

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913 21
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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

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Witness

Donnchadh O h-Annagain,
Lands Officer, Department of Defence,
Parkgate,
Dublin.

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STATEMENT OF DONNCHADH O'HANNIGAN.

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STATEMENT BY DONNCHADH O'HANNIGAN

Lands Officer, Department of Defence

In this account I propose dealing with the Flying Column, why it was started and the methods used in organisation and operation.

During the early part of 1920 there were many attacks on R.I.C. Barracks throughout the country. In East Limerick Brigade area many small posts were evacuated and had been destroyed by the I.R.A. One occupied post was attacked in Ballylanders in April, 1920. After a prolonged fight the R.I.C. surrendered and the building was burned down.

On the 28th May, 1920, Kilmallock R.I.C. Barracks was attacked. It was destroyed after several hours siege, all but an annex into which the remaining R.I.C. had retired. There were a number of R.I.C. casualties, but we were unable to ascertain how many as the enemy had control of the town. On both these occasions - Ballylanders and Kilmallock - Commandant Thomas Malone, otherwise known as "Seán Forde" was the officer in charge of the I.R.A. force, acting under the directions of the Brigade Commandant, Seán Wall. The Volunteers had one fatal casualty, Liam Scully, B.A., who was killed at Kilmallock. He was a native of Ballylongford, Co. Kerry, but had been in East Limerick for some considerable time prior to the attack. He had joined the I.R.A. in our area as soon as he had made contact with the Brigade, and he had also fought in the attack on Ballylanders. He died shortly after being wounded and his body was taken to the West Limerick Brigade area - Tournafulla. He was buried with full military honours at Templeglantine two days later after his relatives had been communicated with. Commandant P. Clancy of Kush, Kilfinane, and I attended the funeral as

representing the East Limerick Brigade.

At this time the West Limerick Brigade had contemplated an attack on the R.I.C. post at Newcastle West, and in furtherance of this purpose all the available rifles in East Limerick, which included those that had been captured at Ballylanders, were sent on loan to the West Limerick unit. After the burial of Scully the matter of this attack was discussed and it was decided that preparations were not sufficiently advanced to warrant proceeding with the operation.

Having learned that an attack was contemplated on the R.I.C. Barracks at Sixmilebridge in County Clare, and at the request of Commandant Seán Finn and some of his men who were interested in the enterprise, Commandant Clancy and I proceeded to Pallaskenry and then across the Shannon to the neighbourhood of Bunratty. We met at the house of Mr. Vincent Corbett near Bunratty Castle, and the gathering included men from the different Clare units, and also Captain Ernie O'Malley and Seumas Robinson. Part of the plan was to have feint attacks on Corofin, Newmarket-on-Fergus and other outlying posts. Two days were allotted for the preparation of explosives and other materials for the attack, but it was found at the end of that time that plans were incomplete and it was decided to abandon the project. This was principally because preparations had not been made for the occupation of a house adjacent to the Barracks which would be vital to the success of the operation. Feint attacks, however, took place.

We re-crossed the Shannon into County Limerick, commandeered a Rolls Royce car in which we travelled over a considerable portion of the Brigade area. Commandant Clancy and I were interested in having the rifles brought back to East Limerick, and as there did not appear to be any action

imminent in West Limerick at that time, we decided to return home to our own area, each armed with a rifle and a limited quantity of ammunition. The other rifles, about fifty in number, were left in West Limerick in the hope that in the near future they might still be used in that area.

We set out to march from the neighbourhood of Glin, via Askeaton, Ballingarry and Rehill, and arrived at Tankardstown near Bruree where we were received by Captain J. Lynch. We had a quiet journey, our only necessity being to avoid the immediate vicinity of towns on our route, and to observe caution in seeking food. This march took place about mid June 1920. Leaving Tankardstown on the following day we proceeded on our way by-passing Kilmallock to reach Clancy's home at Kush near Kilfinane. We had no incidents except that an R.I.C. man who was out cycling with a daughter of the local R.I.C. Sergeant, ran away in panic when he saw us, we being visibly armed. We had achieved an object in this march and decided that as we two, fully armed and in daylight, could travel such a long distance without fear of capture, there seemed no reason why about twelve men should not do likewise, and so was conceived in our minds the idea of the Active Service Unit which later became known as the Flying Column.

With this idea in mind I returned to my home to make preparations for a long absence. Commandant Clancy, who was an Assistant Creamery Manager at Allensbridge near Newmarket, Co. Cork, had been on hunger strike and was just released from Belfast Jail before the Kilmallock attack. During our absence in West Limerick a telegram had arrived from his Manager urging his return to Allensbridge, so that when I returned to Clancy's house he had left for County Cork. He was amongst my dearest friends. He was afterwards killed in action near Kanturk.

On the same day that I returned to Kesh and found that Commandant Clancy had gone to Cork, I discussed the Column project and procedure regarding it, with Vice-Commandant P. O'Donnell, Volunteer David Clancy who was a brother of Commandant P. Clancy, and Volunteer Dan Maloney. Having decided what we would do, the four of us set out as the nucleus of the unit, to await further recruitment of men for the Column at Tankardstown. The following men turned up there from Ballylanders to join us :- Tadhg Crowley, Joseph Crowley, Peter Crowley, Edmond Tobin, Thomas Murphy, David Tobin, Thomas Howard. The last three were afterwards killed in action.

We decided to begin operations in the 5th Battalion area where Commandant J. MacCarthy was in charge. He co-operated with us by setting his Intelligence system to work and they watched for every possible means of harassing the enemy. Early in July a party of four R.I.C. men who had been transferred from Elton to Kilfinnagh had come to Elton to collect their sugar rations. They were intercepted on their return by the unit, which on that occasion was in charge of Tadhg Crowley, and ordered to surrender. I understand they offered little or no resistance. I was in Cork City at the time on military business.

On the 13th July, 1920, the Column was mobilised at the home of Dan Maloney, Lakelly. This house had already rendered great service as an organisation centre and particularly in regard to the famous rescue at Knocklong Station in 1919. We had received information that a patrol of R.I.C. and military were in the habit of coming out each day from Emly and we decided to intercept and attack them if possible. To arrange this was not easy because the enemy very often changed their plans, and a Flying Column consisting of twelve to fifteen men having exposed itself and

waited all day without result, had sometimes to move miles away to rest for the night, and our area was surrounded by strong British military posts. We waited until far into the day, concealed from the public view, until hunger compelled us to come into the open as our rations were long since exhausted. We proceeded to a farmer's house near the Railway Station and requested to be provided with food. At first the lady of the house was rather nervous about receiving us as a number of armed men moving round the country during a working day was at that time a rather strange sight to farmers. They had only been accustomed to the British movements. However, the appearance of Volunteer Dan Maloney, who was known in the house, reassured the occupants and we were hospitably received. We had been there for about forty-five minutes and were about to sit down to a sumptuous meal when the servant maid came in and reported that a party of soldiers and police had crossed the railway line. We were obliged to leave without food and waited in a position of readiness for one and a half hours until the enemy party returned. They had come out from their barracks in Emly after their midday meal and were in no hurry to return. We sent out a scout to locate them and found that they were sitting on the bridge about a mile away at Knockarron. There was no means of approaching them where we were, under cover, and so we waited on. In about one and a half hours the party returned, but to our disappointment they were extended about two hundred and fifty yards along the road. Unfortunately, one of our men carrying a shotgun, crossed over the railway and was seen by one of the patrol to enter a field. An R.I.C. man went to a gate of the field and looked in where the man had gone, whereupon a shot was fired and he was called on to surrender.

