

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 633

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 633

Witness

Michael Joseph Ryan,
Lanesboro,
Co. Longford.

Identity.

Commandant 3rd Battalion Longford Brigade
1918-1921.

Subject.

3rd Battalion, Longford Brigade,
1917-1921.

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STATEMENT BY MICHAEL JOSEPH RYAN,
LANESBORO', CO. LONGFORD.

CONTENTS.

	<u>Page.</u>
Joining the Volunteers	1
North Roscommon Election, 1917	1
Organisation of the Longford Brigade.	3
The South Longford election.	4
The Clare election	5
The conscription crisis	6
The 3rd Battalion, Longford Brigade	7
Reorganisation of the Longford Brigade	8
The General Election, 1918	9
Shooting affray at Drumlish	9
The evacuation of R.I.C. barracks and the Sinn Fein Courts	10
The general raid for arms	10
The wounding of Ernie O'Malley	11
Taking of documents from D.I's. office	14
Raid on Longford Railway Station for ammunition.	14
The ambush at Gowlan	15
Attack on Ballymahon R.I.C. Barracks	16
Raid on Top Barracks, Longford	20
Mooneen ambush	22
Procuring documents from R.I.C. Barracks at Lanesboro	22
Attempts to capture Lanesboro Barracks	23
I get wounded in a mine explosion	26
Arrest and internment	26

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Statement by Michael Joseph Ryan

Lanesboro, Co. Longford.

I joined the Irish Volunteers early in 1917. I was in the Volunteers during the Plunkett elections. We formed a Company in Lanesboro. It was Patrick McCrann, Junior, P.M. Clyne and I who started the Company. Clyne was appointed Coy Commander. I was appointed 1st Lieutenant and McCrann was 2nd Lieutenant. We had about thirty men in the Company. We had a few Service Rifles; Long Lee Enfields they were, which formerly belonged to the National Volunteers. We had different instructors at various times. Those instructors had had experience in the British Army. Patrick Steadman and a man called Scally, who's other name I cannot now remember, and another man named Murphy were amongst the ones I recollect now. Those men were members of the Volunteers, but could not be called active as they were mostly old men.

I attended the convention for the selection of a candidate for the North Roscommon election. Father O'Flanagan attended this convention which was an Irish Parliamentary one. We were anxious that a decision on a candidate should be unanimous and that Count Plunkett should be the man. Father O'Flanagan delivered a great speech to the convention, but despite this the proposition was turned down flat. Father O'Flanagan then left the convention and we took him on our shoulders and carried him through the streets. This was in the town of Boyle, and this incident was really the start of that famous election in North Roscommon.

That evening we returned to Lanesboro and held a meeting at Curraghroe, which is just over the Shannon on the Roscommon side. Father O'Flanagan came with us to

this meeting. To attract the attention of the people to this meeting we set fire to the furze bushes and heather on the Mount Dillon Bog where Bórd na Móna now have erected a camp for turf production. Charlie Gunn presided at this meeting. He was actually a supporter of the Parliamentary Party and did not realise what he was presiding over. He was afterwards a good supporter of ours. The meeting was principally organised by Patrick McCrann, Senior, of Lanesboro, and Patrick Greene of Curraghroe, and was a tremendous success.

I travelled all over North Roscommon with my own car - cars were a rare commodity then. On these journeys I was accompanied by Frank McGuinness of Longford, George Geraghty of Roscommon, Patrick McCrann of Lanesboro and several others. We organised and addressed meetings and formed units of the Volunteers everywhere we could get a chance. There was an extra heavy fall of snow at this time which covered the whole countryside some couple of feet deep. We used this extensively for publicity purposes. We wrote our "Slogans" in huge letters in the snow on the hillsides, filling in the letters with blacksmiths ashes to make them stand out. This was a great success as it stood out so vividly you were more or less compelled to read it.

There were three candidates in the field for this election. Count Plunkett represented Sinn Féin, Jasper Tully, an Independent candidate, and Devine was the Parliamentary or Redmondite man. A local poet wrote in the snow on the side of the hill near Strokestown: -

"Don't vote for Tully,
Or you will sully
The name and fame of the men who died,
For Tully's mixture is not a fixture,
And so is Tom Devine's".

Tully was noted for changing his policy so as to be, always with the winning side. Count Plunkett was returned at the head of the poll.

After this I went all over the County Longford and Roscommon forming units of the Volunteers. In Longford we had a meeting over McGuinness's boot shop. Present at this meeting was Tom Reddington, Hubert Wilson, Sean Duffy, M.F. Reynolds, Leo Reilly, from Ardagh, Francis Clarke, Pat McCrann, Junior, and, I think, P.M. Clyne was also there.

At this meeting Thomas Reddington was appointed O/C. of the Longford Brigade. The other officers appointed were Michael Connolly, Francis Clarke and Jim Flood to the staff. I cannot - not now - put them in their positions or appointments. At this time there were a large number of Volunteer companies existing in the county, but no concrete organisation of battalions existed. After this the organisation of the Volunteers into battalions came into being. The local area became the 3rd Battalion. P.M. Clyne was appointed O/C. I was appointed Vice O/C. The adjutant was Patrick McCrann, Junior. Thomas Gibbons was quartermaster. The companies were Lanesboro or Rathcline. P.M. Clyne was captain. Newtowncashel - company commander - Captain Dan Donnelly, Keenagh Company - Jimmie Hussey as captain, Ballymahon Company, Patrick Kenny, Foughney Company - Captain J. Ivers.

