ORIGINAL



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Nicholas Smyth,
4 Dollymount Ave.,
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ORIGINAL



STATEMENT BY NICHOLAS SMYTH,

4, Dollymount Avenue, Clontarf,
Dublin.

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I was born at ~~Rakeenbeg,~~ Rakeerinbeg, Dromore, Co. Tyrone, on the 8th December 1899. I joined the Volunteers at their first formation in 1913 when I was only 14 years of age. The Volunteers were trained in military matters by Barney Doyle, who was an ex-British soldier. It was a matter of forming fours. We were reviewed by Roger Casement at Fintona. At this review there was a general mobilisation of about 1,000 Volunteers from all over the Co. Tyrone. The period would probably be 1914. One of the quotations Roger Casement made in his speech when addressing the Volunteers was:

"What will the Yeomen do?
Says the Shan Van Vocht.
What will the Yeomen do?
Says the Shan Van Vocht.
What will the Yeomen do
But throw off the red and blue
And swear that they'll be true
Says the Shan Van Vocht".

We were on another occasion taken on manoeuvres by Captain White. He was actually the son of Sir George White, the defender of Ladysmith against the Boers during the South African War 1889-1902. As far as I understood, the object of the Volunteers in 1914 was to oppose and, if necessary, fight Carson's Ulster Volunteers. There was no split in the Volunteers until the outbreak of the Great War in August 1914. The first intimation I had that things were changing was when our instructor, Barney Doyle, turned up at a parade under the influence of drink and informed us that he was being mobilised to fight for his King and country. At the outbreak of the war we had no arms. Our equipment comprised a few wooden guns which were used for drilling purposes. After the outbreak of the 1914-18 war there was little, if any, Volunteer activity.

1916 came along and passed without causing any local excitement. My father, during Easter Week 1916, came home from a fair with rumours of Dublin being captured by the rebels and the whole west being up in arms and the hillsides being held by armed men. This was the first indication I had that a Rising was even contemplated. After the Easter Week Rising in Dublin, when news of the Rising started to appear in the local papers, we read of Pearse, Connolly, McDonagh, Plunkett and several other leaders. The execution of those leaders caused sympathy amongst Nationalists generally. We also got first-hand information about the Rising and about the men who took part in it from some British soldiers who had been fighting in Dublin against the rebels. They described the great fight the rebels put up. These stories increased our admiration for the men who rose up and fought in Dublin. A man who had lived formerly in Dromore and had gone to live in Dublin took part in the 1916 Rising. This fact made him a local hero with us Volunteers. He surrendered after the fighting and was sent to prison in England. Another thing that influenced the views of the people generally was the singing of songs and ballads in connection with the Rising in Dublin. Some of the songs and recitations imbued people with a very high spirit of patriotism.

Early in 1917 a small number of men with republican sympathies organised Sinn Fein in each parish area. The Sinn Fein Clubs which we started in these early days were very small, but we were gradually gaining numbers as time went on. At the time we started the formation of these clubs the Ancient Order of Hibernians had to some extent ceased to exist as an organisation. From 1918 onwards, the Hibernians became alive again and became active in opposing the new Sinn Fein movement. One embarrassing feature of the Hibernian opposition was the fact that the Hibernian Order owned nearly all the Nationalist halls in Co. Tyrone and, when we wanted the use of halls for our meetings or gatherings, the Hibernians refused us any facilities. This caused a lot of local friction.

In order to spread their organisation, Sinn Fein organised sports meetings and aeriochts and feiseanna which had the two-fold purpose of popularising the organisation and spreading propaganda. One of the principal planks on the Sinn Fein programme was the opposition to recruiting for the British armed forces. A number of songs popular at the time and sung by all Sinn Fein Club members were anti-recruiting in their tone.

Conscription Campaign.

In March or April 1918, the threat of imposing conscription in Ireland was made by the British Government. This threat roused the Irish people of all shades of political opinion to a high pitch of enthusiasm to fight the conscription menace. The members of the Sinn Fein Clubs took a very leading part in the campaign to fight conscription. As a result of this threat the Volunteers were reorganised in most of the local parish areas in Co. Tyrone. We had a particularly strong local company and the captain of it was John Smyth of Rahoney, and the name of the company was Tullyclunagh Company. Neil McGrath and myself were two lieutenants. My brother, Frank, was in charge of a battalion at that time.

In the early reorganisation in 1918 the question of battalions and brigades was a matter of little importance, as each company unit was considered of more importance than the higher organisations. One very unusual feature of the conscription campaign in our part of Co. Tyrone was the fact that a number of young Ulster Volunteers came along to us and offered to join the Irish Volunteers in their determination to fight conscription. To my own knowledge, at least four or five came along with others to join us. The conscription menace lasted such a short time that this attitude didn't have time to develop amongst the rank and file of the Ulster Volunteers. The delight caused to us by the great rush of recruits into the Volunteers during the anti-conscription campaign turned to disappointment later on when the crisis passed, because great

numbers of the men who had joined during the heat of the campaign left us. Those who left us included a number of former Hibernians who reverted to their Hibernian ideals. During the conscription campaign, although we were prepared to take the field with whatever arms we had, we really had very little arms except a small number of shotguns scattered here and there throughout the parish in the hands of local farmers. The Ulster Volunteers were better equipped. They had rifles at this time and their equipment was increased very considerably later on.