We had come into the fight which ensued with five

Lee Enfield rifles, each with seventy rounds of .303 ammunition, and one .44 Winchester repeating rifle with about ten rounds of ammunition. The enemy were at first called on to surrender and refused to do so. The man who had looked into the field was the first to surrender, followed by another shortly afterwards. The Sergeant in charge, a military N.C.O. who was at the rear of the party, ran away accompanied by an R.I.C. Constable. These took no part in the fight. There were eight remaining - two R.I.C, and six soldiers of the Lincolnshire Regiment. In about twenty minutes we had only two prisoners and there was grave danger of our supply of ammunition running out. The soldiers got into the field, but we were too few in numbers to surround them, and our principal fear was that the soldiers would cross the railway line. If they did our position would be almost hopeless as across the line they would be in very close distance of their posts. In these circumstances I decided that we should first of all man the railway line and prevent access to it. After some time one of our men, Tom Crawford, located the enemy position in a field. They had taken cover behind high clumps of grass and were difficult to see. We had already spent a relatively large amount of our ammunition and great care was necessary in inducing them to surrender. I may say that at this stage our object was to capture arms and ammunition and we desired to avoid taking life if possible.

The fight dragged on for about three hours, both sides manoeuvring for position. Finally, Jerry Callaghan of Lackelly, who was, and still is, a noted marksman, shot the finger off a soldier with his Winchester rifle. The soldier, on being shot, exposed himself, and the party then surrendered without further resistance.

In order to have the captured booty conveyed quickly into safety, two motor cars were requisitioned from a garage in Bally, and the rifles were taken to Ballylanders. I found it necessary to remain behind with the imprisoned police and soldiers to secure the exchange of notes, already mentioned, and to give final instructions regarding their behaviour, which included remaining in the cottage for at least two hours. I informed them that I had the whole district surrounded and to come into the open would be fraught with imminent danger for them. They loyally obeyed this order until released by the Rev. Fr. Conway, P.P., who had brought the runaway sergeant and constable, whom he had found hiding in a local bog, to join them. I found, having completed my business, that the two cars containing the men and rifles had gone away without me. I was then unarmed and had the captives known it, they could have held me.

My immediate need was food, as I had taken none for over twelve hours. I went to Burke's, a local farmer's house near the railway station, and was treated to a hearty tea, which I enjoyed thoroughly. I then proceeded on foot along the railway line by Lakelly and thence to Knocklong. I met some young men who were leaving the district for the night in anticipation of British raids following the fight, and they kindly warned me that I should get out of the district as fighting had gone on for a considerable time. I thanked them as I proceeded on my way. They did not know me, of course, at the time. On reaching Knocklong I borrowed a razor and shaved off my moustache. I then borrowed a bicycle, and cycled to Glenbrohane where I rejoined my comrades.

Our men took a brief rest for a few days by dividing up into a number of friendly houses in the district.

At this time, of course, it was necessary to choose the places where to stay, as this type of warfare was quite new to the people, and it was still a novelty to see men, fully armed and equipped, moving about in daylight. It was possible that, unintentionally, information might spread and finally reach the enemy. Some of the men of the Column who stayed in Ballylanders, were surprised one night by British military and police, and a sharp exchange of fire took place. They all escaped with the exception of Tom Crawford who was slightly wounded and taken prisoner. I was away in Ballindaggin, County Cork, on this occasion. I had Volunteer Thomas Howard with me as a bodyguard. Messengers were sent for me, and we returned to East Limerick, bringing one Corkman, William Burke, who had volunteered to join my Column. He remained permanently with the Column from then.

On the 4th August, 1920, we were at Tankardstown, near Bruree, and learned that a cycle patrol had arrived at the latter place from Kilmallock. We had established a system of Intelligence, and we were then able to get a good idea of enemy movements, although these movements did not always conform to our expectations. On this occasion the movement of the patrol was unexpected, so that we had to get into a position of attack within a very short time. We had just arrived and were beginning to settle down into position when the patrol came along. Fire was opened by both sides simultaneously. The enemy, consisting of a cycling patrol of ten soldiers and two police, retreated immediately, on the outbreak of fire, and took cover in a labourer's cottage, from which they opened fire on us from the upstairs windows. We made enquiries locally and learned that this cottage was occupied by an aged couple, so that to continue the attack, in such circumstances, was out of the question having regard

to the presence in the house of these innocent people.

The enemy left one dead on the road and his rifle lay beside him. It was necessary for one of our party to cycle down the road, under fire, for about 150 yards in order to obtain possession of the rifle. Continuous firing was kept up against the cottage to cover his advance and retreat. We retired from the scene in disgust - (that men should be so devoid of the qualities of manhood as to endanger the aged and infirm by entering into and fighting from the home of this poor and peaceable couple).

I had already sent reports of our activities through Brigadier-Commandant Seán Wall, to General Headquarters. Our project to have an armed force permanently in the field received covering sanction and full approval. It was about this time that the enemy intensified their cruel and heartless campaign of reprisals on non-combatants. Many of our sympathisers and relatives began to suffer the dire hardships of terrorism.

About an hour after the Bruree attack a helpless youth in a delicate state of health was murdered in the village of Bruree by a British officer, and an abortive attempt was made by enemy forces to blow up Crowley's drapery shop and family residence in Ballylanders. It was destroyed by them at a later date. Those wanton acts appalled us, but our men did not waver in our objective. Martial law was declared over the district, practically covering the whole Brigade area.

We thereupon crossed the border into County Cork and settled at Ballinlough near Ballindangan to await developments. While there, we learned that a party of Black and Tans and military patrolled every day from Kildorrery to Rockmills, and returned by the banks of the Funcheon river, causing considerable annoyance to the local residents.

We were outside our own Brigade area but this patrol was a danger to us; and, for safety, I decided to take the initiative and attack if possible. The Cork Brigade unit concerned had tried, a week or so previously, to take this patrol, but by some miscalculation, they were surprised themselves instead of surprising the enemy, and compelled to retreat. This attempt had given warning to the enemy, so that they were on the alert, and they had limited their travelling to only a short distance away from their base.

On the 7th August, 1920, we set out from Ballinlough, crossed over the Funcheon near Ballyannaghan, and arrived at 7.30 a.m. to a position on the Kildorrery-Meadestown road, at a distance of over 200 yards from the village. We had with us five men of the local Battalion, including Tom Barry, the Battalion Commandant. (This Tom Barry referred to is not the Tom Barry of West Cork). These men were all trusted friends, and in addition to their local knowledge, they could be depended on to give a good account of themselves in any fight. We also had a trained hospital nurse, Miss O'Sullivan, who accompanied us from East Limerick to which she was then attached. She proceeded to fix up an improvised dressing station in the cottage of an old couple named Collins, who were both about 85 years of age.