We did the usual drilling and training - recruiting and searching for arms and so forth. J.P. Farrell, who was the proprietor of the "Longford Leader" and Member of Parliament for North Longford, published in his paper some scathing remarks about the leaders of the

Sinn Féin and Volunteer movements. The Bishop of Longford, Most Rev. Dr. Hoare, who himself was a supporter of the Parliamentary Party, took exception to this, and in a statement said it was neither christian charity nor journalism.

During the election in South Longford the activities of the Volunteers were mainly in protecting meetings, canvassing voters, and arranging for the conveyance of voters to the polling stations. There was a large element of ex British Army soldiers and "hangers on" of the British Army, and women who were in receipt of separation allowances from the British Army, in and around the town of Longford. When meetings were held there those were very hostile to us - using stones and other missiles. The Volunteers always went armed with hurleys or other such weapons to these meetings.

I was the O/C in charge of the Volunteer Guard which was placed on the ballot boxes in the Courthouse, Longford, on the night of the voting. We had some small arms amongst this guard. The Ballot boxes were escorted to the Courthouse by the Volunteers and the R.I.C. from the various areas. The R.I.C. also had a guard on the boxes in the Courthouse. The R.I.C., however, did not remain inside the Courthouse whereas we did. The election was lost by 37 votes, and later won by 13 on a recount - a bundle of 50 votes having being overlooked. This mistake was found out by checking the number of valid votes and spoiled votes against the number cast when the error revealed itself. So certain were the Parliamentary Party that they had won that the town was already bedecked with their flags, and the Sinn Féin ones had nearly disappeared, and the B.A. element and the "separation women" were kicking up hell. Then when the correct result was declared the reaction was terrific.

After this my car was confined to a radius of twenty miles by orders of the County Inspector of the R.I.C. During the election there was a great scarcity of petrol as it was severely rationed and controlled at this time. Prior to the election I proceeded to Dublin, and there secured 80 gallons in 40 tins. I got this petrol in a saw mill where it had been concealed under a pile of saw dust. I don't know now where this mill was or who owned it. As far as I can remember it was through the instrumentality of Michael Collins I got this stuff. The same night that I got this consignment we went to Carrick-on-Shannon and seized about the same quantity, or something more, from the local 'Shell' agent - a man named Rodden. This gave us a good supply for the election. The police never discovered how we got our petrol supplies.

The Clare election took place in June 1917. I went to Clare on a Saturday night in company with Frank McGuinness, Dr. Robinson, George Geraghty, P.J. McCrann and Bridget Lyons, who was a medical student at this time. I helped to form units of volunteers in County Clare, which incidentally is my native county. I put on faked identification numbers on my car when going down to Clare. Several times the R.I.C. held me up. I gave them various names and all sorts of fake information. They never could trace me.

One day, while driving my car from Ennis to Tulla, I had Joe McGrath and Seán Noonan as passengers. At Spencil Hill we were involved in an accident with a horse and cart. The man who was driving the horse was thrown off the cart and appeared to be severely injured. This man turned out to be a cousin of the Parliamentary Party's candidate, Paddy Lynch. It looked like as if we had done it purposely. I pulled up my car and Joe McGrath, who was smoking a large pipe, left this on the folded hood

when he was getting out. When we attended to the injured man, and on returning to the car, we found the hood on fire. There was no water available and we had to beat out the fire with our caps.

This was the first occasion on which I had met Joe McGuinness, de Valera, Seán Milroy, The Plunketts, Joe McGrath and others. Some of those men had only been released from jail and were still wearing portion of their prison clothes, and all had the closely cropped prison hair cuts. The day of the election I brought de Valera around every polling booth in the area. On the day of the counting, de Valera was on the Courthouse steps in Ennis discussing with the opposition candidate, Paddy Lynch, what the results of the election might be and where he had visited on polling day. Dev. said he had visited every polling station. Lynch remarked, "It is no wonder if you win when you had a man that would do that for you". The result of the election was a landslide in favour of Sinn Féin, and was actually the turning point, as the rest of the country followed the lead given by Clare. This covered all the principal activities during 1917.

In 1918 the first big item was the conscription crisis. When this threat to our liberties took place the strength of the Volunteers increased by leaps and bounds, and Companies suddenly increased their strength from twenty to one hundred and fifty and higher in a few days. About this time the Cumann na mBan was started around Lanesboro, and the women set about making bandages and first aid dressings. Up to this we had been swearing in all men who joined the Volunteers, which I now believe was *Not* usual at the time. One night during the crisis, and at Tullyvranne school, which was our assembly point, my

attention was drawn to the fact that two Protestants had been taken in to the Volunteers by the company captain without being sworn. I objected to this and there was a quarrel between the captain and me. I was struck with a heavy stick and was unconscious for a couple of hours. This caused a split in the local Volunteer unit. I reported the matter to Joe McGuinness and, as a result, Mick Collins came down from Dublin and held a courtmartial on the company captain and me. Joe McGuinness was with Mick Collins. The Volunteers who were witnesses gave their evidence individually. Collins ruled that both of us be suspended from holding officer rank for a period of three months. I was wearing uniform and Collins removed my rank markings from it. After the court-martial, the company, including Clyne and me, as ordinary Volunteers, marched through Lanesboro under Collins and back to the school again. This successfully ended the split. I carried on with my activities in the Volunteers, but Clyne became inactive and took no further part after that. Frank Clarke was now appointed company commander and P. McCrann was appointed 1st Lieutenant.