From 1918 up to late in 1919, the Volunteers were organising drilling, training and getting recruits. No effort was made either to import arms or to carry out any active operations. The first move made to carry out military activities was after the coming of Charlie Daly from G.H.Q. One of the first things Charlie Daly did, as far as the Volunteers were concerned, was to get each Volunteer and Volunteer officer to take the Oath of Allegiance to the Government of Dáil Éireann. The manner in which he did this was, first he collected the officers and administered the oath to each of them. Later on, each officer administered the oath to the Volunteers under his command. Each company captain was responsible for each Volunteer in his company taking the oath. As a matter of interest, myself, John Smith and Patrick Lynch called to the house of Patrick McGuire, Sionee, where we met for the first time Charlie Daly. As far as I remember, this was a battalion meeting and at this meeting Charlie Daly administered the oath to each officer present and explained the procedure for having it administered to the rank and file of the Volunteers.

Previous to the arrival of Charlie Daly in Tyrone, each company was more or less acting independently on its own. There was no properly organised brigade or battalions in the area. This was one of the principal reasons why G.H.Q. sent Charlie Daly into Co. Tyrone. They wished to have the

organisation put on a proper basis in Tyrone. Charlie Daly impressed us very much by his example and bearing. He left us under no illusion about what our activities as Volunteers would entail during the future months. He said that a number of people would have to be prepared to make the supreme sacrifice because we were not going to have it all our own way with the British. Shootings would take place and it would be up to every man to do his bit. He assured us that volunteering was not going to be an easy job.

Charlie Daly was in Co. Tyrone area only about a month when he organised the first military operation of the Tan war in the area. This operation has come to be known since as the Ballygawley Ambush. I had no connection with the Ballygawley Ambush, but one man from our battalion area, Hugh McGinn, was present at the ambush. They ambushed three or four police cars. I cannot give first-hand information of this fight, but I know a brother of mine was sent, after the ambush, by Charlie Daly to Dublin to give a report of the affair to Dick Mulcahy, and I remember well, when my brother returned from Dublin, Charlie Daly boyishly asking my brother if Mulcahy was pleased that some shooting was taking place in Tyrone.

General raid for arms; Raid for mails, etc.

One of the first raids we carried out in our battalion area was a raid on Dromore station for mails. On the arrival of the train at Dromore Station, the post office officials put local letters into a bag and put them into a cabin at the station. We came along then and lifted the letters and took them off to a quiet location and searched them and stamped them with a rubber stamp which we had got from G.H.Q. and marked "censored by I.R.A." Any letters to the police or other official letters were sent to G.H.Q. The disposal of the residue of the letters when all this was done presented a bit of a problem. We eventually decided to put the letters back into their bags and we carried them to a road bridge over the railway and waited

one night for a goods train to pass. As this train passed we d dropped the bags containing the letters into an open wagon. They were later picked up at Newtownstewart and the railway officials handed them back to the post office people.

Charlie Daly remained with us until about Christmas 1920 when he went to Dublin to spend a few days during Christmas with friends. On the train to Dublin he met a Kerryman called Moriarty who had been teaching in Tyrone and was going to spend Christmas in Kerry at his home place. They parted at Amiens Street and Daly proceeded to the house of friends. He was arrested there and gave his name as Moriarty . He was imprisoned, but was eventually released after about three months in Mountjoy and returned back to us in Co. Tyrone. His release, by the way, was effected by the good offices of the Kerry teacher's manager, the local parish priest in Co. Tyrone, who was a staunch "loyalist" himself. In order to carry out this piece of deceit it was necessary to get in touch with the teacher, Moriarty, and advise him not to return to his school after the Christmas vacation and then to get in touch with the school manager to use his undoubted influence with the British administration to get this "innocent" teacher released. The school manager soon obtained "Moriarty's" release. The real Moriarty returned to his school and Charlie Daly returned to his military duties.

Before September 1920, some of the nationalists willingly handed over their guns and other small arms to us. In the same month (September 1920), on orders from G.H.Q., we carried out a raid for arms all over our area, concentrating on Unionists and Hibermian houses. The results in captured arms were very poor and we had several unfortunate experiences of being fired on by the inmates of houses who defied our efforts to raid. At one particular house named McConnell's, one of our men was wounded in the face by the discharge of a shotgun. He was really our first Tan war casualty. In

another area where Charlie Daly was in charge a fight developed with inmates of Unionists' houses which lasted for about three hours. The Volunteers had to withdraw, owing to lack of ammunition. About this time Charlie Daly called at our house one night and I went with him to see a lady named Donnelly who lived at Aughafad in the Fintona district. She had a son in the R.I.C. stationed in Belfast and, being a very patriotic old lady, she was constantly writing to him and imploring him and threatening to disown him if he did not resign. This man was of great service to his country in the position which he held and was working for G.H.Q. intelligence. G.H.Q. had sent orders to Charlie Daly to go and interview the old lady and explain the position to her. He had trouble to explain to her that the R.I.C. could be a proper place for an Irishman in those years; in the end, she said she knew no son of hers would be untrue to his country in her hour of need.

We spent the end of 1920 breaking bridges and intercepting enemy communications. The first bridge we broke was on the main road between Fintona and Trillick at a place called Minegar. We placed scouts all around and made a good job of the bridge. We left the road impassable to anything. We spent the whole night at this job. A few days later my brother, James, and Myself were taken from our beds by armed police. We were ordered to get spades and saws and were taken on a lorry to the broken bridge. We collected some more lads on the way. When we arrived we found that most of the young lads in the district had been rounded up. We were compelled to cut trees and repair the bridge. We didn't get on very well with our captors who drew their guns several times and threatened to shoot us. We informed them that this work was a waste of time as the bridge would not be long standing. We finished the job sometime in the afternoon and were then released.