Mrs. Collins was preparing tea for her husband, who was still in bed when we arrived. The old man, on hearing that the I.R.A. had come to his house, immediately got up and cheered for joy. He ordered his wife to seek the protection of a neighbouring house some distance away, saying: "This is no place for women". He stoutly refused to leave himself, as he was glad of the opportunity of being present. He invoked the memory of Peter O'Neill Crowley, who was killed in action in Kilclooney wood, about three miles away, while fighting against the British forces in 1867. We had

learned a lesson of caution from Bruree and knew that the English forces would not respect age or infirmity, and so as old Collins refused to seek shelter elsewhere he was induced to remain within the barred door of his own cottage.

Then began hours of patient waiting. A farmer and his men arrived to engage in hay-making in the field where the larger number of our men had taken up positions. I ordered them to continue their work as if nothing unusual was about to happen. They loyally did so, but appeared to get through the hay-making very rapidly, as, in two hours they had spread out an area of about two acres of hay and were by then at the other side of the field. It would be then about 11 a.m.

We were informed by a messenger from the village that, at about 10.30 a.m., the Black and Tans in the village of Kildorrery, having walked down the main street dragging a tricolour in the gutter, returned to their barracks and, after a while proceeded on their patrol in the direction of Meadestown and Rockmills.

The patrol, which was on foot, was about to return when within a few yards of our position, but after some discussion, they decided to carry on a bit further. We could hear their conversation which was not edifying, and the moment for action had arrived. The whistle was blown, and I demanded surrender, informing them that they were surrounded on all sides and that there was no chance of escape. They refused to surrender, and fell into positions on both sides of the road, whereupon a short and sharp engagement ensued which resulted after a few minutes in our victory, and we had suffered no casualties. Of the eight members of the patrol - six Black and Tans and two old R.I.C. men - all were wounded, two fatally.

Old Mr. Collins was then allowed out to view the scene. He had cheered in his house while the fight was on. He now cheered for us, and threw his hat into the air. It lodged on the top of a hawthorn bush, and was retrieved by a Volunteer.

Notwithstanding the great danger we were in, we deemed it our duty to remain with the wounded. From our small number - there were about 17 of us - we threw out guards to protect the position while the nurse attended to the enemy wounded. Everything possible was done for their comfort and every effort that circumstances permitted was made to save their lives. The two men already mentioned, who were members of the old R. I. C., were only slightly wounded, and it was decided that they should be kept prisoners for a time, provision having been made for transporting the others back to their barracks. An old feather mattress was requisitioned and put into a cart to take those who were badly wounded.

The Column then proceeded with their two prisoners in the direction of Meadestown. We housed the prisoners in a labourer's cottage, and warned them not to leave for a specified time (some hours) as, owing to their knowledge of that countryside, they would be very useful to the enemy if allowed immediate liberty.

It was in this cottage that an unfortunate man named O'Donnell, a Sinn Féiner, but a non-combatant, was murdered by Black and Tans in the following November.

The wounded Black and Tans, having spent some considerable time in the hospital, had by that time returned to the Kildorrery area, and two of them, Englishmen, went to the cottage where the R. I. C. men had been imprisoned. A labourer, an unmarried man, who was tenant of the cottage, suspecting that they were up to some mischief, tripped one

man into the fire when the other had gone into the bedroom, and having achieved this object, the labourer made away and escaped without molestation. The man named O'Donnell who was staying in the house instead of being at his own home was shot dead by the Black and Tan who went into the bedroom.

At the time of the Kildorrery ambush there were thousands of British military available in the neighbourhood, at Kilworth Camp, Mitchelstown, Fermoy, Ballywonaire and Buttevant, all of which centres were only a few miles distant. We therefore could not delay long in the neighbourhood after the fight.

We took eight rifles and 280 rounds of ammunition. Being disappointed at the small quantity of ammunition secured in this encounter, I demanded an explanation from the officer in charge of the patrol as to the meagreness of the supply, as I had expected that we should have got nearly as much as we had taken at Emly. I was informed that they had received instructions to carry a more limited quantity of ammunition when on patrol.

Having finished our work there we proceeded in the direction of Shanballymore and Castletownroche. We were in for a hard time as rain fell in torrents and we were all wet through. Nurse O'Sullivan bore this harship in a fine spirit, as did all the men. At Annagrove a large patrol of about eight police and sixty soldiers came from Castletownroche, and the waving of a handkerchief by a lady from the window of a labourer's cottage saved us from running right into this patrol, as they were hidden from our view by a wall at Annagrove demesne.

We spent the night in the neighbourhood of

Ballyveelick and Skinakilla, at the home of Dan Joe O'Sullivan. O'Sullivan was himself a Volunteer of sterling qualities and we made his home our headquarters. We evaded the enemy, who, all through the afternoon, that night and the following day, scoured the whole country in search of us. Having rested we marched over the hills through Glenanaar, made famous by Canon Sheehan, only a short distance from Ballyvonaire Camp, and finally arrived at Glenroe, County Limerick, where we were warmly received by Father Boh Ambrose, the parish priest. Here a couple of days later we had a slight skirmish with the enemy, who had come from Kilfinane. We were not settled in position to attack, and while we were assembling for this purpose they got away, although a few shots were exchanged.

During September and October we made many attempts to make contacts with the enemy forces, but they had by then become very cautious.

In case it is not already clear, the Kildorrery ambush took place on or about 7th August, 1920.

We had an intensive course of training in August, 1920. At that time General Headquarters recommended all Brigades to start Flying Columns similar to ours. In September the recommendation became an order, and we had a Brigade Council meeting in the neighbourhood of Bruff, Brigadier-Commandant Wall presiding. Captain Ernie O'Malley attended as an organiser from General Headquarters, and delivered the order to us from G.H.Q. that we were to start a Flying Column, and that I having had experience of this type of fighting was to be in charge. It seemed rather amusing to all of us to be instructed to bring into being a unit of our organisation which had already existed for three months, but such is the docility produced by military discipline that there was only

wholehearted acquiescence.

On 10th November, 1920, we took up a position at the village of Grange on the Limerick-Bruff road, expecting a convoy of enemy transport of which we had received information that it was likely to pass that way. After several hours waiting, the enemy approached, but in the opposite direction to that which we expected them. Unfortunately a shot was fired prematurely and probably accidentally by one of our men, and this precipitated the fight, much to our disadvantage in the position we occupied. The British were supported by an armoured car. I had a very poor knowledge of the district, and decided to withdraw. We were hotly pursued by the enemy, but we returned their fire and retired in good order. We had one wounded, but in the circumstances were unable to calculate the enemy casualties. I was subsequently informed that they had five wounded.

This operation over, we moved to the neighbourhood of Ballycahill, Elton. We took our wounded man, Volunteer Burke, to Cork city and secured accommodation for him in a private nursing home.