Some time after my suspension of three months had expired there was a reorganisation of the Volunteers in Co Longford, and I was appointed battalion commander of the 3rd Battalion, Longford Brigade. The battalion was comprised of the company areas of Lanesboro, Keenagh, Newtown Cashel, Ballymahon and Foughney. The officer in charge of Lanesboro Company was Thomas Gibbons who was later followed in the appointment by William Chapman and later still by Michael Farrell. Captain of Keenagh Company was Jim Hussey; captain of Newtown Cashel was Dan Connolly. The captain of Foughney was J. Eivers, and of Ballymahon Patrick Kenny.

We held a big parade of the battalion at Newtown Cashel about this time and Joe McGuinness inspected the different companies. This was during the conscription period. The

companies were then at full strength and the battalion mustered close on 600 men. When the conscription danger had blown over a lot of these men left us or became inactive. The Cumann na mBan was also represented strongly at this parade, a branch being present from each company area.

There was a general reorganisation of brigade headquarters at this time and about six officers of the staff were replaced by others. Michael Connolly, Hubert Wilson, Leo Reilly of Ardagh, Sean Cawley, Francis Clarke and Paul Cusack were the officers who were superseded. I am not in a position to give the appointments on the staff held by those officers who replaced them. The principal officers of the brigade were: Tom Reddington, O/C.; Sean Connolly, vice O/C.; Seamus Flood, brigade adjutant, and Ned Cooney, brigade quartermaster.

The staff of the 3rd battalion consisted of the following principal officers:- the battalion commandant was myself; Paddy McCrann was vice-commandant; Frank McGarry was adjutant, and the quartermaster was Patrick Farrell. We had very little in the way of arms. We took over some of the rifles which had belonged to the Redmond or National Volunteers and which had remained in the area and were not surrendered after the rebellion. This lot, as far as I can remember, was three service rifles. In all, we had about six or seven service rifles in the battalion area, not all of which were in repair. There was also a couple of Winchester rifles. We had no ammunition for the service rifles. We had some ammunition for the Winchester rifles which were a service type of weapon. There were quite a few .22 rifles in the area and a good supply of this ammunition and with those we did a good deal of target practice. We kept punch balls and boxing gloves and the Volunteers in using those kept themselves fit and interested, and in this way we were able to keep them going. Training of a military nature was active and intense.

When the conscription crisis was over our strength

fell off by about 33% or more. All the officers, however, remained active.

During the General Election in 1918 the Volunteers did a tremendous amount of work, canvassing for votes, arranging and employing transport to bring voters to the polling stations and guarding the ballot boxes, and such work as elections entail. Early in 1919 the 1st Dáil assembled as the Government of the country and took over responsibility for the Volunteers and their activities. The Volunteers now became the I.R.A. or Army of the Republic. As we had always sworn in our men into the Volunteers we had no necessity for re-swearing them, and swearing in was only applicable to recruits after that date.

In the early part of the summer of 1919, two of our men were at an aeriocht in Drumlish. One of the men was Matt Brady. They got into conversation with two R.I.C. men and had some drinks with them. Later, they went out the road and attempted to disarm the policemen. In the scrummage that took place for possession of the rifles Matt Brady was badly wounded in the leg. Brady's sister came to one of our meetings and was very abusive towards us, that we were not taking any action against the police. I think this was the first casualty in Co. Longford.

Our Brigade O/C., Reddington, made a mine which he produced at a brigade meeting. This mine was made from a cart-wheel box. I asked him if he had tested it and he got very annoyed with me for doing so. He apparently thought that when he had produced it, it should have been accepted without question. He never seemed to forget this incident afterwards. How right I was, was proved afterwards when this mine was used in the attack on Drumlish barracks and failed to explode.

The police now evacuated a number of the smaller of their barracks and withdrew the garrisons with which they reinforced the larger stations. All the evacuated barracks and other buildings which would be suitable for occupation as such were burned down by the I.R.A. This took place about Easter 1919. The I.R.A. had now to take over the policing of the country and this entailed a huge amount of work on their part. As well as maintaining ordinary patrols, they had to do crime detection, make arrests, and arrange for the detention of prisoners in secret places which came to be known as "unknown destinations". Such prisoners were tried before the Sinn Fein Courts which were now operating effectively throughout the country and the Volunteers were responsible for giving effect to the decisions of those Courts. So effectively was this work performed that in a short time the people had gained complete confidence in the Volunteers and the Courts, and all their complaints and cases were taken to them. The R.I.C. were ignored except by a small portion who were supporters of the British regime.