I decided that as the enemy would probably put a patrol on that road to watch the bridge we would lie in ambush for them. We waited every night up to one or two o'clock in the morning for nearly a week. However, none of the enemy turned up Then one night, after we had dumped our arms and the company had dispersed, John Smith, Patrick Lynch and myself were making our way home. We were walking down a laneway on to the main road when we were called on to halt and put up our hands by a patrol of B. Specials. I had a large jam jar grenade in my pocket from which I had previously removed the detonator as a safety precaution. The police were only about 20 yards away, but as the night was dark, I got the grenade out of my pocket and dropped the useless grenade on to the road before we were asked to advance.to be searched. My two friends couldn't understand how I got rid of it so quickly. We afterwards returned and collected the grenade which was lying on the roadside. We watched for another few nights and, as none of the enemy turned up, we decided to break the bridge again. We made such a good job of it this time that it was not repaired again. It remained that way for the rest of the war. We also broke bridges at Cornamuckla and Aughlish on the main Fintona-Dromore road. Paddy(?) Quinn and I were on outpost duty at Aughlish Bridge near the village of Dromore when a patrol of armed police came along. We let them come to within 15 or 20 yards of our position before opening fire on them. I had a Martin-Henry single shot rifle which made such a noise and flash that the patrol broke and ran back towards the village I had only fired two or three shots when the rifle jammed. Quinn had a small revolver and six rounds of ammunition. I think that he fired five shots, keeping one as a reserve for an emergency. (?) Tom McGrath was another outpost at a short distance from where we were. When he heard the shooting he bega. to fire out of a shotgun with which he was armed and this second shooting to some extent added to the confusion of the B. Specials. They didn't return our fire until they were well

out of range. They must have been about 500 yards away when they fired some shots which apparently weren't in our direction at all. After this engagement, as arranged, we assembled at a vacant house. I called the roll and made sure that all were present. Then I didmissed the men. I went home and was just going to bed when a tender of police pulled up and stopped in our street and, as our house was being repaired at the time - the roof being off - my brother, who was with me at the time, heard some of the police saying: "This isn't the place we were sent to. It must be the house up the road". So they didn't raid our place, but they called at Smith's of Raheny about 400 yards from our place and raided it and arrested one of the sons.

When Charlie Daly was arrested they sent another officer named Ronnie McGinn from G.H.Q. to take his place. McGinn had an idea that a flying column which would move up and down the division striking at the enemy wherever he could be found was the solution. I volunteered for this column and, out of my area, Johnny Smith, Neil McGrath, Paddy Burns. We set up a camp near Sixmilecross in a vacant farmhouse. There we were joined by about twenty others from the various areas in the division. These were a fine bunch of fellows. Our idea in taking over this vacant house was to get a bit of training to fit us for the work of the flying column. Our first job was to raid for some bedding and cooking utensils at a shooting lodge in the vicinity of the camp. One of the routines of this camp was to scout the various roads in the neighbourhood at night. We had been doing this for some nights when one particular night we ran into a patrol of B. men. After an exchange of shots the enemy retired. Our activities in this area drew enemy attention to us and one morning our scouts returned and reported enemy columns advancing on us from three sides. We took all our arms and everything else we could carry and retired up the side of the mountain in the direction of Carrickmore. An aeroplane came low over our

heads and we had a few shots at it from the cover of a ditch. It didn't seem to be hit and took no notice of us. Our knowledge of the district enabled us to avoid the direction the enemy forces were following and later, when we got into a safe position, we got some amusement out of watching the enemy forces, which was a mixed force of police and military, getting into extended order formation in order to advance on the house we had been occupying as column headquarters. When within a few hundred yards of the house they opened heavy fire on it and after about ten minutes they rushed up to find the place empty. The mountains gave us plenty of cover and we lay low for that day, and that night we continued our journey to the Carrickmore area, where we made billets in another empty house. McGinn was not with us on this occasion. He had gone to Dublin to seek supplies of grenades and explosives of which we were very short. He was captured in Dublin taking part in an ambush and didn't return to us again.

n Our living conditions in this place were very primitive. In this particular house, which we occupied for some time, the floors were clay, and we lay on the clay floors on top of straw and hay. This style of living naturally caused casualties amongst our men and several of them had to go home through illness of one kind or another. Our force was reduced to about nine or ten after a few weeks, and we decided then that we couldn't stick this sort of living any longer and that we would billet ourselves amongst friendly houses in small numbers of, say, two or three, here and there, as they were able to put us up.

The 'Daily Telegraph' at that time had reported that a flying column under Cathal Brugha was operating in that area and the army were out searching for us night and day. Johnny Smith and I had a narrow escape one morning when we were wakened up by one of our scouts and we got out the back door as the police were knocking on the front door. We were staying

that night with a cousin of Dr. Pat McCartan.

During the time the column was in existence, when we moved from one company to another, the local company area always provided scouts and were responsible for providing protection. We found that the local companies did this work in a most efficient manner and looked after us in every way.

As our members were now too few to be effective, we decided to break up and return to our own units. This break-up of the column occurred in February 1921. After I got back Mick Gallagher sent for me to attend a brigade meeting. Some of our unarmed Volunteers, who were enforcing the Belfast boycott, were beaten up by the police. We got orders at this meeting to select about ten men from each battalion to be armed with grenades and revolvers to do the picketing the following market day. Hugh McGinn, Hugh McCarroll, myself and a number of others- in all between 2o and 30 I.R.A. men, were in the village that day and we were armed. The police stayed in their barracks and left us severely alone. I had an idea we wouldn't get off, and when we were leaving the village that evening I told the others I would walk 200 or 300 yards in front to look for likely ambush positions. When we got about a mile past the village I was surprised to hear firing just behind me. When I looked round McGinn was down on one knee in the middle of the road firing from the revolver. He had a hand grenade on the ground beside him and he was so constantly engaged trying to repel the attack of the B.men's fire that he hadn't really time to lift the hand grenade and use it. When I heard the firing, I rushed back and this is the sight I saw: Before I got up to the men the B.men had decided they had got enough of it and had cleared off in the direction of the town. As I found most of the ammunition had gone, I ordered the men off the road and into the fields where we got home safely. I had some trouble in persuading McGinn to agree to this course of action; although we had no ammunition for our firearms, McGinn

still had not used his hand grenade. His intention was to remain exactly where we were so that we would be able to use it if tenders were sent out in our direction. I eventually prevailed on him to come along with us.

