

N.S. 742

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

NO. W.S. 742

ROINN



COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 742

Witness

Lieut.-Col. Thomas Halpin,
Collins Barracks,
Cork.

Identity.

Lieutenant (O/C) "A" Company Irish Volunteers,
Clonmel, 1916 - .

Subject.

- (a) National activities, Co. Tipperary,
1913-1921;
- (b) Sinn Fein election campaign,
Co. Tipperary, 1918.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No.S.409.....

Form B.S.M. 2

STATEMENT OF Lt.-COL. THOMAS HALPIN.CONTENTS SHEET.Pages:

1.	Personal details and introduction to Nationalist Movement ..	1
2.	Start of Volunteer Movement in Clonmel, early training and organising ..	2 - 4
3.	Volunteer conventions in Thurles 1915-'16	4
4.	Incidents leading up to Easter Week 1916	4 - 5
5.	Easter Week activities in Clonmel	5 - 8
6.	Internment at Richmond Barracks, Barlinnie and Frongoch ..	9 - 10
7.	Reorganisation of Clonmel Volunteers following the Rising - Conscription Crisis ..	10 - 11
8.	Incidents surrounding 1918 elections, Pierce McCann's death ..	11 - 13
9.	Raids for arms and mails and destruction of military petrol supplies ..	14 - 16
10.	Railway communication systems and strike against carrying enemy forces ..	16 - 18
11.	Enemy raid on Brigade Council meetings at Blackcastle ..	18 - 20
12.	Abortive attack on Clerihan R.I.C. Barracks and feint attacks on Kilsheelan and Kilmanahan	20 - 22
13.	Planning of attack on Ardfinnan ..	22 - 23
14.	Arrested and interned in Ballykinlar	23
15.	Volunteer appointments held showing procedure of Brigade sanction ..	23 - 24
16.	Some minor incidents including funeral of Sean Treacy at Kilfeacle ..	24 - 26

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

NO. W.S. 742

Statement of Lieut-Colonel Thomas Halpin,
Collins Barracks, Cork.

I was born in the town of Clonmel in Thomas Street in January 1895. About 1911 I became employed as a junior clerk with Messrs. Murphy, Railway Agents and General Carriers, in their Clonmel Branch. Messrs. John Wallis & Sons of Bachelors Walk took over Murphy's some years later and I was engaged by Messrs. Wallis & Sons in a similar capacity. I subsequently changed over to Great Southern and Western Railway about 1917 and I was employed as clerk in the parcels' office in Clonmel.

In 1912 or 1913 I joined the St. Mary's Branch of the Gaelic League.

I joined the Volunteers at their inception in 1913. This actually followed within a week of the inauguration of the Volunteers in Dublin, November 1913.

The Volunteer force was started in Clonmel by Frank Drohan who had always been an outstanding Irish-Irelander throughout his life. Even in the very early years when Irish manufactured articles were not up to the high standard of the present time, Frank Drohan, Pierce McCann, Johnny Morrissey and a fair number of others would only purchase Irish made goods. It was Frank's sterling example that inspired a large number of us to go into the Volunteers and other Irish-Ireland activities. Very frequently Frank would get on his bike and move to some of the surrounding villages such as, Ballymacarbery, Newcastle and Kilmanahan, to teach Irish without any fee or award. All he wanted was to get the young people to learn the language.

In or about 1914 or 1915 a big number of Volunteers joined the A.O.H. but, after a short period, cut adrift from it completely for the reason that it was controlled very largely by Irish Party supporters who, in the main, were not favourably disposed towards the Volunteers. I personally had a row with one very prominent member, still living, over some very disparaging remarks he passed about some of the Volunteer leaders. This was about the time of the Redmondite Split in 1915. Clonmel was not then a very strong Irish-Ireland town because of the fact that it was and had been for generations one of the strongest garrison towns in the south of Ireland and a lot of marriages with British troops took place down the years. A further reason was that the Irish Party was up to 1918 strongly entrenched and the local M.P., the late Tom Condon, largely dominated local politics.

Fairly satisfactory progress was maintained from the commencement of the Volunteers, and within a comparatively short period following the split we had between 50 and 60 good and sincere members who were regular in their parade attendances.

We had two ex British N.C.O.s training us, Watty Prendergast and Bobby Burns, who were both fairly decent men. Training was carried out in a large yard off O'Connell Street and in a field off the Cashel road. We later went up the hill overlooking the town to a place called Lar Hallinan's, Scrouthea, for field training.