On 10th December, 1920, I was in the neighbourhood of Garryspillane, near Knocklong. This time I had only ten men. I learned that a patrol was abroad in the district, and we lay in wait for it at a place known as the Cross of the Tree. I had been over the position earlier alone and while I was there a British military cycling patrol came along. The patrol was about eight strong. I was unable to do anything as I had no men, and a shot or any other disturbance would have raised the alarm. Although it seemed rather hopeless when this patrol went by, we took up position in the hope that it was not the patrol we were expecting. The place

was known as the Cross of the Tree. No other patrol came, but a party of lorries arrived. There were three lorries; one came into the line of fire and was attacked. The others were some distance away, and, having heard the firing, the occupants got into the field and attacked our right flank. As a rather strange coincidence, an armoured car and another lorry came from the opposite direction, and we were forced to withdraw.

We had one wounded - Volunteer John Riordan from Kilfinane. His wound proved fatal. This was our first fatal casualty in open fighting as apart from the attacks on barracks.

On 16th December, 1920, we left Shrove, near Kilbeheny, a slope on the Galtee Mountains, where we had been resting, and proceeded to Glenacurrane, about two and a half miles from Mitchelstown on the Limerick side. We were joined by Commandant Tom Barry and his men from the Cork area. This Commandant Barry must not be confused with the other Commandant Tom Barry from West Cork. We were expecting a party of military which acted as a convoy for the mails from Fermoy to Tipperary. We took up position on both sides of the glen. Commandant Barry and Tomás Malone, then known as Seán Ford, arranged the men in suitable positions. A tree was almost severed at its base in readiness for felling across the road.

All arrangements having been made, I travelled over the area and found everything satisfactory. The position appeared to be impregnable from our point of view.

It so happened that a large house party was being held by General Franks, a retired British Army Officer residing near Knocklong, and many civilians passed through our lines.

during the period of waiting. They used various modes of conveyance, including motor cars, pony carts and bicycles. They were all taken and made prisoners temporarily, for their own safety, in the house of a farmer named Morgan O'Brien, about 150 yards away from the public road. A Church of Ireland clergyman, his wife, baby and a lady friend, were amongst the number. This presented a problem to me as I did not like the responsibility of interfering with the movements of a clergyman. I informed him that we were expecting a fight, that it was dangerous to be on the road, and that I considered it advisable for him to take shelter and the protection of our force. He resented this and was horrified at the idea of our attacking the British military who would not be aware of our presence and would be shot down without warning. I informed him that he was labouring under a misapprehension of our methods, that the enemy would be first called upon to surrender and given the opportunity of handing over their arms and vehicles without danger to their lives. He argued that I expected the impossible, that these men were acting under orders and were paid to do their duty. I replied that we also were acting under orders and were bound to carry out our duties although we were not paid. To add point to my argument I proposed to him that he having a bicycle could act as an intermediary and go quickly into Mitchelstown, inform the enemy of our presence, sixty men, and offer the military my challenge to have sixty of their men sent out to fight us. He treated this as a joke and said they would not consider it, and when I suggested that what they would do in such circumstances would be to send messages to Kilworth Camp, Fermoy, Kilmallock, Tipperary and Cahir, where they had thousands of men, and would, as soon as possible, surround the hills, closing in ^{on/} our position, and we would

not know of their presence until they had opened fire. My proposal was, of course, not made as a serious proposition, but merely to show the fallacy of his argument. He abandoned the idea of remonstrating with me, and requested that if any lives were in danger on the enemy side I would allow him to attend to their religious needs. As most of these men would probably be of his religion I agreed to inform him if his services were likely to be required, but remarked that I thought some of our men were also of his religion and asked him would he do likewise for them if they required his assistance. He consented without demur.

Having left the reverend gentleman in the care of the custodian of the civilian prisoners, we awaited the approach of the enemy, and in a short time two lorries with twenty men of the Lincolnshire Regiment stationed in Tipperary came along. They were called on to surrender but refused to do so. A tree had been felled across the road, and they were unable to advance. They tried to reverse, but were caught by our fire in the rear. The fight lasted only a short time, several being wounded, four fatally, and the enemy surrendered. I had the clergyman informed, He came down to the bloody scene and offered to give consolation to one man who appeared to be dying. After repeated requests to the dying soldier to know if there was anything he could do for him towards giving consolation on going to meet his Maker, the soldier looked up and said, "Don't you worry, old chap, I'll be all-right".

In this case we took all the rifles and about three hundred rounds of ammunition.

Amongst the captured booty was a large consignment of mails for the British military in Tipperary. The letters

were all censored by us and both the letters and parcels posted to their destinations later, in time to arrive for Christmas. In the mails were found twelve medals issued, as I have since learned by the regimental headquarters to officers for conspicuous gallantry in Ireland. I took one which had been awarded to Lieutenant L. B. Sheppard Faulkner for gallant conduct in Ireland on 17th September, 1920. This and other souvenirs I have recently handed over to the National Museum in Dublin.

We rendered what first aid was possible to the wounded, took them about a mile away to Athmaslings Cross and put them into a cottage. I explained to the clergyman that the residents of the house had no concern in the fight, that they were accepting these men as an act of charity, and that I was worried lest their home might be destroyed as a result of their action. He assured me that he would do his utmost to prevent such a reprisal. This house was not interfered with afterwards.

From there we went to Knockades, having requisitioned a motor car to take the large batch of mails, and sat down to the long and tedious work of censorship. There were many Christmas presents, some value for about ten shillings, a few containing packets of Woodbines and similar small presents. Many hopes were expressed that the writers' friends of the expeditionary forces would escape the vengeance of the "Shinners". This was the name used by Britons for Sinn Féiners at the time.

A couple of days before Christmas the Column demobilised for the holidays, but they were advised not to go to their respective homes. I, accompanied by Tomás Malone, went by train to Cork city on 23rd December. We stayed in Douglas Street with Séamus Malone and my

brother Dónal. Dónal had participated in the 1916 Rebellion, had spent some time in America, returned, and for some years took to a sea-faring life. Our purpose in going to Cork was to get Volunteer W. Burke, who had been wounded at Grange, out of the nursing home. Having done this, we met Dónal and visited his ship, the "Eblana", which was moored at the quayside. He had a quantity of rifle ammunition in his locker which he gave us. He had brought it from Liverpool. Tomás Malone and I had our pockets crammed with ammunition on leaving the ship.

Dónal introduced me to the Captain of the ship in a tavern near Grattan's Bridge, saying he had shown us over the ship. Having discussed the vessel for some time, the four of us left and crossed over Grattan Bridge, Burke and I leading the way, Tom's and Dónal following. A patrol of Black and Tans came up from Union Quay Barracks and met us on the bridge. They stared at us, but fortunately they passed us by. I remarked to Burke that they seemed to have been contemplating holding us up. The pair that followed, however, had not the same luck. Tomás wore leggings, riding breeches and a trench coat, and this probably aroused suspicion. Dónal and he were held up, and when the Black and Tans were about to search Tomás he bolted. Our first intimation of this was when bullets whizzed past us and struck the walls of the corner house in front. Burke's wound was still tender, and he was unable to run. We turned to the left, and walked quietly down the quayside. Malone was pursued. He got into a hackney car, but the jarvey got confused and refused to drive. He was captured in a tenement house, and the ammunition was found on him.