Dromore Ambush, April 1921.

On the night of 6th April 1921, Mick Gallagher and a few of his men went into the town of Dromore and watched there for a patrol. Some time about nine the patrol which was on the town approached the barracks to go into the barracks. Mick Gallagher and his men were in the vicinity waiting for them and they fired hand-grenades and a few revolver shots at them. One hand-grenade exploded in the midst of the patrol, killing one of the men and wounding others. Enemy forces gathered in the village of Dromore on the following night from all parts of the county and done to death - as reprisals - three of our men, Daniel O'Doherty, John Devine and Charles Slevin. We were so much annoyed by these shootings that we decided we would shoot at sight any of the enemy we found. Charlie Daly rushed into our area next day to remind us that we were soldiers and must obey orders, and that we could not carry out any indiscriminate shootings. He began making plans for large scale reprisals. His plan envisaged the holding up and capture of a number of B.Special officers all over the area who would be executed as a large scale reprisal. This thing was discussed and planned and, so far as I know, the non-execution of it must have been due to G.H.Q. refusing its sanction to the operation.

A short time later another ambush was carried out about a quarter of a mile from Dromore village on the Irvinestown road. A bomb was thrown and firing opened on a mixed force of police and Black and Tans. During this engagement one of our men - Edward McCusker - was killed. About this time I was ordered by Mick Gallagher to report for duty at Omagh. I then learned of a plan which had been made to raid the workhouse

for some books. The raid was carried out in the afternoon. We met in a hall in Omagh and were supplied with revolvers. There would be twelve or fourteen men from various parts of the brigade area. We left in pairs and walked down the road about half a mile to the workhouse. A number of us rushed up the stairs into the Board Room. A number of large books were around and we put them into sacks. There was a little confusion as nobody wanted to carry the sacks. I put one on my shoulders and started down the stairs. I was surprised on reaching the street to find a police car pulled up and a constable sitting in front. I covered him with my revolver which I had in my hand and told him not to move. He stayed quiet and as the others had come down I started to walk down the avenue with the bag on my back. When I got about fifty yards round the bend some shots were fired. I took it that our men were being fired on by some of the police. I dropped the bag over the hedge and our men came rushing past me. We scattered out a bit and commenced to walk back towards the town when we met about three Crossley tenders of police driving in a furious manner in the direction of the workhouse. They were in such a violent hurry that they failed to notice us on the road, so we reached the Hall in safety.

In the winter of 1920, probably October or November, Charlie Daly made plans for the attack on Dromore R.I.C. Barracks. In connection with his plans for this attack, Eoin O'Duffy came into the area. During Charlie Daly's work and planning for this operation E. O'Duffy and he called to my house. My brother Frank at this time was battalion O/C. and any time leaders like O'Duffy and Daly came to our area they generally called at our place. In connection with the plans for this attack E. O'Duffy was to supply the engineers and the explosives which were considered necessary for the work. The plans for this attack had advanced as far as having all arrangements made and a night arranged for the

attack. Something happened which I cannot explain. Perhaps it was the non-arrival of the engineers and explosives for the job, but anyhow, the attack was called off.

Also in the winter of 1920, the police of Dromore had to some extent lost their nerve on account of the tension which was daily mounting. The old sergeant in charge - Sergeant McGowan - appeared to be much affected and one night he came out on to the streets of Dromore and started to shoot up and down the streets. During this shooting a girl named Eileen O'Doherty was shot in both legs and fell on the street. Her brother Dan, who was nearby, rushed to her assistance and the sergeant, who had come closer by this time, fired on Dan at point blank range, wounding him in the face. This sergeant was accompanied by a few constables and all of them used their guns indiscriminately. When this event (which has since become known as the Dromore shooting) took place, Charlie Daly was in another part of the country, and as soon as he heard of the shooting he came along to us. When he arrived at our place he sent for Mick Gallagher, who was then O/C. of the Dromore Battalion, and they discussed what steps should be taken to give protection to the republican population of Dromore. We all went into the village of Dromore and held a meeting in a house belonging to two Miss Gallaghers who also had a shop in the house and who were Cumann na mBan girls. The result of our meeting in Dromore was to make arrangements for a number of armed I.R.A. men to patrol the streets during the night and, if Sergeant McGowan came out on the streets, to make a repeat of his shooting antics, they were to deal with him. He didn't appear on the streets after this and there was no other shooting.

One incident which is worth recording is one which happened in 1920. I received a dispatch for delivery to Mick Gallagher. When I arrived at his place I was informed

that he had gone to a dance nearby. I followed him to the dance . I was not long there when a raiding party of military under a commissioned officer arrived on the scene. The party started to raid the hall where the dance was being held. They separated the older people from the boys and girls and then proceeded to search both boys and girls. During the search a soldier asked Mick Gallagher to lift a sack of oats which was lying on the floor. Mick refused to do this, telling the soldier that it was they who were doing the raiding, and he wasn't going to give them any assistance. The officer, who was drunk, placed a revolver against Mick's head and told him he would shoot if Mick refused to do as he was told. Mick persisted in his refusal and told him to shoot away. He didn't. During the time this raid was taking place I had a dispatch on my person. It was very well concealed and pinned to my shirt. It was not found during the superficial search made by one soldier and later on, when the raid was over, I handed the dispatch to Gallagher. He asked me how it was that it was not found during the search. I told him it was too well concealed. He then told me that I was very lucky that I would have got at least 20 years in jail if it had been found. I then told him that he was very foolish to force the officer, expecially a man who was drunk, to cover him with a revolver as he might well have been shot dead. He told me in reply that it would have been the best thing could happen because before things would liven up a few men would have to be shot.