About this time we had a very energetic young man, Seán McLoughlin of Dublin, who was, I believe, belonging to the Citizen Army. He was employed by the firm of Messrs. Early, I think it was, of Dublin, Church Decorators, and he was at this time working at his trade

in Clonmel on behalf of his employers - working on one of the local churches. Seán McLoughlin, who afterwards fought in the Rising of 1916 in Dublin, had a great flair for field training and taught us the rudiments of this on the hills above Clonmel.

We had many other visitors from time to time, including the Countess Markevicz and Ernest Blythe, who was on his way to Kerry to work with a farmer in order to perfect his knowledge of Irish. Later Seumas Robinson, Seán Treacy and Ernie O'Malley of Brigade and Divisional Staffs visited us now and again.

Going back a bit in the chronology of events; when the Redmondite nominees joined the Volunteer Executive there was a huge expansion in the numbers of Volunteers. Later on, after Redmond's Woodenbridge speech which brought about the Split, our members were reduced to roughly our former strength which was in or about the 50 mark. Those who remained, however, were very staunch and continued active members.

Gradually a fair stock of arms was built up, and, as far as my recollection goes, by Easter Week every man in the Company was armed in some way or other with a rifle, revolver or a shotgun. In the case of the latter, a supply of buckshot cartridges was made by some of the members. I believe there were a few pikes made. I don't remember seeing them but presumably their value would be more sentimental than otherwise, though they could be of use in certain circumstances.

The organisation and training proceeded apace, and it was usual to have a route march on succeeding Sundays to outlying towns and villages for propaganda purposes to help to raise the Volunteers' enthusiasm in

these places. Later on about 25 or 30 of us who had bicycles formed cycling parties which travelled further afield, even as far as Waterford, Thurles, Tipperary or wherever there was a Feis or important football match being held, with small tricolours flying from our handlebars with a similar propaganda object. On one occasion in 1918 when we visited Tipperary town for a Feis at which de Valera spoke, (I can well remember the day as the death of the famous Bishop of Limerick, Dr. O'Dwyer, was announced there and cast a gloom over the gathering), on our return journey that evening the separation allowance element (soldiers' wives) who had seen us passing earlier and were resident principally in the Spittal district, gave us a lot of unwelcome attention and showed their antagonism by pelting us with slops, etc., making us beat a hasty retreat.

Returning again to the chronology of events, I recollect cycling to Thurles in 1915 or early 1916 with Frank Drohan, Billie Myles and Johnny Morrissey to attend a Volunteer Convention which was held in a restaurant in Thurles, adjacent to the offices of the 'Tipperary Star'. Joe O'Connor represented G.H.Q. at this Convention (not "Holy Joe"), and others present included the "Old Warrior", Charlie Culhane of Thurles, Jimmy Kennedy, Mick Eustace of Thurles, Pierce McCann of Dualla, a man named Gantly from Roscrea and, I think, Seamus O'Neill of Clonmel (now Superintendent O'Neill). These are all the names I can remember of those present at the Convention.

I remember an incident that occurred about the end of 1915 or beginning of 1916. We had a carter at the railway station in Clonmel named Tom Barrett. He was employed at Wallis's, the Carriers, and had two sons in the British Army. One day he produced a miniature

Union Jack about the size of a handkerchief which he was flashing about for all and sundry to see. A very good Irishman was head porter of the goods store. His name was Jerry Reen. Jerry tore the flag from Barrett's hand and threw it in the fire. We thought that was the end of the incident, but no. Barrett went to the R.I.C. Barracks and reported the incident, with the result that the following day Reen, who was originally a Kerry man, was served with a notice forbidding him to reside in the counties of Cork, Kerry or Tipperary. He was an oldish man with a fairly large family, and he had to move to Limerick within 24 hours where he got employment with the Irish-Ireland firm of Messrs. Geary, confectioners. I and others in the place attacked Barrett by abusing him for his action in reporting the incident to the police and causing Reen's deportation from the town, but apparently this also was reported to the police because I was warned by the Sergeant who was responsible for the Weights and Measures that unless I was very careful in my remarks I also would receive a deportation order. However, by a process of ostracisation we succeeded in making things so uncomfortable for Barrett that he cleared off to England.

Coming on towards Easter Week 1916 I had charge of a platoon of about 20 or 22 men. Actually they were called sections at that time. On the Saturday of Holy Week at about 2 or 3 p.m., a Volunteer named Mickey White called up to the railway station and told me that there was something very serious afoot and that I was to report to the Temperance Hall that night for instructions. When I reported there that night all those present were told we were to start the rising on the following night.

