ROINN COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 797

Witness

Micheal O Laoghaire,
Shandrum,
51 Griffith Ave.,
Dublin.

Identity.

Member of I.R.B. Liverpool,1908 - ;
Member of Irish Volunteers, Kildare, 1913 - ;
Quartermaster South Kerry Battalion Irish Vol's.
Captain Liverpool and Bootle Coy. I.R.A. 1919 - .

Subject.

(a) I.R.B. Liverpool, 1908 - ;
(b) Organisation of Irish Volunteers, Ireland - general, 1913 - .

(c) I.R.A. Liverpool, 1919 -.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

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Form B.S.M. 2

STATEMENT OF MICHEÁL Ó LAOGHAIRE,
Shandrum, 51 Griffith Avenue, Dublin.

I became associated with Sinn Féin at its inception in October, 1905, in Sligo.

I went to Liverpool in 1907. Then I became directly associated with the physical force movement, the I.R.B., in February 1908. The Centre was Liverpool and the man in charge at that time was Dan McCarthy. I attended all the meetings. The membership was roughly about 20, that is, taking in Bootle and Liverpool combined. Included in this number were a few men who had been associated with the '67 movement. One man I would like to mention in particular was the late James Murphy who marched on Chester Castle in the Rising of '67. We had also visiting us there during that period O'Donovan Rossa, O'Meara and Condon.

The activities at that time were mainly concerned with the holding of meetings. One incident that I would like to record was when, on the death of King Edward VII, the United Irish League flew the Irish flag at half-mast. We objected to this and four of us set out to remove it. We were beaten up and did not succeed in taking down the flag.

I left Liverpool in 1910 and returned first to Dublin. I reported to the Dolphin's Barn Centre where I met Dan McCarthy and Paddy Devlin, known as "the Celt". He was Secretary for the Leinster Centre at that time. I met several other people who later became prominent in the movement, including Joe McGrath.

I then went to Kildare and got in touch with the late Captain Jack Fitzgerald. The activities there were very little. During all that period I was organising for the I.R.B. I did not succeed in getting many members for the I.R.B. in Kildare. The position there, as far as I could see it, was hopeless. I devoted a good deal of my time to the G.A.A. and eventually, about 1912, formed a new Club - hurling and football - at Athgarvan. This Club afterwards became the centre of activities in that area when the Volunteers were established in November 1913.

When the Volunteers were established in November 1913, the response in Kildare, Newbridge and Athgarvan was very satisfactory. The first men to come in were those associated with the G.A.A. and the Club which I had formed. Later, however, when the Volunteers split in 1914, the majority of them went Redmondite.

If the position in Kildare in the years 1910, 1911, 1912 and 1913 was hopeless, the same apathy applied to practically the whole of Ireland. The garrisoned towns of Kildare, Newbridge, Naas and the Curragh Camp - the chief training centre - had a demoralising effect on the people of those districts which left its mark, and to find an Irish-Ireland mind within this orbit would be a rare find, but after events proved that was wrong; the mind was there but latent then. The same could be said of Dublin, Similarly garrisoned; Dolphin's Barn - Dan McCarthy's stronghold and alarmers - was the only ray of republican hope there. They at all times preached republicanism and kept the Fenian embers aflame and alive. When the true facts are known, it will be realised that Fenianism, republicanism and the subsequent fight for freedom owe them

a big debt. In spite of all this, were it not for the advent of the Volunteer movement - November 1913 - the physical movement, in my opinion, was doomed to failure in our time.

The I.R.B. organiser, who could then recruit two Volunteers for the movement in six months of the required standard, was considered a good organiser.

At this time Home Rule was not only on the horizon but the general topic of the day. It was actually becoming law. The Liberal Government, led by Asquith, and the Irish Party, led by Redmond, were forging the measure through the House of Commons and eventually through the House of Lords. It did become law, was put on the statute book and then laid in state with the dignity and pomp fitting the historic measure, but it never operated as Asquith and company suffered from cold feet, due to Carson's defensive rhetoric, the army mutiny and the gun-running at Larne. The historic Home Rule died, tied up without ever seeing the light of day, and is now only a memory buried in the archives of Somerset House, London.

During those years the I.R.B. did not enrol many new recruits as Home Rule had monopolised the mind of the nation. The I.R.B. did not oppose the Bill openly; in fact, they would have worked it and used it as a means to an end. When Sir Edward Carson saw he had the weak-kneed Asquith cornered by his threats, army mutiny and gun-running, he went one step further and founded the Ulster Volunteers. He armed them to carry out more threats and defeat Home Rule. He defied the Government and openly drilled and paraded his armed Volunteers through Belfast and the principal towns in Ulster, while Asquith and his Cabinet only looked on. The Irish Parliamentary Party

was dumbfounded. It was then the I.R.B. took stock and saw their long wished for opening. The dawn of a new era was on their horizon. Action was necessary.