I would say that this would give you an idea of what kind of soldier our leader and future brigadier was to be. Mick, at that time, would be about 27 or 28 years of age. He had been to America, crossing to Montana when he was only 15 years of age to work in the mines there. He worked very hard there in the mines and saved a considerable amount of money. He returned to Ireland and began to work hard on the

farm and used some of the cash to stock and equip it. He must have come back about 1916 and when the Volunteers were organised he immediately joined the new organisation. He was one of the best officers we had. His whole idea was to fight and attack the enemy in any place they could be found. The area in which he was operating was most unfavourable for trying out any kind of large scale operations. He, however, took full advantage of any opportunity which presented itself to attack. During his military career, Gallagher served two long terms of penal servitude in British prisons for active service against British interests. He was arrested in 1922 and received a sentence of seven years which he served in Peterhead Prison, Scotland, where he received very harsh treatment, spending several periods in irons. He was again arrested about 1930 in Belfast whilst attending an I.R.A. courtmartial. With several others he was tried and again sentenced to seven years which he served. He went again to America, worked hard and earned sufficient money to pay all his debts. He returned to Co. Tyrone where he has since worked his farm.

When the truce was declared the first move made was to perfect the training of the Volunteers as far as possible. The first training camp which I attended was at a place called Glenelly in the Sperrin Mountains. The first course given in the camp was for divisional brigade officers. The next course which I attended was for battalion officers. A later course was held at which all company officers attended. The idea behind the training camp was that instructions given there would be conveyed to the rank and file. After our period of about two weeks in the training camp we returned to our area and started training camps for the company officers in the battalion. Later, a course of training was provided for the rank and file in each company. Our battalion camp was situated at Mountstewart. In the battalion training camps our battalion officers acted as instructors to carry out the training

programme. In the divisional and brigade camps which preceded our period of training - G.H.Q. sent training officers who gave the officers of the division special courses. In connection with the period of our camp, Dan Breen - now T.D. - called and spent about two weeks with us. He gave regular demonstrations in the use of revolvers. He opened our eyes to what proficiency in revolver shooting meant, as he was a crack shot. His standard of marksmanship was an ideal which we would all like to reach.

This period at the camp is one on which I look back with a great deal of pleasure as I met a lot of men who had been previously unknown to me and with whom, after this, I became great friends. I also made the acquaintance of weapons which I had heard about, but have never seen, such as the Thompson machine gun, the parabellum and Peter the Painter automatics. These weapons were new to the average Volunteer and, needless to say, we were all very anxious to learn all we could about them.

During the period following the declaration of the Truce the recruits for the I.R.A. flowed in at such a rate that we were actually flooded out with them. We put these lads to their drilling and training in order to make them efficient soldiers. I remember on one occasion where a battalion party was ordered to have a review at which the brigade O/C.- Michael Gallagher - attended with other brigade and divisional officers and when Gallagher saw the number we had on parade in our battalion he inquired from me "Where did ye get all these men?" "I didn't think there was as many men in the whole division during the war".

After this battalion review was held, a review of the whole brigade was ordered for Coledergan, Dromore. Up to the period this brigade review was held, we had been carrying on quite openly with all our training exercises, parades, drills and all other I.R.A. activities. There had been no attempt made by

British forces or local police to interfere with us in any way. Consequently we didn't anticipate any trouble because of taking part in a very large review, which the brigade review was to be. The brigade review was held then. At it the salute was taken by an officer from G.H.Q. whose name, as far as I remember, was either O'Neill or MacNeill. Everything in connection with the review passed off quietly and at the conclusion of the march past the review was broken up. All units before leaving the field broke up formation. At this stage, when we were quietly moving off, as civilians would break up from any meeting, enemy forces of police appeared on the scene and surrounded the field where the review had been held and blocked all exits from it. This force comprised men who arrived in about sixteen Crossley tenders. They commenced a search for arms on all the men leaving the review. As far as my experience at this is concerned, I had the loan of a bicycle and when I was ready to leave the field with four or five other fellows, I told them I would see them in the village as I was taking the bicycle with me and I would be having tea in my aunt's place. I got on the bicycle and cycled off. On the way to the village I met the force of police in Crossley tenders going in the direction of the review field. They made no attempt to hold me up and, later on when in the village, I saw the fellows whom I had left in the field going along under police escort, handcuffed in pairs.

This raid on the review was most disastrous as there were about 100 of our officers and men captured, and I should say there were about 50 officers amongst the number. We lost a number of revolvers and perhaps a few shotguns.

This was the first occasion since the Truce where enemy forces took any sort of drastic action against I.R.A. activities. A short while later, however, a party of Co. Monaghan men - footballers - were passing through our district to Derry, where they were going to play a football match.

There were a few platoons of special constabulary drawn up in the village of Dromore and when the cars carrying the Co. Monaghan footballers arrived in the village the Specials intercepted them, held them up and searched them for arms. A number of the men were found to be armed, including Dan Hogan, who was Divisional O/C./5th Northern Division, ex-Colonel Eamon O'Carroll, Brigadier Seamus McKenna and a number of other divisional and brigade officers from the 5th Northern Division. Any man found carrying arms on this occasion was arrested by the Specials and later imprisoned in Derry Jail. Any of the party who were not armed were permitted to go home. A local song which was made to commemorate this episode ran something like this:o

Dan Hogan, a Peter the Painter had he,
And Donnelly had a Webley, the finest you would see;
McKenna had a Bulldog of very small bore,
And they lost the whole lot when they came to Dromore.