Frank Drohan was there and Johnny Morrissey, Billy Myles and all the other officers as well as some others. I think the meeting at which this announcement was made was purely composed of officers and N.C.O.s, though the remainder of the men may have been paraded nearby, because we in turn issued instructions to all our sections to be ready for the following day. I think this meeting I referred to in the Temperance Hall must have been only officers and possibly N.C.O.s, because I remember that we examined the rolls, going over each name with a view to discussing the reliability of each individual, and that there were two men on the rolls, one of whom is still alive, of whose suitability for field service we were not too sure. One of them had weak lungs and another had difficult domestic conditions or something like that. It was Frank Drohan who announced to us that the Rising would begin on the next day, Sunday, and he also advised us all to go to confession that night so as to be able to face what might lie in store for us in the future with easy minds.

When Drohan gave us these instructions he also expressed some doubt as to what it was intended we should do. It seemed that Pierce McCann was also in some doubt, that he had gone to Dublin to clear the matter up and that his return was expected on the night mail train that night, Saturday. He told us that Seamus O'Neill had been sent to Gooldscross or one of these stations to make contact with Pierce McCann when the train would arrive and get confirmation or details of the orders for the Rising.

Some of us met together on Easter Sunday morning and we heard then that O'Neill had brought word back that he had seen McCann and that the orders for the Rising were confirmed. Later that day - Easter Sunday - word came

into Clonmel by Paddy Henehan and Jack O'Shea of Fethard that the mobilisation (by which we understood the Rising) had been cancelled or postponed.

Our plan had been to move out of Clonmel into the country. We were to move out sometime about 7 or 8 o'clock on the Sunday evening and to capture some of the outlying R.I.C. Barracks such as Lisronagh and Clerihan, in each of which we would obtain some 5 or 6 weapons. Thereafter we were to join up with Pierce McCann's contingent in the vicinity of Dualla and await further instructions which we presumed McCann would be able to give us.

Frank Drohan was prepared to take the field if anyone at all was out in Munster, and so after we got the cancellation order on Sunday and had no other news except rumours of fighting in Dublin on the Monday or Tuesday, he sent Tommy Donovan (who was killed later on at Killenaule) to Cork by motorcycle to find out the position in Cork city. When Donovan got to Cork and got in touch with some of the Volunteer officers there he found things up in a heap because of the cancellation orders, with, apparently, no immediate prospect of Volunteer activity there.

On the Thursday of Easter Week word was again received by Dinny Skehan and myself, who were at the railway station, that we were going out that day. We got word that we were going out at 3 o'clock, and we got the word shortly before one o'clock. We said good-bye to a few pals of ours there and went off to get our dinner and collect our weapons. We called into a saddler's shop on the way home and bought two leather straps which we wanted to use as rifle slings. I

think the intention was to get a certain amount of the arms out of the town in a breadvan and I don't know whether they were supposed to be already gone at this time. These were to be brought to a place about a mile and a half outside the town in the Rathronan direction. We learned that Pierce McCann was doing the same thing and picking up contingents at Cashel and Fethard and we were to meet and join up our forces. However, before we actually left the town word came in, if my memory serves me correctly something to the effect that Pierce McCann could not get out because his house was surrounded by military or something like that.

Seemingly there was some hitch in our communication system. We discussed this matter amongst ourselves afterwards, wondering where the link in the communications chain had broken, and it was months afterwards when I came back from Frongoch and was going around arranging the perfection of a communications system, that I tried to find out just what had happened during Easter Week regarding the delay of messages or their failure to reach their destination. We tried to arrange it in such a way that we had a double channel of communication, that is, when messages were being sent out they were sent out on the double, travelling by different routes, so that if one failed to get through the other might have a better chance.

Drohan, Johnny Morrissey, Seamus O'Neill, Jim Ryan, Phil Cunningham, Tommy Donovan, Jerry Puffcell and myself were rounded up by police and military in the week following Easter Week. Similar arrests had been made throughout the country. We were sent to Cork where we were kept about a week in solitary confinement, being then

sent to Richmond Barracks in Dublin where we remained for a few weeks and were there when the British Prime Minister, Asquith, visited the place.

Our room leader in Richmond Barracks was the late Colonel (Ginger) O'Connell. Ginger, whom we had not known until then, began to establish a rule of discipline amongst us. He would allow no smoking or talking after lights-out. When the British Commanding Officer visited our room in the course of his inspections, Ginger called us to attention. His reason which he stated, was that we were all soldiers and should act accordingly. Some of the prisoners did not take very kindly to Ginger's idea of soldierly discipline.