Actually it was in November 1913 they founded the Volunteer movement. This movement - the work of a few just men - not only fanned the dying embers of the Fenian fires throughout the country but resurrected the dormant spirit of freedom in the hearts of the young men of the country as well. Redmond was shocked, Asquith furious, but having taken no action to suppress Carson's Volunteers, he could not then suppress the I.R.B. Volunteers. The Volunteer movement not only spread but quickly took root and, in a short time, Volunteer companies were springing up everywhere. This was the first light of freedom.

Prior to the founding of the Volunteers, the Irish-Ireland movement was at a very low ebb and, as a proof of this, the Wolfe Tone Anniversary was unknown, and only a few I.R.B. men kept his memory alive. Tom Clarke, P.T. Ryan, Mrs. McCarthy (Dan's mother), the Dolphin Alarmers under Dan McCarthy and a few scattered I.R.B. men from Newbridge and Naas were the only people then who paid tribute and laid a wreath on the grave of the immortal Tone. The late Jack Fitzgerald and I were the only two who went from Newbridge and Mick Kelly (editor of the 'Leinster Leader') and the Pattison family, the Naas representatives.

Looking back now on those years, comparing them with the present day demonstrations and the thousands that are now willing to do him homage, one is bound to ask the question, "Did Tone die in vain?" No, Tone did not die in vain! He sowed the seed, as did the '67 and 1916 men, for future generations of Irishmen and women to not only

reap but to secure and cherish. In the hearts of Irishmen and women his memory, like his grave, will always remain green and the seed he sowed fertile. May he rest in peace!

The Home Rule Bill not only killed the spirit of physical force before the founding of the Volunteers but, through it, Redmond subsequently rent the Volunteer movement. When he (Redmond) realised that the Volunteers had come to stay, he demanded control which was refused him. He there and then split the movement, taking with him the majority of Volunteers, known afterwards as the Redmondite or National Volunteers, by promising them Home Rule. The founders of the movement - the I.R.B. - after this had their ranks very much depleted; but, if depleted in numbers, the spirit was there and that spirit and that alone ultimately led Ireland to freedom, although very few men (if any) at the time thought this possible.

After the split, two distinct Volunteer organisations grew up; one, the I.V. (Irish Volunteers), under the I.R.B., who joined to fight for Ireland; the other, the National Volunteers under Redmond, who joined to defend Home Rule. This was the sorry position of the Volunteer movement in Ireland when the 1914-1918 war broke out.

The Irish Volunteers, true to their promise, afterwards fought for Ireland and their leaders suffered the supreme sacrifice before the altar of liberty.

The majority of the National Volunteers joined the British army and 10,000 of them laid down their lives in Flanders, Gallipoli and Mesapotamia fighting for small nationalities and the promise of Home Rule.

Early in 1914 the late Ted Kelly was sent down from Dublin to carry out the organising of the Irish Volunteers

in Kildare. I was appointed Secretary for South Kildare. The Athgarvan Club was the only place where Ted Kelly really got a footing. Eventually he made contact with Tommy Harris, T.D., and Michael Kelly, editor of the 'Leinster Leader', and Tommy Patterson of Naas. In this way he was able to extend the organisation of the Volunteers to these areas. The local I.R.B. men were, in fact, responsible for recruiting for the Irish Volunteers in these areas. Captain Jack Fitzgerald and I had given the names of men who could be trusted to Ted Kelly.

On the day of an all-Ireland football final at Croke Park in 1915, Captain Jack Fitzgerald and I, who were attending the match, were ordered by the Volunteer Executive to attend a meeting at No. 2 Dawson Street (Volunteer Headquarters). At that meeting Bulmer Hobson presided. Several matters were discussed concerning the Volunteer movement. I raised the question of what Volunteers should do in the event of their being accosted and searched by the R.I.C. - should they use their arms? No ruling was given. I was not satisfied and I therefore formally proposed that in such an eventuality Volunteers should use their arms rather than surrender them. While my proposal was seconded, it was not agreed to, with the result that the matter was dropped. This meeting was supposed to represent the 12 Counties of Leinster but only 7 or 8 members turned up at the meeting.

While I was in Newbridge, my activities were fairly well known to the R.I.C. When Kitchener's drive for men was launched, recruiting forms were distributed to able-bodied men and somebody filled up my form. I got a communication from the British recruiting department, signed by Colonel Maurice Moore, to report to some military

centre for enlistment. I ignored it. Some days later I got a wire giving me 24 hours to report from the same officer, Colonel Maurice Moore. I acknowledged this and wrote back, saying that I never signed the form and asking them would they be good enough to pass the form on to me as I might be able to identify the signature of the man who forged my name. I heard no more. The matter dropped.