Towards the end of 1919 a general raid for arms took place throughout the country by the I.R.A. One of our men in Lanesboro company was badly wounded in the leg during one of those raids. This occurred accidentally - one of his pals let off a shot from a shotgun. He received the full contents of the discharge in his hip. He was treated locally by Dr. Robinson for a few days and I then brought him to Jervis St. Hospital in Dublin in my car. He remained there until after the Truce. He recovered, but is lame and will be so for all his life. In this raiding for arms we got nothing except shotguns and such like. Most of those guns were antiquated weapons and of no use. We had collected a lot of those guns earlier on during the conscription crisis. In the fall of this year a big Volunteer dance was held in the Temperance Hall in Longford. Most of the officers at this dance and a good number of the men also were in uniform. The R.I.C. did not interfere with us however.

In the summer of 1919, Ernie O'Malley was organising the I.R.A. along the Galway-Roscommon border around Ballymoe. He was crossing the bridge at Ballymoe one night on a bicycle when he was surrounded by R.I.C. They closed in on him from all sides. O'Malley drew a revolver and fired at the police, throwing his bicycle at others. The police fired in return and O'Malley received a bullet through the palm of his hand which travelled up his arm making an exit near his elbow. O'Malley jumped over the parapet of the bridge into the River Suck. The police saw him gaining the Galway side and immediately surrounded that area and got reinforcements from Castlereagh. O'Malley spotted what they were about and swam back to the Roscommon side where he succeeded in making the bank. He got in touch with Frank Simon of Roscommon and Joe Finlay. They concealed him for some time until they got a way of moving him to Dublin.

It was not possible to get a car in Roscommon to bring O'Malley to Dublin, they were so well watched. The police suspected he was still in the area. I received a dispatch via a man named McCrann who was a near relation of McCrann who was vice O/C. of the battalion. In this dispatch I was asked if I could get O'Malley to Dublin. I said I would, but that I would not go to Roscommon for him as I would have to pass the local barracks to do so. At this time I had no car as the military had dismantled my three cars and immobilised me in that effect. The military had removed the magnetos from the cars. I rigged up one of them with a magneto and faked registration plates. I sent word to Roscommon to have O'Malley moved to the edge of the Shannon to Killucan to the residence of a man named Davis who was also a brigade officer. Davis was to arrange to have him brought across the Shannon to the Longford side and left in the house of Charles Martin of Blenvoher, Lanesboro'. I got the car shoved out of the garage and up the road at about 11 o'clock at night. This was to prevent the local police from getting suspicious

should they have heard a car running. I then proceeded to Martin's house in the car.

When I arrived there O'Malley asked me if I was a Volunteer and would I fight if we got me into a corner. He said he had stuff he would not give up. I think he referred to documents which must have contained important matters in connection with the Volunteers. I said I was a Volunteer and that I would fight. He gave me a revolver and a bomb. He had a revolver hanging from a lanyard around his neck. He also had bombs in his pocket on the unwounded side.

We started immediately for Dublin. When about four miles from Mullingar we eat a cold cooked chicken which Mrs. Martin had given us, as we would not wait to have a meal at her house. It would be near 12 p.m. by now, but not long after dark. We proceeded on and just when we had reached the Mullingar Racecourse we met about 10 or 12 R.I.C. men on the road on foot patrol. What appeared to be a Head Constable stood out on the road and put up his hand and signalled us to halt. I immediately accelerated in an attempt to rush through. O'Malley immediately drew a pin from a bomb and dropped it over the side of the car, right in the middle of the patrol. I sped through with gaining speed. Although I did not hear any shots the police fired and a bullet pierced the windscreen of the car, making a neat hole but without shattering the glass.

We had no further trouble and got to the city all right. When we reached the city O'Malley ordered me to switch off my headlights and to keep only my side or wing lights on. We drove through the city via lanes and by-ways which he knew and I did not. I deposited O'Malley at the house of a man called Joyce, who seemed to be expecting him. I do not know in what part of the city this was. O'Malley offered to leave me the revolver and bomb, but I declined as I considered I

would be better off without them as I was driving and in a forbidden car with faked numbers.

I did not know my way through the city, but I told O'Malley if I could get on to the ingoing tram tracks I could find my way all right. He volunteered to leave me on the tram tracks and stood on the running board of the car. I had a rug on the car and on looking around I noticed it was missing. I immediately pulled up and O'Malley said he would go back and get it. It had apparently dropped off on the road. I switched off the lights of the car. O'Malley had only gone when out of the shadow I was approached by two men who turned out to be two detectives. They questioned me as to what I was doing and where I was going. I told them I had come up with a patient to one of the hospitals and that when I had got there they would not take the patient in as they had no bed and that I had left him at a friend's house. I told them I had lost a rug which had been around the patient and that I had pulled up to see if I could find it. Just then I spotted the rug lying on the road some short distance back. I went back to get it and just as I got there I noticed O'Malley approaching it from the other direction. I signalled him to go away and he did. I returned to the car. The detectives pointed out that I was committing an offence by having a car parked without lights; I said I had been driving most of the night through lights and that I was blinded from them. They then said I could go ahead and I started off again. I made my way home via Navan, Oldcastle and Granard without further incident to Lanesboro'. On getting the car into my garage I set too and removed the windscreen, carburettor and the faked registration plates and put them away safely. I then brushed away the tyre marks of where the car had been taken in and out of the garage. It was daylight next morning when I had this task completed. The local police apparently never got wind of the fact that I had the car out and never approached me or made any investigation.