We next found ourselves sent to Barlinnie Prison, near Glasgow in Scotland, where the food and general conditions were somewhat mixed. After a week or so the Irish residents in Glasgow came to our assistance and thereafter kept us well supplied with food, underclothing and books, although, I might remark, this was a period of severe food rationing in England owing to war shortages and these people could ill afford to send us the materials they did. The majority of us were young and with healthy appetites and I must say that these Glasgow-Irish people rose to the occasion and filled all our requirements.

One of the warders in Barlinnie Prison was an N.C.O. of the Connaught Rangers, Sergeant Pat Doyle, who had been badly wounded in the battle of Mons. Doyle was very kind to us and kept us up to date on all the latest news and in many other respects was of great help to us. He was very good at bringing out messages surreptitiously from the prison and we liked him a lot. He was reputed to

have 25 or 27 pieces of shell still lodged in his body.

After 5 or 6 weeks in Barlinnie we were transferred to Frongoch Internment Camp in North Wales. Except for a short break when we were brought before the Sankey Commission at Wormwood Scrubbs we remained in Frongoch until our release some time in August.

Some short time following our release from Frongoch we re-organised the Volunteers and had, in the main, the same old comrades as before. We had practically all the arms that we had had previous to the Rising. Very few of these - only a matter of 3 or 4 rifles - were captured in the police raids following the Rising. I know at any rate that I had the same revolver I had had before I was arrested.

About this time I was sworn into the I.R.B. by Frank Drohan.

We maintained a fair state of activity in the Volunteer force in Clonmel and assisted in the organisation of Volunteer units in the surrounding districts. I personally visited Ballingarry district in company with the late Micheál Sheehan and Tommy Donovan, and we organised a Company there and assisted in its training. Later I was around Kilsheelan district with Ernie O'Malley when he came to organise from G.H.Q.

On one occasion, although I think it was a little later in the chronology of events, I remember visiting a Mr. Declan O'Neill of Emmet Street, Clonmel, in company with Seán Treacy. Mr. O'Neill was a builders' provider. Although the details of this visit escape me now, I am almost sure that the purpose of Treacy's visit was to endeavour to settle some labour dispute that existed or

was threatened. Mr. O'Neill was in the habit of taking over woods for cutting and sawing into commercial timber and I think the dispute was something in connection with this. I mention this to show some of the lesser known interests and activities of Seán Treacy who interested himself in everything that concerned the life of the country. It may have been, in this particular case, that the dispute concerned the purchase of standing timber of Mr. O'Neill in Treacy's own part of the county, or something like that, which he had a special knowledge of.

The conscription crisis in 1918 brought about a very considerable increase in Volunteer strength in Clonmel as in other places and our numbers were quadrupled, but, as was the case elsewhere when the crisis passed, most of these what we called conscription recruits left us.

During the 1918 election the Volunteers were engaged practically wholetime on election activities. It was looked upon as of the highest importance to secure the return of the Sinn Féin candidates at this election and the efforts of the Volunteer Companies all over the country were devoted to the canvassing of voters, protection of speakers at meetings and committee rooms and generally doing everything possible to supply enthusiastic free labour for the success of the elections. It was exclusively Volunteer officers who did all the administrative work in connection with the elections to secure Pierce McCann's return and a really magnificent victory was won when McCann defeated the very strong Irish Parliamentary candidate locally, Mr. Tom Condon. Condon was confident of victory before the election, and it was really the work put into the election by the Volunteers

in Clonmel and other parts of the Constituency that secured his defeat. I am referring to this here to show how intimately the Volunteer organisation was tied in with the political movement of the time. We had here what was known as the Big Five which was a committee with Johnny Morrissey (R.I.P.) as its head. Seán Cooney was in charge of organisation. He arranged speakers for meetings and suchlike. Billy Myles was responsible for publicity and propaganda. I was in charge of the Volunteers, directing their activities on election work. I think it was Jimmy Kennedy (R.I.P.) who was responsible for administration and supply.

At the counting of the votes, Seán Treacy, Ben Hickey of Bansha and one or two others came into the town in Volunteer uniform. I remember meeting them at Feehan's shop in the Main Street. Later the R.I.C. in Clonmel arrested Ben Hickey and another one, but not Seán Treacy. When we heard of this arrest being made a crowd formed spontaneously, which I found myself at the head of, and we marched towards the Barracks with the general idea of giving a cheer for the prisoners. As the crowd reached the Barracks, and before there was time to do anything, the door opened suddenly and about 60-80 R.I.C. men with drawn batons launched themselves on the crowd, hitting out left, right and centre at the unarmed crowd. I suppose the police had become frightened and thought that this crowd was about to attack the Barracks in order to release the prisoners, which nobody in fact had thought of doing at that time, but the seemingly unprovoked assault of the police on the crowd enraged the citizens so that for the rest of the night there was a continual series of scuffles all over the town - wherever police patrols appeared they were attacked with

stones and bottles. This incident or series of incidents being the first political clash with the police for some years in Clonmel, together with the announced result of the elections, brought excitement to fever-pitch and had no doubt some effect in concentrating the attention of the general public on the situation in the country and the struggle for freedom for which the Volunteers and the Sinn Féin Party stood.