Dónal escaped the search, and in the confusion walked quietly back to the tavern.

Tomás Malone was a very serious loss to the Column. He was sent to Spike Island, from where he escaped about the time of the Truce. We went back to Douglas Street. We had a narrow escape on this street, but I am not quite sure if it was on that particular day. The whole street was being searched, but we went into the backyards, climbed over several walls and got out through another house. Mrs. Collins who had a drapery shop took charge of our guns and handed them over to us afterwards. We left without our Christmas dinner.

Seamus Malone came with us to East Limerick, as his position in Cork was likely to become untenable after the incident.

I walked out of Cork accompanied by Mrs. Malone, carrying one of the babies in my arms. We were met outside the city by a jarvey on an outside car, and drove to friends of mine in Carrignavar without incident.

On Saturday, 1st January, 1921, Volunteers David Tobin and Thomas Murphy, who were amongst the original members of the Flying Column, were surprised in Tobin's house in Ballinlackan, Ballylanders. They made for the hill above the house but they were outflanked. Murphy, who was wounded, ran a long distance, about half a mile, until he fell into a quarry. He was taken by the enemy to a nearby cottage, where he was detained. Tobin was shot a short distance from his own home. His body was not found that night. Neighbours and his mother searched all through the night but did not find him. The enemy searched with bloodhounds. On Sunday morning they found him. On hearing the news his brother, Ned Tobin, with Tom Howard and myself, cycled to Ballinlackan from Kilclooney. When near Tobin's house we had to dismount to make way for lorries of Black and Tans

and military, and as the second lorry passed we noticed that Tobin's body was hanging over the side of it. Up till then we had not known he had been shot dead. This was a terrible shock to his family. His brother was in the Column from the beginning, and his mother, a widow, and his sister were among the heroines of that time.

These two Volunteers were a very serious loss to us as they were then regarded as veterans.

The Flying Column had assumed larger proportions after the fall of the year 1920, and it was necessary to spread its activities throughout the whole Brigade area.

On the suggestion of Brigadier-Commandant Wall I proceeded to the neighbourhood of Kiltelly and contacted Commandant Liam Hayes, later Major General of the National Army, who retired from the position of Adjutant General some time ago. We took up position at Ballinlough, near Hospital, and having waited for some hours we were disappointed in capturing only one British soldier who was cycling with unimportant dispatches from Pallas to Hospital. He pleaded that he was a Welshman and not an Englishman. He cursed the English nations and said that thousands of Welsh coal miners were then on strike against conditions imposed by their British taskmasters. His despatches consisted of private letters to enemy personnel in the town of Hospital. On perusing these documents I found the contents of an indecent nature, of no military importance, and accordingly had them destroyed. We released the prisoner but kept his bicycle.

Somewhat later in the month of September we had a very serious loss. Tadhg Crowley of Ballylanders, who was Adjutant of the Column, was away for a few days. On his

return, while staying in the house of Mrs. Burke, a couple of miles from Kilmallock, with Commandant Michael Scanlon, O/C. of the local Battalion having headquarters at Kilmallock, they were surprised at night and arrested. The house was familiarly known to us at the time as "the Dardanelles". It was very far in off the road in the fields and difficult of access. The prisoners were taken to Limerick and on the following day at William Street, Limerick, Commandant Scanlon endeavoured to escape. Although he was handcuffed and unarmed, he was fired on and fatally wounded by his captors. Crowley's imprisonment and Scanlon's death were both very serious losses to us.

We had adopted a method of recruitment for the Column by sending to each Battalion area for one or two men as they were required, the selection being left to the Battalion Commandant. Replacements were sometimes necessary. Some men remained with the Column from its inception to the Truce; others would remain for two months or so and would be released to rest or to perform important military functions with their own units.

About early October, 1920, I was staying in Kearneys in Martinstown, where Con Kearney was O/C. of the district. This may be regarded as the first billeting area occupied by the Column from early July. Later we were able to get accommodation with full confidence throughout the whole of East Limerick, the people anxiously awaiting our arrival and making elaborate preparations for us.

At this time I was visited by Commandant Nicholas O'Dwyer, the Brigade Engineer, who informed me that I had been appointed Vice-Brigadier. I expressed surprise, but Commandant O'Dwyer told me that it was necessary. I was proud of the honour, of course, but it added to my responsibility.

We continued our training. At night the men engaged in the study of Irish, Irish history and military tactics, and generally whiled away the long winter nights.

We found that the enemy was pressing hard on us. The area we operated over was flat country, and our retreat for anything like a rest was towards the Galtee Mountains. We could only do this at intervals, as there was the question of maintenance by the people, and we had to spread the burden as evenly as possible.

We had some light skirmishes with the enemy, including one at Kiltteely, where I, with five other men, was surprised on leaving Connolly's house, where I had been engaged drafting some propaganda. We had our Ford car, and had just got it on the road ready to start when two lorries of British military and a private car containing officers arrived on the scene. We had to abandon the car and take to the open country. We were poorly armed and had little ammunition, but we kept the enemy at a safe distance by our fire. Some workmen who were in the vicinity took up their coats and ran away in the same direction. We went over a rise in the ground, and there we divided from the civilians and were lost to the enemy. They pursued the civilians instead of us, and, having caught them, beat them up badly. We got on to another public road, commandeered a horse and trap, and drove a distance from the danger area, where we abandoned the vehicle, giving it in charge to a local farmer so that it could be collected by the owner. We went by a circuitous route and joined up with our main body.

About 1st February, 1921, Commandant Richard O'Connell of Caherconlish got in touch with us in Kiltteely, and informed us that two lorries of Black and Tans were

accustomed to travel from Pallas to Caherconlish and back. On the night of February 2nd we marched from Martynstown to Kiltteely, a distance of a few miles. We slept for a couple of hours, and at three o'clock on 3rd February we assembled and marched to Drumkeane, about five miles away. We settled down in a hay barn in the centre of a field, sent out scouts, and slept soundly on the damp old hay. At twelve o'clock we got news that the lorries had gone to Caherconlish. I divided the Column into sections, taking up positions on both sides of the road. At the point selected the road branched into two, one road going to Pallas, the other to Bruff. We blocked both roads, the one to Pallas with two horse carts. A woman came along driving a donkey and cart containing a bag of flour. We requested her to take shelter in a house. We then unharnessed the donkey, putting it into the farmyard, and used the cart to help in blocking the road. Unfortunately we forgot to remove the flour. At 2.30 p.m. the two lorries containing Black and Tans came along. We waited until they were within our cordon. We called on them to halt, and opened fire. The first lorry driver was unable to see the road blocks as they were hidden from his view. He attempted at first to go towards Pallas, but when he got to a point where he could see round the bend, he saw the road block and endeavoured to change to the other road. He struck the wall of an old building, then struck the donkey cart, bursting the flour bag, and throwing up a cloud of white dust. All in the lorry were thrown out. They were all fatally wounded, with the exception of the District Inspector who was in charge and who escaped and ran away. He was in civilian clothing. I endeavoured to get him halted, but he was travelling at a very fast pace. As I had not seen him come off the lorry I feared at the

time that he was a local civilian and did not have him fired on. The other lorry stopped about the centre of our position. The men got out and fought. The driver was already fatally wounded. The others were called on to surrender, but refused. They all succumbed to their wounds. There were thirteen altogether in the enemy party, eleven of whom were killed, the District Inspector and another having got away. We had only one casualty, Liam Hayes, who had a finger shot off.