In February, 1916, I went to Newry and took up a civilian appointment there in the military barracks. Before leaving for Newry, however, I asked Dan McCarthy, Joe McGrath and others to give me the name of one key-man in Newry for the sole purpose of finding ways and means of procuring arms, but they were not able to do so. I may mention that, before I took up the appointment in the military barracks, it was ratified by Headquarters.

My job in the military barracks, Newry, was to take charge of the canteens. While there I became very friendly with a military Sergeant, a Cavan man by the name of Phelan, and afterwards he was instrumental in having an invitation sent to me to become an honorary member of the Sergeants' Mess. While a member of the mess, I thought I saw a great opportunity of getting arms. I arranged with Sergeant Phelan that he should take me to the miniature range and train me in the use of arms. This he agreed to and I had several days with him on the range. As time went on, other civilians resident in Newry were admitted to honorary membership of the Mess. When I got to know them, I put up a further proposition that these men should also be taken to the miniature range and instructed in rifle practice there, which was done. Then when we had some idea of the use of fire-arms, I put up a third proposition that we would challenge the members of the

Sergeants' Mess to a shooting competition. This competition, believe it or not, was fired on Good Friday 1916; for verification, the results were published in one of the daily papers.

I should have mentioned that, before leaving for Newry, Joe McGrath told me in confidence that he thought a rising would take place around Easter and that I would be communicated with. When the Rising did take place, the notification did not reach me. Joe McGrath later admitted that I had been overlooked. I had collected two rifles and some ammunition, which I kept in my stores, but could not establish a contact outside.

It was not until Easter Monday night that I learned that the Rising had taken place. I left Newry immediately and tried to get to Dublin, but failed. During the course of my journey I was informed that there was a Rising in Kerry, which was my native County. I made for there but, when I got into Tralee on the Wednesday or Thursday of Easter Week, I found that there was nothing doing there. I then went as far as Castleisland to contact Dan O'Mahony who was the local leader there and was well-known in I.R.B. circles but, before I could contact him, I was arrested. I was detained for two days in the R.I.C. barracks in Castleisland. I bluffed them as to my innocence regarding any connection with the movement, with the result that I was discharged. They tried several times while I was there to get into communication with Newbridge R.I.C., but they were unable to get through as the lines were cut. Had they succeeded in doing so, I would not have got off so easy.

I then proceeded home, took my bearings and remained inactive for about two months. Then I got going on

organising Sinn Féin. At this period I regarded Sinn Féin as the parent organisation for the recruitment of Volunteers. In a very short time I formed a local Company of the Volunteers at Kilgarvan where I was appointed Captain.

As time went on, the organisation grew and Volunteer Companies were established at Bonane, Templenoe, Tossasist, Tallagh and Sneem. John Joe Rice was also organising at this time and had established a Company in Kenmare.

We then formed the local Battalion. That was the position of the Volunteer movement in South Kerry in 1917. In short, it consisted of one Battalion commanded by John Joe Rice; and the late Seán O'Callaghan, a 1916 man, was Adjutant and I was Q.M.

During that period I was arrested with some of my local Company. I was afterwards sent to Tralee Jail. A rather amusing incident took place regarding those arrests. I received word the night before that we were to be arrested in the early hours of the following morning and our destination was Tralee Jail. There were at that time two trains running daily from Kilgarvan to Tralee, one at 7 a.m., the other about 2 p.m. We had no intention of resisting arrest as arrests at that time were considered very good propaganda, but we didn't like obliging the authorities by surrendering to them at 5 o'clock in the morning and being marched off for the 7 a.m. train to Tralee. We decided not to sleep at home on that night. The police, true to form, raided our homes about 5 a.m. but drew blanks. On their way back to the barracks from my home, they ran into one of the wanted men, Michael Murphy, and arrested him. I was notified and went to Kilgarvan, mobilised the Company and marched them to the police

barracks, halted and stood the Company at ease. Then I knocked at the barrack door which was promptly opened by Blake, the local R.I.C. Sergeant. I asked him was he looking for me and some of my men. He said he was and asked me and the wanted men to step inside. I said to him not until I had handed over the Company to my second in command. This I did and the wanted men and I walked into the barracks but, before going in, I asked a local Tralee Volunteer by the name of Drummy to contact 6 Tralee Volunteers and ask them to meet us at Tralee station. When we arrived at the station, the Volunteers were waiting for us. The police were there also with two Black Maria's. They ordered us to get in and we refused. The idea of the 6 Volunteers was a bit of bluff on my part, because I had in mind all along that we would not get into the Black Maria's but that we would march through Tralee to the jail. I knew that, by swelling the numbers of Volunteers, it would make the position more difficult for the Royal Irish Constabulary (who accompanied us) to keep us in check. It meant arresting us again at the station to put us into the Black Maria's.