Pierce McCann's death in Gloucester prison was a great blow to the people of Tipperary and especially to the Volunteers there. McCann was a great character and commanded the highest respect of everyone in Tipperary. His death in prison also served to influence a lot of people in Tipperary in our favour. I was in bed at that time with the 'flu which was then prevalent, but felt McCann's death was such an important event that I got up from my sick bed to attend his funeral. At this time Frank Drohan was an inmate of the same prison and was even seriously ill.

Following the 1918 elections the main activities of the Volunteers were the usual drilling and training, together with a certain amount of political activity which had dragged over since the election.

A very good Branch of Cumann na mBan was formed in Clonmel, the members of which gave great assistance to the national movement.

There was a very good Fianna Unit also formed under Dominic Mackey and Bill Phelan which catered for the younger element in the town and helped to promote national sentiments.

Coming to 1919 the Volunteers began to carry out raids for arms on the houses of ex British officers and suchlike where arms were reported to be. One such raid was carried out in the Ormonde Hotel where there was an ex British officer staying, named Hope Nelson. This ex officer was staying as a sort of permanent boarder in the hotel and we learned that he had some arms in his room. We got Jerry Davin from Rosegreen to go in as he would not be known in the place, and to remain in the hotel after closing time so that it would be open for the raiding party. Myself, Tommy Smith (who died recently) and, I think, Billy Myles and one or two others waited between the hotel and the R.I.C. barracks. Two of our party followed Davin into the hotel. Then the remainder of us came in and we held up the place, ordering everyone there to put their hands over their heads while we kept them under cover from our revolvers. There was one poor man present in the hotel that night, Reggie Whelan, who died next day from heart failure or something like that, and it was said that the raid was the cause of his death. A search of Hope Nelson's room disclosed three weapons, a rifle, a shotgun and, I think, a revolver.

One of the Volunteers, Mick Lambe, engaged on one of these raids got badly injured, one of his hands being shattered, so that he had to be sent to Dublin for treatment. He was shot by the man whose house was raided. Subsequently when consideration was given to punitive action against this man for wounding the Volunteer he was allowed to go scot-free because it was stated he was mentally unbalanced.

There were a number of such raids carried out in the locality which secured a fair number of arms of various

kinds. I was on about 6 or 8 of these raids myself, including the houses of two R.I.C. men one of whose sons, Phil Carroll (since dead) later owned a public house and was married to a cousin of mine. He was on the road at the time with another cousin of mine (Paddy Halpin) when we came to raid the place, but his father came down to meet us and wanted to shoot us on the spot. Then we went to the house of another ex R.I.C. man (Leahy) in Tivoli Terrace. He used to repair shotguns and do all kinds of work like that. We only got one shotgun in the place. There were a lot of parts and things like that in various stages of repair but only one complete weapon. We were operating in several separate bands at this time and over an area of about four miles radius of the town of Clonmel.

We also carried out a few raids on the mails. On two occasions we waited for the mail car on the Fethard road and collected the mails from it which were duly censored before forwarding.

One very wet night five of us destroyed twenty barrels of petrol which belonged to the military authorities and were lying in the railway goods yard. I had seen these barrels lying there and we decided that it would be a good thing to come along at night, take the bungs out and let the petrol leak away. As it happened the night turned out very wet so that in the morning there was no trace of the petrol that had spilt from the barrels. To our great surprise nothing at all happened as a result of this. When the R.A.S.C. Sergeant, who, apparently, was responsible for this was asked to return all empty barrels to the petrol supply company, he came along a week or two later and finding these empty

consigned them back to the oil company, and however their accounts were manipulated they did not seem to have missed the 800 gallons or so of petrol.

At this time I was employed in the parcels' office at the railway station and most of the stores coming and going passed through my hands. I had pals in all the stations between Limerick and Waterford, and by arrangement with them we were able to keep a close watch on the movements of individuals by rail and in this way keep our Brigade informed of any suspicious enemy movements. I knew all the railway guards and most of the engine drivers coming to and from Clonmel and the vast majority of them were a hundred per cent reliable. Through them we got several parcels of arms through from Dublin. Some of these parcels of arms I had seen myself beforehand in John O'Mahony's place in Dublin, that is Fleming's Hotel off Gardiner Place. We were easily able to arrange for the carriage of this stuff as far as Clonmel or, where it was required, to forward through to Limerick. In this business I was in close touch with D.P. Walsh (R.I.P.) who was a member of the Brigade Staff and looked after this matter of getting arms and ammunition. In this way I handled the gelignite which we got for the destruction of Cahir rifle range, two large cases of it. The system used was to consign materials like this to well-known unsuspected and unsuspecting commercial firms, the material being taken charge of by Volunteers when it reached its destination.