As a result of this operation there were ten houses burned as a reprisal, and non-combatants suffered dire hardships.

On 6th February, 1921, military rounded up civilians at Kiltteely and brought them to the house of Commandant Hayes, whose mother was in a delicate state of health, being convalescing from a serious illness. They ordered the furniture to be piled up on the floor, and set it on fire. The house was completely destroyed, Liam Hayes himself being then suffering from the wound which he got in the Drumkeen ambush.

On 8th February a small detachment of the Column, about ten men, were resting in the neighbourhood of Martinstown near Kilfinane. I was at the time at Mrs. Burke's engaged in a discussion with the Chaplain, Reverend D.R. McCarthy, now deceased. An aeroplane came flying rather low over the area. Our men, who were in charge of Commandant J. McCarthy of Kilfinane, fired on the plane, and gave chase along the direction in which it was flying. After circling round for some time the plane came down, and it was seen that a number of bullet holes were in the petrol tank. It was some distance away and the pilot succeeded in escaping to Kilfinane to get men from the R. I. C. Barracks to guard the

plane. It was evident that they did not know that they had been fired on, but I heard the firing.

After Father Dick McCarthy had hastily heard my Confession, I proceeded to the scene of activities to find the plane burned and the observer a prisoner. We took him with us to a place above Kilmallock, near Ballingaddy. Our prisoner, the observer, expressed surprise at our military discipline and at our good service rifles. He explained they had been flying from Oranmore to Fermoy. On the following day planes from the Air Squadron in Fermoy soared over the area and dropped leaflets stating that unless Flying Officer McKay was released within thirty-six hours they would burn four houses in Kilfinane and four in Kilmallock. They had already burned down the home of David Clancy of Cush, leaving his two sisters to set up housekeeping in an outhouse.

I wrote to the O/C. of the Air Squadron and informed him that Flying Officer McKay would already have been set at liberty were it not for the threat, but that now he would be kept indefinitely. Flying Officer McKay wrote to the O/C. at Fermoy to say that he was being kindly treated by the cottiers where he stayed, who, he understood, had no option but to keep him, and that he would deplore any drastic action against them. There were no burnings. We found our prisoner a very likeable person, fairly well educated for an Englishman, and felt rather sorry at his departure.

The aeroplane was a De Havilland and was then value for £3,000. I have recently handed over to the National Museum the propellor of this machine which escaped the fire owing to the direction of the wind.

Shortly before Easter Week, 1921, I was speaking to Brigadier Wall and he informed me that General Michael Collins at General Headquarters, whom he affectionately referred to as

"the big fella", had expressed a desire that we should go to the West Limerick area. Accordingly we set out on a long march and settled down on the first night in Kilfinney in the Groom area. Having rested here for a couple of days we contacted the West Limerick Brigade, marched to Newbridge and were joined by the West Limerick Flying Column, commanded by Seán Finn. We moved to the vicinity of Athea and found that a lorry belonging to the enemy had broken down on the road through Athea bog. We set out for the place and found that the soldiers guarding the lorry had gone into a labourer's cottage. We had this almost surrounded. It was slow work as the ground was flat and the cover poor. We were surprised to find an armoured car and a number of lorries, carrying eighteen men, coming to the enemy's relief. We were reluctantly compelled to withdraw, which we did in good order and unnoticed by the enemy.

At night we mobilised for our long march to Ballyhahill near Foynes. Father Dick was curate in this parish. Rain came down in torrents during our march and we were all thoroughly drenched. It was about 4 a.m. when we arrived.

Having had supper and made arrangements for billeting, I, accompanied by Brigade Commandant Seán Finn, Officer Commanding West Limerick Brigade, Séamus Colbert, Brigade Quartermaster, a brother of Con Colbert executed in 1916, and Volunteer Séamus Finn of the East Limerick Brigade, proceeded to the home of Mr. Danaher of Woodlawn, between Ballyhahill and Loughill. I did not know this district, and had only seen it in the darkness for the first time. It was eight o'clock in the morning when we arrived. We were offered tea but we declined it, and went to bed and slept soundly.

At about three o'clock in the afternoon Mr. Danaher called us and said that he had heard shooting some distance away for the past half hour or so, and that he thought it was coming nearer. We dressed hastily and left the house. We proceeded in the direction of another house where we had heard the firing. We located three East Limerick men who were leaving the house and crossing over a freshly tilled corn field. Brigadier Finn went up to the top of this field and found that the men were retreating from the fire of one enemy party towards the line of another party of the enemy who were waiting in ambush for them. On receiving this report I blew an arranged signal of two whistles, which I carried. They gave out sounds which were well known to our troops. On hearing the signal the three men, Volunteers Tom Howard, Quan, and Michael Walsh, all of East Limerick, changed their direction and joined up with us. They were heavily fired on but escaped. A running fight took place. The enemy pressed hard and got close on us. We resisted firmly but they were in a much stronger position than we were, being in all about ten to one. They had lorries. The battle ground was between two public roads, and the enemy were able to utilise their transport with effect in conveying men along the road to cut off our retreat.

The battle had raged for about half an hour when Volunteer Quan was shot through the neck, the bullet making its exit between his teeth and through his cheek at the other side. Volunteer Quan, who was from Redchair, Ballyorgan, exhorted us to fight on and allow him to fall into the hands of the enemy, as he could fight no more and would be only an encumbrance to us. We could not agree, and roused him as well as possible and endeavoured to guard his retreat.

The fight continued. It was one for all and all for one. The enemy repeatedly demanded surrender, but we would not do so. The battle ground was not in our favour, there being very bad cover. We were being driven away from our main body of East and West Limerick Flying Columns. Our men fought bravely against terrific odds in the hope, which unfortunately did not materialise, that the Brigade Flying Column in the neighbourhood of Ballynahill village would come to our assistance. I had sent a young boy with a message, but he was either intercepted or was unable to proceed owing to the firing.

When the battle had proceeded for over two hours Brigadier Commandant Seán Finn fell, mortally wounded, his hands went up, his rifle whirled straight into the air, and I caught his words, which are as clear to-day as at the moment of utterance - "Goodbye lads. Carry on. I am done". He fell into the field and his rifle fell beside him. A young life quickly gone from the cause he loved. At the same time a Black and Tan stepped on the fence with the evident intention of approaching the dying man but was shot down by Volunteer Tom Howard, who coolly remarked "I have him shot, boss". He very often addressed me thus.

