission. Then another party under Ted O'Sullivan took up a position at Brinny Cross in case any reinforcements might come that way. They had done that before. After all these preparations the mine at Innishannon did not go off and after firing a few volleys the attacking party in the village withdrew. The Black and Tans sent up Verey lights and kept firing for a long time. In case the Signals would

attract the attention of the British who might come around by Brinny the Column joined up with Ted O'Sullivan's party there and held ambush positions for about an hour but no one came.

After this the whole Column withdrew to the northern end of the Knockavilla Company Area and the following day marched to Newcestown. The Force was divided here, one party of thirty under John Lordan went on for Bandon and got into position about 80 yards on the north side of the Military Barracks, while the main body was to close in on the south side. I was with the north side party and we were to wait for shots as a signal from the party on the south side when the Curfew Patrol was out, but nothing happened and we withdrew about 2 a.m. The northern section of the Column went to Newcestown and we there disbanded, returning to our own areas.

The main body went on to the Clonakilty Area and a few days afterwards the fight at Burgatia House took place. When the six men of the Knockavilla Company who were with the Column returned to the Company Area they found that on the previous day a big 'round-up' by British Military had taken place there. Every able-bodied man in the district was rounded up and taken down to Brinny Cross where they were made level out the walls on both sides and reduce any other cover there that would conceal an ambush party. During the job a party of Auxiliaries came along and gave the workers a bad knocking about without any attempt being made by the military to stop them. Though there were a good many wanted men in this forced labour party only three were detained. They were Volunteers; they were interned. Their names were Frank Drew, the Company Quartermaster, Stephen Moore and Jer. Buckley. Some rifles were again removed from the Company Area to Kilmacsimon Quay and a raid for mails took place at Upton Post Office. There was nothing important found in the mail.

February:

About the 7th or 8th I was ordered to go on to the Column then going into the Skibbereen Area. I left home on a Saturday night by trap, carrying in it some spare rifles, ammunition, explosives and electric cable. These were for the Column. Flor Begley was with me. We travelled to Newcestown, picked up John Lordan, the Vice Battalion O.C., there and went on to Ahiohill and Rossmore where a Brigade Council Meeting was taking place. Begley and Lordan attended this Meeting. I left there early on Monday morning with five or six others armed with rifles who were going on to the Column. We now had two horses and carts. We went on to Drinagh where we rested. The Brigade O.C., Charlie Hurley, visited us there with some instructions from the Column Commander. This was the last time I saw him alive. The party left Drinagh for Kilcoe, the Column having gone in that direction. On the way in the night time we met a burial party under Con Connolly. This party had a farm-cart with a coffin on it and in it the remains of a young Volunteer - O'Driscoll - who had been accidentally killed the day before.

At Kilcoe the six riflemen left me and took a short cut through the fields to the Column billets while I went along the road with the farm cart filled with arms and ammunition. Our transport had been reduced to one cart by this time. During the last mile of the journey along the main road between Skibbereen and Schull I heard the noise of lorries approaching. I urged on the horse and luckily enough a bye-road was not far away and I turned up it just in time for soon four lorries of military passed along the main road missing me by a few minutes. I got to Column headquarters and the men there were all in defensive positions having heard the lorries down the road. Shortly after the Column moved out for Caheragh. The following night it went on for the attack in Skibbereen as described by Tom Barry in "Guerilla Days". During the whole of my journey to the Column I suffered severely from pains in the legs and body and when the Column moved off I was left behind, very ill. The Column Commander, before leaving, gave instructions that I be moved to a safe place near Ballydehob. That was done that night. Dr. McCarthy of Durrus came the day after to attend to me and found I had acute rheumatic fever. The Schull Volunteers removed me to Schull Union Hospital and I remained there a long time for I was very ill indeed. I will always remember the men who brought me there. They were Jim Hayes and Gibbs Ross, both now dead, and Seán O'Driscoll who lives in Skibbereen. The doctor and nursing staff in the hospital were very good to me.

In the first few weeks of February it was noticed that a small party of military from Kinsale used to change trains at Kinsale Junction and travel on to West Cork. It was arranged to attack them at Upton Station. A small party was organised for the attack, mostly local men with a few Brigade Staff Officers, including the O.C., Charley Hurley, Flor Begley, Seán Phelan and Pat O'Sullivan.