The destruction of the British Military rifle range at Cahir was an operation planned by the South Tipperary Brigade Staff in conjunction with the local Bn. at Cahir. The job was carried out early in June 1920. As, however,

I was not personally concerned in the operation the details of it may be obtained from Mick Ladrigan, Cahir, Seamus Robinson or Seán Hogan who were amongst those engaged on it.

Communications also followed the same routes as for instance, I remember on one day collecting an urgent despatch myself from Purcell's of Glenagat where the Brigade Column was based at the time. It was Jack O'Meara, the Brigade Communications Officer, who told me of this despatch and its urgency. I collected it that morning and saw that it reached Phil Shanahan's in Dublin by that evening.

When the railway men decided to take action against the carrying of British forces or munitions on the railway there was a meeting held in Clonmel in Corboy's publichouse at the back of the railway which was attended by all the railway employees. I was appointed as their leader to take such strike action or whatever was necessary to enforce the decision not to carry British troops, police or munitions.

It was my duty then to inform the driver and guard of the train if any armed party or munitions were going aboard and to ask them to withdraw their services. Actually this only happened in Clonmel on two or three occasions. I can remember two occasions at least. When they saw that we would not carry them the military did not do anything further about it. They made no further attempt to travel by rail.

On one occasion the British officer in charge of a party which proposed to travel on the train became rather nettled when I informed him that the train crew

would not proceed until they had left the train. I explained to him that I was acting on the orders and by the decision of the National Union of Railwaymen. I explained that if we failed to carry out the instructions of our Union it might have serious consequences for us and that, in fact, we might be shot by the I.R.A. I thought he was going to carry the matter further but apparently he accepted my explanation and moved away with his men, and so the train proceeded without them.

About the end of 1919 or beginning of 1920 we began a public collection to establish an arms fund. I got a number of collection boxes made with the necessary coin slots in them. Volunteers were given these to go round all the functions, such as, football matches, aeriochts and the like, and in a comparatively short time we had collected over £100.

I had this money with me when I attended a Brigade Council meeting in Maher's of Blackcastle and I nearly lost it. I had this money, together with some despatches, on me when reporting to Blackcastle for the meeting, to which I had cycled with four others. The two O'Keeffes, Jimmy Kennedy and I were cycling along near Clerihan and just as we came around the bend of the road we came across a party of Tans. This was about the time that the Tans first made their appearance. We got rather a shock when we saw them as we were quite close to them when we saw them and, of course, they saw us. We could think of nothing to do about it but cycle unconcernedly past them, shouting good-day to them as we passed. They in turn returned our salute and took no further notice of us.

On arrival at Maher's we were assembled in a hay barn

where Seán Treacy, Seamus Robinson and other members of the Brigade Staff were present. Just as the meeting was about to start one of our scouts brought in word that a party of British Cavalry were moving on along the road near the farm. Everyone was slightly alarmed about this news, but Seán Treacy said we need take no notice of the matter as the road in question was a normal patrol route for the British military, and we were reassured. Hardly had he said this, however, when it was apparent that the military had surrounded the place and were firing at random at anything that they thought they saw. We all fled helter-skelter in different directions. I happened to follow Seán Treacy, Paddy Hogan and four or five others. Seán Treacy, after running a bit, turned about and opened fire with his revolver towards the military. He then ran on a bit, turned again every now and then to fire off a few shots from his revolvers, of which he carried two.

As we had only arrived at Maher's a short time before, after cycling from Clonmel, I was feeling tired, and after running a short while felt I could go no further. So I climbed up a tree in the hope that I would not be observed there. When I got up into the tree I realised that there was no concealment there, and that if any soldier happened to glance up I would be spotted at once. I bethought myself then of the money and the despatches which I carried. I had in my possession an old brown silk handkerchief in which I wrapped the money and the despatches and I tied them to a bough above me. I hoped that in the event of my being discovered the parcel tied to the tree above me would not be seen when I had climbed down. As it happened I was not discovered, although Ned McGrath, Seamus O'Neill of Rockwell and small Jack O'Keefe of Carrick-on-Suir were caught and I saw them

being marched off under arrest right under me. As all our bikes were taken by the military and they had found some despatches the military made a most exhaustive search of the neighbourhood. I was three hours up in the tree before the military moved away and I was able to come down. Having made my way to the road I saw Miss O'Neill from Clonmel driving in a pony and car from Cashel and she gave me a lift home.