This capture of the Monaghan officers by the Special Constabulary caused a succession of events which was very much discussed at the time. A demand was made for the release of the Monaghan officers by General Eoin O'Duffy. This demand was ignored and the 5th Northern Division, under O'Duffy's orders, made an invasion of the Co. Tyrone and Co. Fermanagh areas and arrested a large number of prominent Unionists who were held as hostages to be bartered for the release of the officers arrested in Dromore. After a great deal of negotiations, the Monaghan officers were released and, later, the Unionist prisoners were also released.

After this episode the northern police became most aggressive towards everything connected with the I.R.A. and towards the Sinn Fein organisation. All wellknown republicans were being raided for and their houses searched nightly. A known practice of the B.men was to patrol the roads at night and hold up with arms everyone they met and search them for arms and documents. These activities on the part of the B.men

naturally caused resentment amongst all republicans and laid the seeds of a lot of unfortunate incidents which took place subsequently. This time the police in Northern Ireland were supplemented by some of the most notorious gunmen who served during the Black and Tan war with the R.I.C. in Southern Ireland. These men had earned such a reputation in the south that it was impossible and dangerous for them to live down there, so they came to Northern Ireland to carry on their dirty work against us.

We considered that all the various annoyances carried out by the Special Constabulary against us would have to be met in a drastic manner. It was decided at divisional level that the I.R.A. would strike back in a most definite and drastic manner and put an end, if possible, to the campaign carried on by the Northern Government forces. Plans were made for various attacks which were to be carried out in different parts of the area on one particular night. The operation allotted to us was an attack on an enemy stronghold situated at Glengeen. Here we met with stout resistance. About fifteen or twenty of our officers and men armed with about five rifles and a various collection of other arms, including shotguns, went to the vicinity of the residence of a Mr. Allingham, who was local head of the B.men. Our objective in this operation was to burn out his residence and we approached it in a secretive manner and, when we were in the act of crossing the yard in the direction of the house, fire was opened on us from one of the outhouses. This caused us to take up positions and to reply to this fire. Fire was the opened on us from another direction, the dwellinghouse. This exchange of fire continued for about an hour during which time one of the B.men was killed. After about an hour we found that a number of other B.men came on the scene as reinforcements and started to take part in the operation. This fact forced us to evacuate our positions near the house and we had to call

off the engagement, as any chance of finishing the operation was impossible.

We later retired into the mountains at a place called Lifford and decided to remain together and fight it out with all comers no matter what happened. We expected the enemy to carry out reprisals after this attack and we lay in ambush for over a week. They didn't strike again for nearly a fortnight. After that, they did come and they raided the house of Edward McLoughlin. They took him from his home and family and shot him dead on the roadside near his own house. This man, although a Catholic, had no connection with the I.R.A We Were only about a mile away camping at a farmhouse on the night this shooting took place. Our scouts rushed in to tell us they had heard shooting and we rushed across the fields to find the enemy had gone off.

We were hard pressed at this time and lost by capture a good lot of officers and men, including our brigadier, Mick Gallagher, during a general round-up which was carried out all over the Six County area. To make an estimate now, I should say that about 50% of our officers and men were captured. During the time we were in the mountains, Father Mat Maguire heard we were there and made his way over to us and heard our confessions and told us that we were fighting in a just cause. This visit gave us great consolation as at this time we were not very popular with the majority of people. At this period our people were being terrorised and threatened all over the place. Nightly raiding of our people's houses was a common occurrence, also hold-ups and shootings were regular features of the times. A reign of terror was launched and the people, while standing up to it generally, were affected by the dangers of the times. They had reached a stage when they couldn't endure any more and we had no reply to this reign of terror.

There was very little we could do about it. We decided to break up and seek assistance across the border in Co.Donegal. We broke camp and made our way towards the border in groups. I decided I would pay a visit to my people and tell them I was leaving the area. On the way home I met a friendly Protestant - Mr. Crawford. He was very much surprised to see me and told me I was to be shot at sight as the Specials knew I was the leader and the cause of the trouble in the area. I stayed around my home for a few days and one night my brother and I were in bed when we were wakened by sounds of shooting which was from an enemy patrol which was passing along the railway line about 300 yards from our house. I jumped out to get hold of a hand grenade which I had lying on the floor and in my excitement pulled the pin out of it. This patrol passed and I got the pin safely back into the grenade. After this I made my way to Pettigo. Some of our lads had arrived there before me.

This was about the month of April 1922. The idea behind our evacuation of the north was to get properly organised, armed, trained and equipped with things which we needed badly and return again to Northern Ireland to carry on the fight as long as it would be possible to do so. Pettigo lies on the border between Fermanagh and Donegal. At this period there was really no border in existence. There were recognised lines of demarcation between the two counties, but no attempt was made to have a Customs Post or any of the border regulations which are now observed. When I reached Pettigo there must have been 30 or 40 I.R.A. from the Six Counties in occupation of an old barracks in the town. We were well received and very kindly treated by our comrades in the area. Danny Gallagher was O/C. at the time of the local battalion and had his headquarters in Pettigo. He did his utmost to make our stay there pleasant. We confined our activities to patrols about the village at night and lived there very quietly and uneventfully for a time. I got s dispatch from

our O/C., Charlie Daly, asking me to meet him at O'Gorman's Hotel, Bundoran. When I arrived there I found he had gone on a tour of inspection of the Donegal area with General Sean MacEoin. I had great hopes they were planning something big for the Six Counties. I returned to Pettigo and I didn't hear from him again.