On February 15th the party, consisting of ten local men armed with Ross Canadian and Lee Enfield rifles and the remainder armed with revolvers and automatics, fell in at Raheen and proceeded to the Station over three miles away. Upton is a small station on the Cork and Bandon Railway. The Station premises and Signal Cabin are on one side of the line - the north side - and a Goods Store and a terrace of low houses are on the other side. The country round is very flat with very large fields sloping down to the station. Two scouts with bicycles were stationed at Kinsale Junction to report the number of military on the train to the men at Upton. Two other small parties were engaged in blocking the roads leading to the station. The train was due at Upton at 9.30 in the morning. Some of the ambush party took up positions in the station premises; a few others were in the Goods Store and behind a low wall close beside the railway line. The scouts on the bicycles at Kinsale Junction failed to make Upton before the train. Instead of a small party of military in a couple of carriages, as expected, military from Cork City going on to the West were in all the carriages the full length of the train. They were belonging to the King's Liverpool Regiment stationed at Skibbereen. As the train stopped fire was opened by the Volunteers, to which the military replied at once. Almost in the first

volley Seán Phelan, a Liverpool Irishman, and Batt Falvey were killed. Three others - Pat O'Sullivan, John Hartnett and Dan O'Mahoney - received terrible wounds. Shortly afterwards the Brigade O.C., who was on top of the iron footbridge over the railway, was wounded in the head. Six civilians were killed, four passengers and two Railway officials, the Guard and a Porter. After a short while the Brigade O.C. blew his whistle as a signal to retreat from what was a hopeless engagement. The wounded Brigadier and Tom Kelleher got one hundred yards down the line under heavy fire as far as the level crossing. Kelleher got a position in the turnstile wicket and opened rapid fire on the military who were advancing in all directions. Under that covering fire the other members of the attacking party managed to extricate themselves. Dan O'Mahoney, wounded in the hip, was helped along by Din Doolan to Murphy's farmhouse, a short distance away, where he collapsed. The Murphy family did all they could for him and hid him in the corner of a field where he remained all day and until nightfall. Enemy raiders failed to find him where he was concealed. He was removed that night by some civilians. During the day, though, he was attended by Fr. O'Connor of the Order of Charity. This priest belonged to Upton Industrial School and was a good friend to the I.R.A. O'Mahoney, after spending a long time in a Cork Hospital, recovered but died some years afterwards from the effects of the wounds he had got. John Hartnett, who was shot through the lung, was helped away by O'Leary and a few others. He also recovered. Pat O'Sullivan, a man of splendid physique, was shot through the stomach. Despite this he made his way alone carrying his rifle for a mile through the country to a farmhouse where he got some attention and was then removed in a trap to the northern end of the Company Area. He there got some medical attention but died a few days later in a Cork Hospital. The Brigade O.C. and Tom Kelleher, after covering the retreat of the others, had to make their way at least a quarter of a mile through open country before they were out of rifle range from the Station. They eventually got away some miles into comparative safety where the Brigade O.C. was able to get medical attention. He recovered from his wounds but was killed on the morning of Crossbarry about five weeks later. The bodies of Falvey and Phelan were taken to Cork by the military but were claimed as relatives by members of the City Cumann na mBhan. They, along with Pat O'Sullivan, were buried in St. Finbarr's Cemetery in the Republican Plot. Some casualties were caused among the British, all wounded, but the numbers were never made known. On the day of Pat O'Sullivan's burial, while his family were in Cork, his home at Raheen was raided extensively by British military, a workman there being arrested and interned. A woman and a young girl who were in the house at the time were arrested, too, and were taken around the country all day in a lorry. They were, however, brought back unharmed and were released at nightfall near Raheen. About this time an enemy spy was arrested by members of the Knockavilla Company. He was badly wanted by the 1st Cork Brigade. He was handed over and was duly shot. Patrick O'Leary, the Company O.C., was arrested towards the end of February but he was not identified and was released after a few weeks. Five other members of the Company were arrested as well. Some of them were interned and a few

others, though they were badly wanted men, were released. There were again changes in the Company at this time. Tom Kelleher became O.C. and two new men - James Ryan and Seán Falvey - went on the Company Staff.

March:

The Brigade Column entered the area and went into billets. It left for a position at Ship Pool shortly after on the Innishannon-Kinsale road. This was on St. Patrick's Day. Nothing happened there and the Column moved back northwards to Knockavilla again. Then came the fight at Crossbarry on the 19th March. It has already been described in Tom Barry's book. About twenty members of the Knockavilla Company took part in the fight. Some were scouts, others dug the holes for the mines in the road and some were on transport work. A good many of these were caught that morning but being unarmed they passed themselves off as farm labourers going to work and got away with it. The Brigade O.C. - Charley Hurley - was killed in Humphrey Forde's house at Ballymurphy, about two miles from the scene of the Crossbarry Ambush. The owner was arrested and sentenced to six months for harbouring rebels. His hay, straw and oats were burned by the British. A neighbour, another man named Forde, was also arrested but a dump on his land escaped detection. About a week later, in a 'round-up', eight members of the Company were arrested, including O'Leary now 1st Lieutenant. Some were interned and others received short sentences of imprisonment. At this time, too, the Company, which had hitherto numbered ninety and had become somewhat disorganised after Upton, pulled itself together again in time for Crossbarry and under the leadership of Tom Kelleher. He spent long periods with the Column and took a leading part at Crossbarry, the Rosscarbery Barracks attack and many other fights. A police force was organised in the Company at this time as part of the Republican Police and maintained law and order in the absence of the R.I.C., who were, of course, wholly engaged on military duties. Our police ensured that public-houses closed at the proper times, collected fines imposed by the Republican Courts, arrested prisoners for civil offences and carried out as well as possible under the circumstances of the times normal police duties.

April:

Official reprisals began. British Military burned down five farmhouses in the area. They were Kellehers of Crowhill, O'Mahoneys and Delaneys of Belrose, O'Learys of Ballyhandle and Hartnetts of Killeens. As counter-reprisals the houses of two loyalists - Harolds and Beasleys where the ambush took place at Crossbarry - were burned by the Volunteers. Enemy columns with military transport were moving through the area and activities were becoming very difficult and dangerous. However, the Company succeeded in cutting trenches in roads leading into the district as well as breaking down a small river bridge. Volunteers were also engaged in temporarily repairing the houses of the burnt-out people. They were also engaged in working the lands for men 'on the run' or in prison.

About the end of the month Richard Barrett, Brigade Quartermaster, who was a teacher in the district, Denis O'Mahoney of Belrose and Eugene Begley of Ballymurphy were arrested and interned. Dick Barrett escaped out of Spike Island Internment Camp during the Truce.

May:

Local Volunteers were engaged in despatch and transport work to other Company Areas. The Flying Column again entered Knockavilla Area two days after the Rosscarbery Barrack attack. An enemy raiding party came to within a few hundred yards of the Column billets. Local men acted as scouts and armed outposts and when the Column withdrew scouted for it as far as Newcestown. A small section was called out to attack an enemy party at Kilpatrick near Bandon but this was called off for some reason. Others removed telephone apparatus from Upton Post Office and Kinsale Junction Station. The wires were also tapped for information and all bicycles were seized by the Volunteers and dumped in the area. A section of the Company also derailed a train on which military were expected to travel from Kinsale, near Ballymartle Station.

June:

A very important spy at Innishannon - Colonel Peacocke, a retired British Officer - was sought after and on two occasions an ambush was laid for him at a house which he used to visit near Upton. He was eventually shot dead by two Officers of the Company at his own house at Innishannon.

Three members of the Company took part in the burning of Longfields of Kilcolman, Enniskean, a prominent loyalist, and also in the burning of Peacocke's, Dennehy's, Frewen's, Stenning's and of Cor Castle - all residences of British loyalists. There was a special Unit of picked men for these jobs, which were all reprisals for similar actions by the British. Such work had to be done quickly and thoroughly. About this time, too, a quantity of arms, including a Hotchkiss Machine Gun, and ammunition came down by train to Kinsale Junction and was taken over by William Barrett, a local shopkeeper. The Stationmaster there, Mr. O'Leary, was also a good supporter of ours. The gun was kept in the area for some time and was cared for by local Volunteers.

A section was mobilised to ambush lorries of military which used pass along the road between Bandon and Crossbarry. A concealed trench was cut. The Hotchkiss gun was brought out and manned by an ex-British soldier but nothing happened as the military did not travel. On two other occasions as well armed parties lay to attack the military on the train at Kinsale Junction but nothing happened here at either time. Persons arrested for civil or suspected of other offences were detained in the Company area at this time. Seán Falvey was now arrested for the third time by the British. This time he was kept and sentenced to three months' hard labour, apparently for being a suspect. He was released during the Truce.

Parties of snipers under Tom Kelleher carried out sniping attacks on Innishannon R.I.C. Barracks, wounding one Constable.

July:

All Peacocke's goods and livestock were confiscated by the I.R.A. and removed by members of the Knockavilla Company to the Company area where everything was disposed of in order to swell the Arms Fund. At the seizure of these goods armed outposts were stationed at the Bridge and other points near the village, Curfew being in force at the time and military passing that road continuously, as well as there being an R.I.C. post in the village. The last seizure was made on the night of the 9th July, two nights before the Truce. That night, before withdrawing, the outposts fired at the R.I.C. Barracks for the last time.