The following morning, accompanied by a comrade, John (Skin) Cronin, I got another bicycle and cycled out again to Blackcastle. After a fairly long search I discovered the money and despatches intact. In the excitement I had forgotten the location of the particular tree in which I had hidden them and I was becoming alarmed for my reputation if I should fail to recover the money as, not having been arrested, it would be hard to give a plausible explanation of how it had been lost. However, I found it eventually and that settled the matter.

About June or July 1920 a big attack was planned on Clerihan Barracks. Billy Myles was responsible for covering the Cashel road with about 30 men and I was responsible for covering the Lisronagh road with about the same number of men. We were in position by midnight with our men disposed in accordance with the particular way they were armed, that is, the men with shotguns closer to the road and a few with grenades, the riflemen being placed further back.

This attack was planned as a Brigade attack, that is, the arrangements were made by the Brigade Staff and the Clonmel Battalion merely had the job of covering the roads approaching it from Clonmel as it was expected

that large numbers of military reinforcements would rush out from Clonmel as soon as the attack began. So we had the roads barricaded with our parties covering the barricades in the manner stated above.

Part of the general scheme of the attack was that feint attacks would be carried out at Kilmanahan and Kilsheelan Barracks, and these feint attacks did take place as Verey lights were going up from these places so that the sky was bright with them while we waited for the opening of the attack on Clerihan. We waited all night until well after daylight in the morning, but saw no sign of activity around Clerihan.

For some reason the main attack, which was on Clerihan Barracks, did not come off. I heard the reason given afterwards and, of course, I am not sure about this. What I heard was that it had been found that there was a serious maternity case on in the house adjoining the Barracks and the attack had been abandoned in consequence, but, be that as it may, nobody had taken the trouble to warn us that the attack had been abandoned and we were left to assume this when daylight had come without anything happening, whereupon we made our way home. It was also mentioned that the reason the attack was called off was due to the fact that the Brigade had not obtained G.H.Q. sanction for the operation.

We had considerable difficulty in getting our stuff away in daylight as it was. Actually I had waited there until about six o'clock in the morning trying to arrange this. Some of the smaller arms could be taken away by the men themselves but there were other materials which were more difficult. I was able eventually to

arrange that most of this would be brought to the railway station where I was employed, and there I locked it up in a toolshed where it remained for a couple of days until I was able to get a carpenter, Bill Cleary, to make boxes to contain the stuff and bring it back to where we had it dumped before.

I never was able to clear up why this attack did not take place because elaborate preparations had been made for it and there were stocks of petrol brought up - with pumps to pump the petrol on to the Barracks. Most of the Brigade Staff were supposed to be there, but what the truth of the abandonment of the attack was I never knew. The date of this episode was the same as the feint attacks carried out on Kilmanahan and Kilsheelan, reports of which were published at the time and I think it was the night of July 21st.

A rather interesting story was told concerning the attack on Kilsheelan that night. As I have stated, this was really a feint attack to draw attention from the main attack intended at Clerihan, and the attackers, therefore, had no intention of trying to capture the place. We heard afterwards that the Sergeant in charge at Kilsheelan, who was a Sergeant Prenderville, was friendly towards us. He later became a Superintendent in the Gardai. He had all his men lined up ready to surrender the Barracks when its surrender was called for by the attackers. The attackers, of course, did not know this, and as they had not intended to capture the place did not call for its surrender, so the opportunity passed.

There was another attack planned around that time at Ardfinnan. My connection with this was in the preliminary stage of the planning of the attack. I was

called out to a meeting at Tincurry, Cahir, to meet Ernie O'Malley. Mick Ladrigan was with me. When we arrived out at Tincurry we saw Ernie O'Malley on top of the roof of the Barracks there, the roof being about forty feet above the ground. He was scrambling back and forward from one side to the other. When he came down off that he told us that the particular roof on this Barracks was the same as that on the Barracks in Ardfinnan, and he thought by examining this one he would discover first-hand the best method of attacking the Ardfinnan Barracks. Only tentative arrangements for the attack on Ardfinnan were being made that night but I was arrested in the meantime and the actual attack on Ardfinnan came off some time after my arrest.

On the morning following Bloody Sunday there was a general swoop made in Clonmel and I was arrested. After being kept in Clonmel for a short time I was sent to Cork jail and afterwards to Ballykinlar Internment Camp where I remained until the release of the prisoners after the Truce in December 1921.