There is usually a crucial moment in every protracted battle which calls for brave deeds and quick action. Volunteer Séamus Finn of the East Limerick Flying Column, a boy of eighteen years, was lying with me at my right. He complained that his ammunition had run out. It was a terrible situation. One man dead, one wounded, and now one unarmed. In fact there were two unarmed, as one rifle had jammed, so that its owner was out of action. In desperation I gave the order to young Finn to get the rifle from the wounded Brigadier, Seán Finn. The opposing forces were then

only forty yards apart, our wounded officer being midway between. Those of us who had remained effective kept up a fusillade of fire against the enemy, while young Finn rushed forward against a blaze of intense but obviously nervous rifle fire and brought away the rifle and ammunition from our dead comrade. He endeavoured to take a pistol from the Brigadier's holster, but, owing to the intensity of the firing, he was compelled to abandon it. His escape was amazing. The land here was closely grazed pasture, and the trail of the bullets where they skimmed along could be traced for a considerable time afterwards.

There was now a distinct easing of the pressure of the enemy forces, but the fight continued. As already stated, they had used the two roads in an endeavour to cut off our retreat, and Black and Tans were seen approaching from the opposite direction. Our retreat seemed to be effectively cut off, and for a moment, something like dismay fell on our little band. At the double and with rifles at the ready we rushed towards this new front, but on reaching the centre of a high fence, a hedge with furze bushes, we suddenly changed our direction and wheeled around towards the scene of death. This, of course, was a manoeuvre which I adopted to outwit the enemy. Taking cover behind a lis or rath which was at one corner of the field, we prayed fervently and awaited developments, having no hope but the confidence gained by trust in God. In a very short time a dense fog came down over the landscape and closed over our position. We welcomed it as it crept up from the shores of the lordly Shannon, bringing with it its blessed twilight. The enemy had either been too nervous to approach or had failed to locate us. Jim Colbert looked over the fence and observed a local farmer surveying the scene. It was decided to seek an interview, and we learned that the enemy had withdrawn from that quarter.

On Colbert's return, our little worn-out force, parched with thirst after the trying ordeal, withdrew from the field to place ourselves in the hands of a hospitable farmer who came out from his house with welcome refreshments, including a pail of new milk. We had just settled down at the back of a fence to partake of this refreshment when we heard whistles being blown, and found that the enemy were within one hundred yards of us collecting straggling members of their forces. We had to move off a distance of a couple of hundred yards to another farmhouse, where we were served with hot tea, home-made bread and fresh eggs. We had a hearty meal while telling all our experiences and bemoaning our losses.

The good-natured farmer and his family told us of an attack on his house by the Black and Tans. They had fired several shots through the windows while the farmer and his family lay on the floor. Having received no reply to their fire, one ventured to the door and knocked. It was immediately opened by the farmer. The Black and Tans abused the farmer for sheltering the "Shinners". Angry words were exchanged on both sides, and were it not for the filthy language of the enemy it would have been amusing. They left without injuring anyone in the household. Then the farmer went into a room and found a web of rifle ammunition left behind by a Volunteer who had escaped from the house before it was attacked. We could see that the windows were riddled with bullet holes.

Volunteer Quan, the wounded man, bore his sufferings bravely. He lost an enormous quantity of blood, and it was impossible under the circumstances to render anything more than meagre first-aid. He was afterwards put under the care of the doctor, and is still hale and hearty.

Volunteer Finn was immediately promoted to the rank of 1st Lieutenant in recognition^{of/} his conspicuous bravery on the field, the promotion being afterwards confirmed by General Headquarters. When he was sent to me by his Battalion Commandant from the Ballylanders Company some months previously I refused to take him owing to his youth, as he looked a mere stripling schoolboy. I found him afterwards with some friends of his weeping at my refusal, and I relented. He has since died, and I am convinced that he got into poor health owing to the many hardships he went through. He was the chief breadwinner of a widowed mother and young family.

I cannot pass from this operation without paying a tribute to the bravery, generosity and anxiety of Mr. Danaher of Woodlawn, with his family on that day. In fact the people generally showed a wonderful spirit, and the heroism of the women was unsurpassable. There was a case of one woman who, when her house was attacked, coolly handed out his rifle and ammunition to a Volunteer who got out through a back window while bullets whizzed through the front windows. The homes in West Limerick were generally of a less prosperous type than we were accustomed to in East Limerick, but on both sides of the county the people had hearts of gold.

I sent a report of the operation to General Headquarters. It was published in "An t-Óglach", "The Catholic Bulletin" and in the "London Daily Herald".

After Ballynahill the Column moved back, with a view to returning at a later stage after some intensive training. For some time we had the Column divided into two sections, for tactical reasons. Now we had three sections.

Some time after our arrival in East Limerick we were joined by a column composed of men from Mid Limerick and Limerick city, in charge of Brigade Commandant Liam Ford, They stated they had come out to gain experience.

Our forces had now grown in dimensions, and we could easily have raised a thousand men or more if we had had the wherewithal to arm them.

There was an enemy patrol at Galbally which was causing much trouble as they harassed the civilian population. Age, infirmity or tender youth got no pity from them. We had watched for them from the slopes of the Galtee Mountains above Anglesboro for several days. Kilbeheny and Anglesboro had two excellent Companies of Volunteers. The parish had a good record of nationalism. Here was born John O'Mahony, the Fenian leader, and Commandant General Liam Lynch. I also had the honour of being born in and nurtured within the bosom of this parish, as also had my brother, Dónal O'Hannigan, who fought in 1916.

On 1st May, 1921, the three combined Columns were in the neighbourhood of Knockadea, Tully and Shraharlia. We got word that the Galbally patrol had gone to Kildorrery. The Column was mobilising. Commandant Liam Hayes, who had now recovered from his injury, led his section across Shraharlia Bridge. When about on the centre of the bridge they were surprised and attacked by enemy personnel who arrived in four or five lorries. Some of them got into John Roman's farmyard and were trapped. Four were killed, and Volunteer Casey from Ballybricken, all from the Mid-Limerick Brigade, was taken prisoner. He was court-martialled and executed on the following day. His execution was the subject of questions in the British House of Commons.

That night we marched to the neighbourhood of Knocklong through the fields, a distance of about twelve miles. Unfortunately we narrowly missed attacking the Galbally patrol on our way, as they passed on bicycles a short while before we got on to the public road. I divided up the men, keeping the different units together as much as possible. The Limerick section were sent to Mitchelstown area. They were in each case accompanied by a small number of East Limerick men. Another party went to Lackelly, which is near the Tipperary border, Emly being in the immediate neighbourhood. About midday I was in a shop in Knocklong and got word that firing was heard at Lackelly. I immediately went by the shortest route possible, being guided across the fields by Mr. David Byrne, a local victualler. I found on arrival that our men had been surprised by the Galbally patrol; four were shot dead and some local Volunteers were made prisoners. Our men got no chance. They were fired on with their backs turned, and did not get the option of surrender. The attacking party were the Galbally patrol. I found that some of our men were going across the railway line. I met Liam Fraher, afterwards a Commandant in the Defence Forces, and John Joe O'Brien of Galbally, who firmly supported me in developing a counter attack. There were also some West Limerick Volunteers who proved good fighters on that occasion.