I was refused a permit to keep a car by the police. I made an application for a permit and with this application I had to submit my driver's licence. I was refused a permit and the R.I.C. did not return my driving licence, although I had made repeated applications for its return. The D.I. of the police was Preston of Glenaherry fame. Previous to coming to Longford he had been instrumental in the prosecution of Lord Ashtown for attempting to burn his (Ashtown's) place. I had paid the County Council for my licence and as it was my property it should have been returned to me. Eventually I called to the Police Headquarters in Longford and met the D.I. who said he thought it had been returned to me but he would have a look. In searching for the licence he turned out a number of files which he left on his desk. I noticed on one of the files the handwriting of a man I knew. He was P.J. Crann, a leading Sinn Féiner in this district. I naturally had my suspicions aroused to see this man's writing on documents in the possession of the D.I.

The D.I. left the office on failing to find the licence there, and went, I presume, to another office. While he was out I grabbed the documents and put them in my pocket. The D.I. returned and on informing me that the licence would be forwarded to me I left the office, much to my relief. I recovered the licence back some days later. Mr. Crann had written to the police on behalf of another man asking for a permit to purchase shotgun cartridges. The application had been sent to the local R.I.C. Sergeant for his remarks. His remarks were as follows: "Under no circumstances would I recommend this man for a permit. He is a rabid Sinn Féiner and an associate of M.J. Ryan. He is also an associate of P.J. McCrann who wrote this application".

In September, 1920, I used to go into Longford to the parcels office at the railway station to collect the daily

papers. A Miss Skeffington was in charge of this office. I was speaking to her one day and on going into the back office I noticed a box of 500 shotgun cartridges which were consigned to Lord Granard. Lord Granard was having a shooting party at his estate soon after. Outside on the platform was Sergeant Reidy who was the Detective Sergeant of the R.I.C. and keeping a watch on the cartridges until they were called for. I slipped the latch off the window and then left the office and went down town and contacted our Brigade O.C. - Tom Reddington - and told him about the cartridges and what I had done. This was about eleven o'clock in the morning. We got a couple of young boys to go up to the railway station and play with hoops in the station yard and to watch until the office would be closed and Miss Skeffington gone to her lunch. Miss Skeffington would lock the office and hand the key to the station master. When the office was locked Sergeant Reidy would also leave. The boys informed us that all was clear and Reddington and I then proceeded to the station and took the cartridges out through the window and got them away safely. I am sure Miss Skeffington knew quite well how the cartridges were removed but she was all right, being very much in sympathy with us. The police did not attribute anything to me apparently and never came near me in their investigations.

About August, 1920, there were about twenty-five or thirty soldiers encamped on the banks of the Shannon opposite Lanesboro R.I.C. Barracks. Their duty was to guard the bridge over the Shannon at Lanesboro, which was of the swing type to afford navigation on the Shannon. They had a general service wagon drawn by two horses which they used to get their supplies out from Longford. When the wagon was due to return from Longford a party of soldiers were wont to proceed towards Longford on cycles and escort it to Lanesboro. We had this movement under observation for some time and decided

to ambush this party at Gowlan and capture their arms and ammunition. I took charge of the ambush party which consisted of about seven or eight Volunteers. As well as I can remember we had two Service Rifles and the rest of the party were armed with shotguns.

We concealed ourselves at the back of the fence along the road. There was a small wood there then, which has been cut away since. The escort came in scattered formation, which made the situation awkward for us. We allowed the first or leading files of the escort to pass, and concentrated on the rear files. When they arrived at the position we wanted, we shouted "Hands up" at them and fired a couple of shots over their heads. They surrendered when we fired. We secured three rifles and some .303 ammunition, not very much, and three Army cycles. We also took some uniforms off them and replaced them with some of our own civilian attire. We wanted these uniforms for future stunts. There were no casualties on either side. We allowed the soldiers to go free when we were finished with them. The remainder of the escort who had passed on before firing commenced did not interfere.

Seán McKeon and Seán Connolly carried out a reconnaissance of Ballymahon R.I.C. Barracks with a view to capturing it. I accompanied them. We viewed the back and front and went into the two houses adjoining the barracks. One of the houses was a saddler's shop and the other was a private dwelling. The one next to the barracks was the private dwelling. We got into this house under the pretence of getting water for a carbide lamp. We got into the saddler's by pretending that we wanted estimates for the repair of harness. Donoghue was the saddler's name. He was very friendly and talkative. Connolly asked him if he was paying much rent for the house and so forth and Donoghue showed him around the house and yard. After we made our plans that night we decided we would get the

local Volunteers to obtain more information for us. Packie Keenan did most of this scouting for us.