There were numerous small things that happened in between times of which it is hard to recollect the details now. We had two or three Sinn Féin Court cases for instance, and there was a case where we went out at half-past seven one morning to ambush a patrol from a post they held in the courthouse. These fellows usually went out for their breakfast about this time and four or five of us waited for them that morning, but on this particular morning a lorry picked them up and brought them to the station instead.

Regarding the Volunteer appointments held by me: I was a Lieutenant in charge of this platoon or section

as we called it then before 1916. After 1916 when we reorganised the Volunteers I became O/C of "A" Company.

After the formation of the Brigade - it must have been near 1920 - I remember being ordered to mobilise my men one Saturday night and march them away up the mountain road to near where the Clonmel Golf Links are now, and there we went into a field. Frank Drohan was there that night with Ernie O'Malley, Seán Treacy and, I think, Seamus Robinson and some other members of the Brigade Staff. In the field we were put through various evolutions, Treacy giving instructions as to what he wanted us to do, and I carried them out. This seemed to be a kind of a training test. After this there was an election for a Company Commander held at which I was elected, and my appointment was formally ratified on the spot by the Brigade Staff as O/C of "A" Company. Actually I had been acting as O/C of the Company for a long time before this, but this seemed to be a ratification of the appointment. I believe similar business was carried out in other places as if the Brigade Commander and his Staff wished to satisfy themselves that all the officers of the Brigade were suitable for their appointments. Dinny Skehan (now Lieutenant-Colonel Skehan) was appointed that night as one of my Platoon Commanders. I forget who the other one was, whether it was Jack Tynan or not. Having been out all night on this exercise we marched back after daylight with O'Malley and the others right past the Barracks.

In connection with Volunteer training: I was always keen on physical training and we had P.T. Classes apart from our other parades in the Gaelic League Hall a couple of nights a week. We had as an instructor a man named

Joe O'Neill, known as the "Old Horse". He had been formerly a Physical Training Instructor in Pittsburg University. He was a brother-in-law of T.A. Morris. This would be about 1919 and 1920, and however this matter came to the notice of the local R.I.C. Inspector, Power O'Shea, the latter ordered our instructor, O'Neill, to cease his activities with us. O'Neill came to us and told us all about this. We told him to go ahead and that if he was brought up in Court and fined we would deal with that. About a week later a local R.I.C. Sergeant called on O'Neill and delivered the ultimatum that unless he ceased his physical training instruction with us he would be placed under arrest, whereupon O'Neill gave up his work with us and our P.T. classes fizzled out.

We had a rather tough R.I.C. Head Constable (Hunter) here and an incident regarding him may be worth relating. A few of us were on our way home one night, myself and Seán Cooney (ex Major Cooney of the National Army). Cooney was a great man on the political side, a great hand at making speeches and that kind of thing, and was a member of the Clonmel Corporation. He was a Volunteer of course, and attended parades and the like, but he was a better man in connection with political activities through his membership of the Corporation. He had a revolver this night and some other fellow had a holster. We were at a corner at Morton Street and we heard a slight patter of feet. Thinking that this might be a military party or something, Cooney bethought of the revolver he carried and which was empty. He left it on the window-sill beside which we were standing and we moved to the other side of the street. A moment later we saw this patrol of military and Tans led by this Head Constable Hunter all wearing rubber-soled shoes, but they passed

on their mission, whatever it was, without noticing us. Recovering the gun we cleared off. The possession of a gun at that time would have entailed a term of imprisonment at least.

Following Seán Treacy's death in Dublin his body was brought down to Tipperary by rail. Five of us including Frank Drohan, I think Seán Morrissey and Billy Myles, with a Franciscan priest, Rev. Fr. O'Leary, went across to meet the remains at the railway station and to act as pall-bearers at the funeral to Kilfeakle. About midway between Tipperary and Limerick Junction we noticed a Battalion of British troops hidden inside the ditch who just made their appearance as the funeral arrived. The Commanding Officer named Wilson was well known to us. We had armlets on us which they pulled off, and I think they collared a lot of our bikes that day and threatened all sorts of consequences if we tried to carry out any kind of display. Afterwards they followed up to the graveyard and surrounded the graveyard, training machine guns on the funeral cortege while the burial was in progress. I was talking to Phil Shanahan there that day. I forget now who it was delivered the oration at the graveside.

Signed: *T. Halpin*
(T. Halpin) Lt. Col.
Date: *October 29th 1952*
October 29th 1952.

Witness: *J.V. Lawless* Col.
(J.V. Lawless) Col.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21
NO. W.S. 742