I was out of hospital about the middle of May and stayed for awhile in Mark Lucey's house in Dunmanus. Then I made contact with Brigade Headquarters which was then in the Dunbeacon Company area. The Quartermaster, Tadgh O'Sullivan, who was Brigade Quartermaster too, then advised me to go up to Cork to see a Specialist. With Flor Begley I went in a motor cargo boat from Schull to Cork. I saw the doctor there and he advised me to go back to a quiet area and have a good long rest. After a couple of days I went back the same way and went to Lucey's house. There was a Battalion Column in the area then under Seán Lehane. That column had a number of prepared ambushes for the enemy on the Schull-Skibbereen road - ambushes which did not come off.

A party carried out a very successful raid on the Fastnet Lighthouse and got a lot of stuff there - a big quantity of guncotton and detonators.

About the middle of June, the 23rd in fact, the last great enemy sweep took place. They advanced on Schull from the north and had a line from Durrus to Roaring Water Bay. With that line they swept the area. They also had a gunboat patrolling off the coast. The night that the sweep started the Column burned the Schull Workhouse and a party also fired on the Coastguard Station at Schull where the Royal Marines were. They had to make a very quick 'get-away' after the burning because the enemy were coming along from Durrus. The Column got away along an old road down the side of Mount Gabriel to Dunmanus. I was called out from Lucey's house about one o'clock in the morning and went along with the Column. Boats were procured at Dunmanus and the whole party crossed Dunmanus Bay to the Kilcrohane Peninsula. The Column remained the whole of the following day on the alert. The enemy combed every house on the Dunmanus side of the Bay. That night scouts reported that the enemy were advancing on the Kilcrohane Peninsula. The Column Commander made arrangements for more boats to cross Bantry Bay to the Castletownbere side. There was another alternative, to go down the cliffs and into the caves. Anyway, during that night again, more news came that the enemy were withdrawing. That eased the

situation. They did withdraw eastward. The night after the whole Column crossed Dunmanus Bay again to the Schull area. The Column disbanded then and the men returned to their own Company Areas. I remained on there with the Headquarters Staff.

A couple of attempts were made by members of the Battalion Staff to ambush parties of the Marines at Schull but they were hardly stirring out at all at that time. The days wore on and we moved from one Company Area to the other and one day in Ballydehob raiders came in lorries from Skibbereen. As all the principal roads were trenched their progress was very slow and we had no difficulty in evading them. Our party moved back to Dunbeacon. A few more days passed by and the Truce came. The arms were put away and it was the end of the guerilla war.

The Knockavilla Company area was a hilly district in the north-eastern portion of the parish. Another Company - Kilpatrick - was to the south-west. There was another to the south at Innishannon. There were actually three Companies altogether in the Parish of Knockavilla. The people were mostly small farmers. The majority were with the Volunteers; a few were passive and gave very little willing assistance. The area for a long time was a safe one for men 'on the run' and for Brigade and Battalion Staff Officers. There was a lot of administrative work and planning carried on there. Headquarters was at O'Mahoney's of Belrose. It was a great billeting place for Brigade and Battalion Columns. It was also the nearest Company in the Brigade area to Cork City and on that account was important for communications. There were also two important roads running through it - one via Crossbarry to Cork and the other - the main road running from Bandon to Cork - running on the southern border. There were altogether six engagements took place in or near the area and a number of prepared ambushes. The Company numbered about 60 (sixty) active men altogether. They were mostly farmers' sons and farm labourers.

The organisation was good and the Officers were good. Officers were changed from time to time through casualties, arrests, and so on, but there were always good men to take their place. Some of the men had long service in the Brigade Column and the rest took part in local engagements and other activities.

There were about a dozen girls in the Cumann na mBhan organisation in the Company Area. Miss Bridget O'Mahoney of Belrose and Miss Kathleen O'Sullivan were their leaders, and they did remarkable despatch work and took a lot of small arms from place to place for the Company. They took care of arms and concealed them. They cared wounded and sick men. They helped at billets and looked after the welfare of the active men generally. There were many other women and girls, too, who helped and who did the same type of work. The I.R.B. was organised within the Knockavilla

Company in the usual way as a Circle. About fourteen members of the Company belonged to it. Meetings were generally held once a month. It was mostly during the early stages of the fighting that for particular jobs it was members of the I.R.B. in the Company who were picked to carry out these jobs. As the fight became hotter there was naturally no distinction between I.R.B. men and other Volunteers when engagements were being planned, and all took part and did their best for their country.

Signed

Frank Neville

Witnessed

~~James~~ Atcol

Date

23rd October 1950

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

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