We anticipated that there would be a big fight for the place, because at this time all the R.I.C. barracks were supplied with Verey Light signals. Ballymahon was situated between the military stations of Longford, Athlone and Mullingar. The country between Ballymahon and those posts was comparatively flat and Verey Lights fired in Ballymahon would be visible to any one of the three. We had to call in all the Companies in South Longford and a good many from North Longford as well, to put down an elaborate blocking belt around the area. All roads leading to Ballymahon had to be blocked in depth - in some cases this blocking extended to a depth of up to fourteen miles.

We also put ambush parties on the blocks on the roads leading directly from the military stations. All of the material at our disposal was in the Ballinalee area and one of our big problems was to have this removed to the Ballymahon area. At this time I was the owner of a six-ton Napier lorry. This lorry was built for the British Army by the Napier Company, but was not delivered to them and on becoming surplus was purchased by me. This lorry was exactly similar to the ones used by the British Army in every detail. This proved subsequently to be an advantage and a disadvantage. McKeon and Connolly asked me to get the material from Ballinalee to Ballymahon area. At this time I had a contract for drawing stone from the quarries at Mountnugent, Co. Cavan, to Lanesboro, where a new bank was being built. I went for a load of stones to Mountnugent, bringing Thomas Gibbons with me. I dropped Gibbons off in Ballinalee and gave him instructions to have all the material that was to be shifted at McKeon's forge on my return. I then proceeded to Mountnugent and filled up my load of stones. On my return I picked up Gibbons at Ballinalee and loaded the stuff on to the lorry on top of the stones. We picked up

thirty to forty rifles, several bags of home made bombs, including smoke and stink bombs, and a couple of mines. It might be said that we had everything roughly in the County or Brigade area on the lorry. McKeon was against the idea of moving the stuff in daylight and also against the risk of moving it in one complete assignment, but I insisted that there would be less suspicion than if we travelled with it at night. We got the stuff safely to ^{my MR} our place at Lanesboro, where we took it off the lorry and with the assistance of the garage hands placed it in a store in my yard. I then proceeded to the building site and deposited my load of stones.

That night about 11 p.m. we reloaded the stuff on to the lorry and proceeded towards Ballymahon. With me on the lorry were Pat Reilly and Hugh Curran and we picked up Tom Gibbons and Peter Skelly on the road out. We were to meet three sections of Volunteers at three different points in the Ballymahon area. Each section was to take over a third part of the material. The first party were there to meet us all right, but when we got near the meeting point, on seeing what they thought was a military lorry approaching they got scared and made off. This was the disadvantage of having a military type vehicle. We, however, succeeded in contacting this party and giving them their portion of our consignment. We then proceeded to meet the second party. This was at Terlicken. We approached the hill on the road and on reaching the top we perceived what appeared to be the lights of a military tender coming towards us. I was now in a proper stew and there is no doubt about it the hair on the back of my neck and head stood up. The lads on the lorry wanted me to jump with them and run for it. This meant that even if I got away I would lose my lorry which even at that time was worth about £600 and was no small consideration. Furthermore I would be letting down McKeon and Connolly. If caught with the lorry I

would probably be shot. I told the lads to jump for it and that I would chance getting through.

At this time I was wearing a very special overcoat. It was a kind of military type with a very large collar. I had this specially for driving. I pulled the collar well up around my neck and head. The tender was a military one all right. On coming to it I partly stuck out my head and adopting an English accent to the best of my ability I asked them in soldiers' language if this was the right so and so road to Mullingar. They said: "No, you are on the so and so road to Longford". They guided me into Ballymahon and assisted me to turn the lorry and put me on the right road for Mullingar. After they had gone I returned and with a lot of trouble succeeded in getting in touch with the party I wanted to and gave them their portion of the stuff. This was the advantage of having a military type vehicle. We delivered the other portion of the consignment without further incident.

At about five o'clock that morning I proceeded to Longford town and picked up the foreman of the Longford Arms garage and proceeded to Dublin for four hundred gallons of petrol. This was a perfectly legitimate job. Mr. Delaney, who was the Crown Solicitor for Longford and Chairman of Longford Arms Garage Co., had asked me to do this job for him. I especially elected to do the job early on this morning so as to cover up my tracks, so to speak, in the Ballymahon area. Starting work for the Crown Solicitor at this hour of the morning I believed would be a good alibi. I had a collision with a tram car in Dublin, which I attribute to the want of sleep on my part. The lorry was only slightly damaged, and I got back to Longford with my load of petrol all right.

That night I proceeded to the attack on Ballymahon barracks. I was in charge of a party of Volunteers in the

grounds of the Protestant Church. We only fired a few shots altogether. The police surrendered much easier than was expected and all their arms and ammunition were captured. I will leave the details of this to be told by others who were more involved than me.

On the way home I was with Tom Gibbons who had been in charge of a squad on one of the roads. When leaving Lanesboro that night for the attack I had given Gibbons a nearly new bicycle belonging to a Volunteer named Long. Unfortunately this boy had placed his name on the saddle bag in the slit provided for that purpose. On leaving Ballymahon and reaching the first bridge on this side of the town we contacted a party of Volunteers who had a block on the road at that point. They had a prisoner with them. He was a local Protestant, whom they had held up and detained from entering the town. He had a bicycle. The bolt in the chain of Gibbons's bicycle had come out and we could not fix it at that hour of the morning. We took the prisoner's cycle and gave him Long's. Long was in Lanesboro when we got there. When we told him about his cycle he told us about his name being on the bag on his. Long and Gibbons had to return to Ballymahon and secure Long's bicycle. The man who had it was very glad to get his own back and had not noticed the name on the saddle bag.