Although life was dull, there was an air of expectancy about the place and one felt that anything could happen. It didn't come much as a surprise when word came through late on Sunday evening, the 28th May, from Belleek to alert the I.R.A. in Pettigo. It appeared that the I.R.A. in Belleek had an engagement with enemy forces and had succeeded in cutting off a section of Specials in an island in Lough Erne. I understood this at the time but, being a stranger, my version of the affair may not be accurate. Our officers decided to cut a trench across the road at Pettigo Bridge to prevent a rush through by enemy cars or tanks. While this work was in progress large numbers of enemy forces began to appear on the Fermanagh side of the border. As our working party was in grave danger should the enemy open fire, I was ordered to take a covering party of about 12 or 14 men to protect them. These men were armed with rifles. We took up positions overlooking the bridge. The enemy forces doubled and took up positions behind a hedge (?) across from us. As the men making the trench were now in grave danger, being right in the line of fire from both sides, it was decided to withdraw the working party. We didn't wish to be the aggressors and I warned the men to withhold their fire and await orders. We must have been in that position for a couple of hours. The tension was great. The whole town had become very quiet and you could hear a pin drop when suddenly a shot ran out somewhere up the street. This was followed by three or four more single ones. This seemed to be a signal, because the whole place became alive with sound in a few minutes.

Bullets were hitting the wall just over our heads and large lumps of lead were dropping on top of us. Our rifles were soon too hot to hold and the air was filled with the smoke and the smell of cordite. We had 100 rounds of ammunition each and most of it was gone before the enemy withdrew. I forget the names of the men who were with me at this engagement except one who was called William Kearney. He was killed near the same place a week later. We remained at our post until about 7 o'clock on Monday, 29th May. I told my party to go two or three at a time to get some breakfast at a headquarters we had commandeered in a house.

Danny Gallagher and I were crossing the street when one of the enemy had a shot at us. The bullet hit the road just in front of us. We lay down flat on the street and one of our fellows who saw the thing happening got a Thompson gun and let this sniper have a couple of bursts. We didn't hear from him again. I had breakfast and returned to my unit in the house at the station. I had a few hours' sleep and by evening we took up positions in the Pumping House at the station. Monday night was fairly quiet, but at daybreak a battle royal broke out around the village. From our positions we couldn't see what was going on and I moved the men out along the railway line in order to be in position to cover the main road leading to the town. Some of the enemy were retreating down this road and our men opened fire on them. One of our men had a rifle fitted for firing grenades and he tried to get a few across the road. As far as I remember, they failed to hit the target. I found this experiment most interesting as I had never seen a rifle grenade fired before and I saw that at short range they could be very effective. Things were mostly quiet for the rest of the day except for occasional sniping. It was Thursday, 1st June, before the enemy decided to try our strength. A mixed force of police and soldiers in about twelve Crossley tenders came down the main road. Our outpost let them through and it was

only when they were right up near the village that our men opened fire on them. They were then in line of fire from a number of our positions and must have suffered heavy casualties in their efforts to turn the lorries and get back. They were well armed with machine guns and put up stern resistance for about half an hour, the time the fight lasted. An amusing sequel to this fight was that one of the policemen, for some reason or another, didn't leave with the rest and after the main party had moved off he started off down the road, running for all he was worth. None of our fellows fired on him, but gave him a hearty cheer.

The police didn't like the treatment they received and we didn't see any of them again for the rest of the week. We were kept very much on the alert due to the attention of snipers. These were British soldiers mostly who had plenty of experience and often crept to within a couple of hundred yards of our positions. Our front had become much extended by this time and we had to send a detachment of men under John Travers to stem an enemy attack in Letter district, which is about three miles out on the Lough Derg side of the town of Pettigo. Two girls had been seriously wounded in this area, one named McGrath and the other MacNeill. There was also a heavy concentration of British troops on the Boa Island and two sections of these had been landed on the mainland about two miles below Pettigo. We had to send another detachment of men under Jim Scallon to meet this new front. I spent Friday and Saturday on Drumharriff Hill. This post was always fairly active as it overlooked a large part of the Co. Fermanagh and the main road leading from Kesh to Pettigo. We came in for quite a lot of sniping at this post. We were all very tired by Saturday as we had less than 100 men at any time in Pettigo and we had to spend long hours at our posts. We were relieved at about 9 o'clock on Saturday evening, 3rd June, and we went down to our headquarters to have a meal and rest. My men and I weren't

more than one hour in bed when one of the officers from headquarters woke me up and told me to take my section to assist Jim Scallon, who was being heavily attacked in his position at Waterfoot on the Belleek road. One tragic sequel arising out of this incident was in the case of Paddy (?) Flood. When I was told to take my men to help Scallon, I tried to waken Flood. He looked at me and said he was completely exhausted and that it was no use in his trying to get out. I could see the boy was thoroughly exhausted and I told him to remain in bed. The next morning he was mobilised with another section and sent to a position on Drumharriff Hill. Shortly after he and the boys took up positions on the hill they were heavily attacked by artillery fire and Flood, Kearney and McKenna were killed. Had he been able to come with us the previous night he would not have been in Drumharriff during the shelling.

When I arrived at Waterfoot we had to crawl for about 300 yards to get to the position held by Scallon and his men. He was under heavy cross fire from two sections of the enemy. I suggested to Scallon that we should try to move into a position directly between the enemy positions in order to get them to fire at each other in their efforts to reply to ~~their~~ our fire. We did this and it worked out as we had anticipated. When we got them properly engaged in the darkness, we returned to the safety of our trench. Their fire at each other continued for some time and eventually both parties of the enemy evacuated their positions and retreated. After the enemy retreated we slept in these positions until morning when we were relieved by another section. I think it was either eight or nine o'clock Mass I was at in Pettigo. The firing had become intense all over the place. During the time we were at Mass, firing had broken out by approaching enemy forces from various points surrounding the town. When we were leaving Mass, Pettigo was being shelled. It was about the time we were leaving the chapel that the first shell came across.