The first result of our counter attack was to release the prisoners captured by the enemy and to recover the dead bodies. We endeavoured to encircle the enemy, but as it was an open plain and their numbers were greater than ours, while they also had the best available cover, we were unable to surround them. We drove them into two houses. I had already sent a despatch to Mitchelstown for reinforcements, with detailed instructions including the forming of an encircling

movement in Scarteen Demesne. As an alternative to holding them we had to drive the enemy in a certain direction, where they would fall into the hands of our reinforcements.

The fight continued. Our ammunition was running low. The battle having lasted for about five hours we found that for some little while we had got no response to our fire. We closed in and found that the enemy had escaped, but they had gone in the desired direction. They were met by our reinforcements, but unfortunately they got away. We captured fifteen bicycles. The enemy in their bulletin admitted having two wounded, one seriously. That night we had all the roads blocked for a radius of several miles. On this occasion we had four fatally wounded, having had four on the previous day also. I shall give the full Christian and surnames of the casualties at a later stage.

(Men of mid-Limerick Column killed at Shraherly 1st May '21: Captain Paddy Stair, James Horan, Tim Hennessy; Vol. Casey was taken prisoner and executed in Cork next morning. Killed at Lackelly on 2nd May '21: Lieut. Jim Frahill and Pat Ryan of mid-Limerick and Wm. Riordan and Tom Howard of East Limerick).

Volunteer Tom Howard was one of the men killed at Lackelly. He was a member of the East Limerick Flying Column from its formation. He, as well as the others, was a terrible loss to us. In addition to his fighting qualities, his store of wit and humour was a tonic to the Column.

We took the dead bodies away to Mohane Cross, and the following evening, enshrouded in sheets, they were buried in the corner of a pasture field, the local parish priest, Father McGrath of the parish of Herbertstown, attending. Some days later they were coffined and interred in Herbertstown graveyard.

The Column then proceeded to the neighbourhood of Kiltelly, and on Wednesday one of our outposts was attacked and Michael O'Callaghan of Emly was slightly wounded and taken prisoner.

A short time previously the 2nd Southern Division was formed, the East Limerick Brigade being one of its units. A Divisional meeting was called by the O/C. at Donoughill, and Brigade Commandant Seán Wall and I were summoned to attend.

On Thursday we took with us a small party and proceeded to the neighbourhood of Annacarty in County Tipperary. It was late at night when we arrived. We found the Volunteer Organisation here was run in a rather slipshod manner. It appeared that all the officers in the local Company were away from home. We decided to divide our party into two sections and have them billeted in two houses about half a mile distant from one another. It was about eight o'clock in the morning when we got to bed. The instructions were to await a despatch at this point which would arrive by twelve noon. Having got no despatch we remained in bed. We were up and out about 2 p.m. I went to the roadside and found a local farmer doing guard duty. I was looking through field glasses and he requested me to allow him to use them. On lifting them he saw a patrol of Black and Tans on the road only a few yards away from us.

I returned to the house and found John Joe O'Brien just going out, and sent him back. I informed our party of the position and ordered the defence of the house. I asked Brigade Commandant Wall to take cover, but while I was going into the room to get my gun he was induced by the owner of the house to leave, and had only gone twenty

yards or so distant when he was captured. This changed the situation, as my whole thoughts turned to rescue. He was so important to us that I thought any efforts were worth while trying. I ordered a volley to be fired at the enemy in the hope that they might release him in the excitement, but they held him and got him quickly under cover.

Meanwhile we got out into the open and a running fight took place. We were heavily outnumbered. The last that was seen of Brigadier Wall was when he was on the road being held by a Black and Tan. John Joe O'Brien fired from the centre of the road and mortally wounded Sergeant Kingston. It was a coincidence that this Sergeant on a previous occasion had severely punished John Joe's brother, Willie P. O'Brien, when the latter was a prisoner in his hands. The Brigadier was pulled away to the side of the road, and was at that time hurt. The enemy got away. We had the impression that they had taken him with them and were not aware that they had killed him. The Black and Tans had a shotgun. We had none, and it was by such a weapon that he met his death.

We crossed the fields, to be met by the other section of our party who were coming to our assistance, but unfortunately, although they came as soon as possible, they were then too late. This and Lackelly could easily have turned out otherwise, but the fortunes of war are precarious.

On leaving this place, a despatch rider arrived with a despatch from the Divisional Officer Commanding, stating the place and time of meeting. It was then 2.30. I sent a reply informing him of what had happened and stating that we were returning to East Limerick.

We had had a hard week, fighting five days out of seven, and we had received our greatest blow in the loss of Brigadier Wall. We were to see his genial smile and hear his merry laugh no more.

After the death of Brigadier Wall, I, being next in the line of succession, became Commandant of the Brigade on the orders of G.H.Q. We began an intensive course of training and adopted a method of harassing the enemy by forming small parties and sniping on every possible occasion. This proved very effective and was most disconcerting to the opposing forces.

After re-organisation I prepared a report for General Headquarters in contemplation of wider scope for our activities and extending the fight all over County Limerick. The ardour of our men and their desire to retaliate had reached boiling point. We were making elaborate preparations for bigger operations. Commandant Nicholas O'Dwyer was our Brigade Engineer in the earlier period of our activities, but he was requisitioned by the Dáil Authorities and attached to the Local Government Department in Dublin as he was evidently very valuable in that direction. I had made all arrangements for his recall for military operations, but the Truce came soon afterwards and terminated our further plans.

I found it impossible during the time at my disposal and the space available, to give an account of more than our major military operations. We had many minor activities throughout the area, and there were many incidents of fighting in which the Column were not actually engaged.

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In addition to military work we had to give assistance in maintaining law and order. We held military courts for the purpose of punishing offences of a criminal nature. These were, of course, few in number. There were minor and major thefts, all of which tended to detract from the main issue and had to be rigorously suppressed.

On one occasion I found that an actioneer from outside our area had advertised an auction of purebred farm stock, and, as the auctioneers in our Brigade were not able to hold public auctions owing to the fact that they could not and would not apply to the enemy authorities for the necessary permit, I became curious and attended the auction, accompanied by four of our men. I enquired from the auctioneer as to what was going on. He informed me that he was holding a public auction. I demanded to see his permit, which he produced. It was signed by the County Inspector of the Royal Irish Constabulary. I then informed the auctioneer that as a signatory he was not recognised by us, and that as he had no authority from Dáil Éireann I would not accept his permit as authentic. I declared his auction an illegal assembly, and ordered the sales already made to be cancelled and the deposits returned. I cautioned the auctioneer not to again appear in such circumstances, as he and all participating were liable to fines, but said that on this occasion I would overlook the matter as a first offence. The auctioneer and many others at the auction apologised profusely and promised not to offend again.

I would like to make personal mention of all those who fought and co-operated with me in Limerick, and to pay individual tribute, as far as I can remember, to a people whose patriotism and forbearance under severe hardship, suffering and trial stood a great test, but I must reserve my efforts.

WITNESS Rawlinson Col. SIGNED Donogh O'Sullivan
DATE 19th October 57