I should have mentioned that two nights before the attack on Ballymahon the guard room of the Top Barracks ^{LONGFORD} was raided by Seán McKeon and a party of Volunteers, and twenty-five rifles and two revolvers were secured. I was one of the party who took part in the raid. I did not enter the barracks, however. I was on the avenue or lane outside. I assisted in taking the captured arms out of the guard room and putting them into a car which was waiting down the road a short distance. The rifles captured here were some of the

consignment I carried on my lorry from Ballinalee to Ballymahon the night previous to the capture of the barracks.

One night in June, 1920, my wife and I and some others were playing cards in our house at Lanesboro. There was in the local R.I.C. barracks a policeman named Kearney. He was married and living in the barracks. He was favourable to us and co-operated with us. His wife was very sympathetic to us. This night there was a knock on the door. I went and opened it. There were two policemen at the door who were under the influence of drink. One of them was called Clarke. I cannot remember the other one's name now. They came into the house. One of them asked if we were playing cards. I said we had been but had just finished up - that we always finished up about 11 p.m. and would not play later. Clarke said, "You would not play with us because we are R.I.C. men". I said no, it was time to finish up and that was all. Constable Clarke, who was slobbering about, remarked that he was going to the assizes in Roscommon on Thursday and "maybe I would not come back to the R.I.C."

Next morning I had a talk with Constable Kearney and he told me that Clarke and the other constable were going to Roscommon as members of a guard of honour to meet the Judge at 3 p.m. I immediately got in touch with Pat Madden who was the O.C. of the only active Battalion in Roscommon and gave him this information. He sent me a message to get further particulars for him.

We arranged that John Connor, who was Madden's dispatch rider, was to be with me in Lanesboro and was to purchase an ordinary hay rake from me outside my shop. He was to tie this rake on the cycle and proceed home past the spot where Madden would be waiting to ambush the police. If the head of the rake was towards the front of the bicycle this would

indicate that the police were coming immediately. If the head of the rake was towards the rear it would indicate that the police were coming but that the exact time was not known. The purchase of the rake would cover up Connor's presence in town.

Connor was outside my door looking at rakes and I was going through the motions of selling him one and all the time keeping our eyes on the barracks. We saw the police preparing to start. O'Connor put the rake on his bicycle head to the front and set off, passing out the police who were cycling slowly. The rake on the cycle indicated that they were coming immediately. However, it did not work out that way, as the police went into a public-house en route and made a pretty big delay. This delay caused confusion in the ambush position, with the result that the police arrived in the ambush position without being seen. On spotting them the ambush party shouted at them to put their hands up. The police cycled on a bit, got off their cycles and attempted to get their rifles off, ^{The Cycles. Th 98} The ambush party fired and Constable Clarke was shot dead immediately. The other constable dropped down and feigned death. The ambush party then took the two rifles and the two cycles and did not discover that Clarke's companion was only pretending he was dead. They left the police there as they thought dead and decamped with their booty. There was a big "splash" in the newspapers about this and the British made out that Constable Clarke had been knifed as well as being shot. What actually happened was that the barrel of the weapon that fired the shot that killed Clarke was badly scored. This gave the bullet a jagged surface which caused a jagged wound. This ambush took place at Mooneen.

In May or early part of June, 1920, I was working outside the front of the shop one morning. Constable Kearney came up on the other side of the street and when opposite me he said,

"Are you not gone yet". He then returned down the street and crossed over on to my side and came up to where I was. He again said, "Are you not gone yet". I asked him what he was talking about. He replied "We know a lot about you fellows". I again asked him what he was talking about and then he told me that there was a secret document in the barracks which contained instructions to watch certain suspects leaving the district around a certain date. I told him to get that document for me. He replied that he would not and that I could go down and get it myself. Eventually Kearney's wife, who was very sympathetic to us, informed me that the document was in the Sergeant's office. The Sergeant was in the habit of leaving the key in the outside of the door when he was in the office. I gave Mrs. Kearney a piece of soap and showed her how she could get an impression of the key for me. She did this and I made a key for her and she sent me up the document concealed in a milk can and carried by one of her children. The document was an instruction to the police to watch suspect persons leaving the district and travelling to Dublin around a certain date to attend a Volunteer Convention. A Volunteer from the Roscommon side cycled with a dispatch containing this document to Dublin which he gave to Collins.

It transpired that a Convention was to be held in Dublin which was to be attended by all Brigade O.Cs. As a result of getting hold of this document the Convention was cancelled and Collins sent me a letter of thanks through the Brigade Headquarters. I gave this letter to Kearney when he was applying for a pension and he told me it was of considerable help to him. Kearney resigned from the R.I.C. in September, 1920, when we told him to do so. He had wanted to resign previously but on our request he stayed on.

Tom Reddington, who was Brigade O.C., came here to plan an attack on the local R.I.C. barracks and hoped to capture it.