I returned to my headquarters in the town and, when I arrived there, I found the garrison had all evacuated. Tommy Doherty and I had a cup of tea which we prepared ourselves. About the time we had this feed at our former headquarters I didn't anticipate that the British forces would move into Pettigo, although they were shelling the place with heavy fire. I didn't think they would actually occupy the town. I walked along a corridor leading from the kitchen to the front door and looked out and was shocked to see two armoured cars outside the door. I took up a Thompson gun which had been left behind and was lying on the table, and Danny Doherty and myself got out the back door and across the yard. There we joined up with Danny Gallagher and about twenty others who were behind a hedge sheltering from the heavy fire. In that section there was a chap named MacBerty who had a Lewis machine gun. He called to me to come up to him and we would try and get in a few bursts because I had the Thompson gun. He put the muzzle of the Lewis gun over the fence, but found it impossible to use it as the ground around where the gun was planted was being cut away by enemy fire at short range. We made our way as best we could, crawling singly or in pairs along the side of a hedge. We were able to evacuate this position without drawing any undue fire from the enemy. Apparently they didn't detect us. When we got further away from the scene of the heavy fire we made an effort to increase our rate of progress and it was at this time we came under really heavy fire when the enemy noticed our retreat. In our efforts to get away we came to a point where we had no cover of any sort. In crossing this a heavy shell from a British gun came dropping in our midst. When the shell exploded it covered all of us with mud. There were no casualties from its explosion. After we got away from this hill we lost touch with the enemy and continued on across the chain of mountains in the direction of Ballintra. This engagement, as far as I am concerned, ended the fight at Pettigo.

A large number of our men in various positions, probably forty or fifty in all, were captured. The forces which the British used against our men in the last stages of the fight in Pettigo were so overwhelming that we couldn't stem the tide. I would suggest that Detective Officer Scallon should be approached for evidence, as his memory is good and he knows all the various units of the British army which fought against us at Pettigo.

I would like to pay a tribute before I pass from this Pettigo incident to a Unionist lady doctor who was practising in Pettigo during the attack on the town. On our retreat from Pettigo she apparently had to evacuate about the time we left the place. She came to us later on in our journey to inquire if any of our men were wounded or needed medical attention. We all appreciated her intentions and her offer to help us. I cannot remember this lady's name now.

As far as I remember, we were picked up by motor cars later on that day and taken into Donegal town. We took over the workhouse building in Donegal town as a temporary barracks. I think that over half of the force which was engaged at Pettigo reached Donegal town. I would say about 55 or 65 men. When we arrived in Donegal town we were in bad shape. Many of us had lost our spare clothes and we had neither money nor goods. The people of the town showed great kindness to us. The local priest made a collection to provide some of our men with necessary clothing. In addition to supplying us with shirts, boots, etc., they provided all the food we required. In fact, we couldn't have been treated better.

I would also like to pay a tribute to the nuns in the hospital who prepared food for us when we had no means of cooking it ourselves. During the few weeks I was in Donegal town we contracted scabies. Most of our men became infected

The local doctor was called in to examine us and sent all of us to the Isolation Hospital for treatment. We were here under treatment at the outbreak of the civil war. We heard the shooting at Finner when the Free State army came to the camp which had been held formerly by Republicans.

Most of the men in the hospital were members of the 2nd Northern Division and were true to their allegiance to the republic, and during the time we were in hospital the only thing we could do to help the republican forces was to procure petrol in Ballyshannon and dump it in the vicinity of the hospital to be picked up by the republican army cars which were able to go into this town from Kiltyclogher.

The men began to recover and we made a plan to go back to the north and collect some rifles and revolvers which had been dumped. It is very difficult now to visualise what our intentions really were in going to procure the arms in the north. Our sympathies were with the republicans in their fight in the south, but our keenest interest was our own job in the north.

During our stay in the hospital in Ballyshannon a lot of our comrades from Donegal and other places had joined the Free State army. The officer in charge of these men was Danny Gallagher. The relations between Gallagher and ourselves were friendly. He didn't forget we were old comrades in arms. Apparently, the higher authorities in the Free State got to know of this good relationship which existed between Gallagher and us and they came along with motor cars and took us from the hospital and carried us into Finner Camp, where they put us under guard in a hut in the camp. We found the army authorities in Finner were in a constant state of nerves. One night, through some defect in the electric cables supplying light to the camp, the lights began to flicker on and off. An officer named Smyth

who was in charge, came in and warned us in our huts that if we wouldn't stop our signalling the republicans he would blow us up. During the time he was returning to his quarters the lights began flashing again. I got the men out of bed and we all lay flat on the floor. Three or four shots were fired through our hut. I then heard a voice which I recognised as that of a McDonagh who was with us in Pettigo calling out to stop the firing, and it was stopped immediately and an electrician came down and had the defect repaired.

I remained in Finner Camp until December 1922, when I and all the others who were prisoners with me in Finner were released. As soon as I was released I went to Liverpool. I had to borrow the fare there from a pal of mine. I arrived at my brother's place. He was teaching there. I had twopence in my pocket. To add to my troubles, the week after I arrived we were raided by C.I.D. who had a warrant for the arrest of my landlord and landlady - Mr. and Mrs. Leonard - and my brother. I was left in charge of the house, but I had no money. Next morning I went to the Central Police Station in Dale Street and found my brother and Mr. and Mrs. Leonard and a number of others had been taken on board a cruiser for shipment to Ireland. I was now in a very unenviable position, being in charge of a big house, not knowing who owned it and with no money in my pocket to provide the bare necessities of life. I had to call on a girl I knew from Tyrone and I borrowed 10/- from her. After a few weeks I got employment in the Liverpool Corporation through the good offices of an Irishman named P.J. Kelly, who was an Alderman of the city.

Signed: Nicholas Smyth
(Nicholas Smyth)
Date: 8th September 1952

Witness: John McCoy.
(John McCoy)
8/9/52