The barracks was surrounded by a thick barbed wire entanglement on one end and at the rear. The River Shannon adjoined it on the other end. The front was also covered with barbed wire for a depth of about fifteen yards. There was a machine gun post on the roof protected by steel sheets with loopholes. The strength of the garrison varied from time to time but was always strong. This was the last outpost of the R.I.C. in South Longford and was a key position guarding the crossing of the Shannon on the Longford-Roscommon road. I gave Reddington all the details I knew about the barracks and its garrison and we arranged that he would make a final inspection himself.

We differed about the plan to capture it. I was for trying to smoke the police out by burning a load of hay at the front of the barracks. Hay would be plentiful in September and loads of this material were usually being drawn past the barracks at this time. The load or loads of hay would have to be pulled close to the barracks. The wind would usually be favourable owing to the situation of the barracks. Reddington was for trying to get into the barracks by a ruse. He was unknown to the R.I.C. His plan was that his car was to break down on the bridge by reason of the water in the radiator boiling over. I was to go down and fix it for him and he was then to go to the barrack door and ask for water. By doing this he hoped to be able to get into the barracks and have a look at the layout of it from the inside and then make his plans accordingly. He arrived with the car as arranged, and, having let most of the water out of it some distance away, it boiled up and came to a halt on the bridge. I went to his assistance. He proceeded to the barracks to procure water, but the police only opened the door on the chain and gave him out the water through this small opening. They did not admit him to the barracks. He now gave me instructions that I was to attack the place at a later date.

My plan for the attack on the barracks was as follows. I would get several parties of Volunteers on suitable positions around the barracks and between ten and eleven o'clock at night a couple of Volunteers pretending drunkenness and generally kicking up a row and shouting "Up the Republic" would throw some stones at the barrack windows. I hoped that the police might react to this and come out and chase those men and on opening the door give us a chance to rush it. Our ambitions were not realised as the police did not come out. I then decided to open fire on the barracks, and we fired at the doors, windows and any place that light was showing through the loopholes in the shutters. We continued to fire from different angles at the barracks and kept it up for about three hours. This was mostly with shotguns. As our men were close in the machine gun on the roof was ineffective as they could not get sufficient depression on it to bring it into play against us. They sent up Verrey Lights and reinforcements came from Athlone. The reinforcements drove with lights full on, on their lorries and as such gave us ample warning of their approach. We withdrew before the reinforcements arrived.

There were no casualties on our side. I think that two or three of the R.I.C. got slight splinter wounds.

We again attacked the barracks in October, 1920. Our plan this time was to place bombers or grenadiers behind the wall and slip leading to the Shannon on the opposite side of the street. We hoped to be able to blow in the barrack door by bombs and then rush the place. We also thought we would be able to make a hole in the roof with bombs. The bombs exploded all right, but failed to blow in the door or make a hole in the roof either. We kept up a desultory fire on the barracks for about four hours. Although the garrison again sent up Verrey Lights no reinforcements came to their

assistance this time. The night was a bright one and I think the Verrey lights were ineffective. We had no casualties and I don't think the R.I.C. had any either.

A few days after this while making land mines from old cart wheel boxes and hollow metal columns, an explosion took place and I got wounded on the left hip and along the left leg. While a hole was being drilled in one of the mine cases, the drill caused a spark which ignited the explosive. The explosive being used was gelignite and blasting powder. This affair occurred at a house in Killnacarrow. I was on the run at this time. My wife heard that I was injured. I knew that she would be very worried about me and I decided to come home to see her and assure her I was alive. I was no sooner in the house than it was surrounded by Black and Tans and R.I.C. and I was arrested. I afterwards found out that a maid in our employment at the time was courting one of the Tans, and I suspect she tipped them off about my arrival. I was severely interrogated about my wounds, but owing to their nature they did not seem to link them up with I.R.A. activities.

I was first taken to the local barracks and then to Longford and then to Athlone. From Athlone I was transferred to Mountjoy. One Sunday night we were handcuffed in fours, taken to the docks in Dublin and put aboard a destroyer and we sailed for Belfast. We did not know where we were being brought until we arrived in Belfast. A dense fog arose at sea, with the result that we did not get into Belfast until midday on Wednesday. We had nothing to eat from supper on Saturday. We were on the deck of the destroyer all the time in handcuffs. There was no lavatory accommodation and our condition was appalling.

We got a terrible reception in Belfast. There was a

huge mob of Orangemen and their women and children just mad with frenzy to get at us. They hurled insulting slogans at us and pelted us with everything they could lay hands on. We were marched from the docks in Belfast to the South Down railway station and taken from there to Ballykinlar Internment Camp. I was kept in Ballykinlar Camp until the general release after the Treaty. As a result of injuries received from the bad treatment aboard the destroyer one of our men died subsequently, and others went insane.

While I was in Athlone prior to being transferred to Mountjoy my wife came to see me. She was not allowed to do so, and her driver was arrested and with his car detained for three days.

They raided my house while I was a prisoner and damaged my shop and threatened to burn the place. Several times and later completely closed the shop and painted their slogans outside "Up Tudors toughs", "God save the King", etc. etc.

Signed: M. J. RyanDate: 26th Dec^r 1951Witness: Matthew Barry

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