As I said before, we refused to travel by the Black Maria's and we marched off from the station to the jail, with the Maria's bringing up the rear of our parade. Since our numbers were now increased to 12, aided by the 6 Volunteers, the position for the R.I.C., who were only 4, looked ridiculous. To add to the ridicule, I gave the order when passing a publichouse, "Left wheel!". With this, we prisoners and the local Volunteers immediately went into the publichouse followed by the R.I.C. Drinks for the Volunteers were ordered, and the R.I.C. who took the matter in very good part ordered drinks for themselves. We chatted over our drinks but, as the R.I.C. were taking

their third round of drinks, I called our party to attention and moved out. The policemen dropped their drinks unfinished and followed us - contempt for law and order being the motto. Eventually we reached Tralee jail. The 6 local Volunteers were dismissed and went to their homes.

We were brought before the Governor and I immediately demanded from him that we should be treated as political prisoners. After considerable argument, he agreed to our demand. We were held in Tralee jail for only one week and were then released.

On returning to my local unit, I was instructed by Sinn Féin Árd Comhairle to carry out a plebiscite in my area, with a view to testing the feelings of the people. Every house in the Kilgarvan area was visited and, with the exception of about 6 Protestant houses, the householders and their families were all in favour of Sinn Féin. Not alone were they in favour of it, but each house contributed to the Sinn Féin funds.

There is an old custom in South Kerry and West Cork that as many people as possible would visit Gougane Barra on the last Sunday in September to attend Mass there. On Sunday, 30th September, 1917, the day that Tomás Ashe was laid to rest, a big contingent of men and women from Kilgarvan wended their way over the mountains into Gougane Barra to attend Mass. Also present at Gougane Barra was a big contingent from Bantry and the surrounding districts. I availed of the opportunity and addressed the crowd, telling them that on this day Tomás Ashe was being buried in Glasnevin and that the least that those present could do for a patriotic Irishman would be to offer up the Rosary

for the repose of his soul at the old Abbey. I said that anyone who wanted to come to the Abbey with me should fall in on parade; those present who were not agreeable to my suggestion need not take any part. I should mention that a big contingent of R.I.C. were also present, fully armed. As a result of my appeal, practically the whole crowd present followed me to the Abbey where we recited the Rosary in Irish.

Before leaving Gougane Barra that evening, an incident occurred. I saw a lady talking to a policeman about 200 yards from the main body of R.I.C. and, as patriotic feelings were running high, I went over to the lady and told her that she should be ashamed of herself talking to a member of the police force. The policeman did not say anything. I rushed over to him and, after a tough struggle, took his rifle from him. To give him his due, he could have blown a whistle and called on his comrades to assist him but he did not do so. With that, the incident closed and I threw back the rifle to him. This was more or less a propaganda stunt to show what could be done if men were determined. It gave food for thought in the area and it was all badly needed at this time.

In May, 1918, following the meeting in the Mansion House protesting against the enforcement of the British Conscription Act, a meeting was held in all parishes throughout the country on a given Sunday in May for the people to voice their feelings against the enforcement of the Conscription Act. I remember before Mass in Kilgarvan on that day speaking to the local acting parish priest, the late Father Tim Murphy, and suggested to him that he should come out strongly on the pulpit regarding the question of conscription. This he agreed to do. In fact, his

denunciation regarding the measure we were to take was so strong that his name was mentioned in the House of Commons later and excerpts of his sermon quoted by Lord Curzon for the manner in which he had advised his flock to resist conscription. A meeting was immediately held after Mass and all the able-bodied men in the parish joined the Volunteers to resist conscription. This I think was the position in every other parish in our Battalion area.

The upshot of that meeting was that the Volunteers in our area trebled themselves in number. We knew then that the Volunteer movement would succeed. When we had all the able-bodied men who elected to join the Volunteer force enrolled, I addressed them. I told them that, in the event of conscription being enforced, they would be the first body of men in my area to take active steps to prevent enforcement. My idea behind that was to keep the old trusted Volunteers intact.

The village of Kilgarvan is small and, I might say, not very wealthy; yet, as a result of the appeal that went forth for funds on that day, there must have been over £300 subscribed, which was a notable contribution to the anti-conscription fund.

We were now forced to consider ways and means to take military action against the British in the event of they forcing conscription. With this object in view, I travelled to Bantry and discussed with the local Volunteer leaders there the best way of meeting the position. Except for a few shotguns and pikes, we had no arms at our disposal. We felt that the best thing we could do would be to withdraw the able-bodied men from the peninsula between Kenmare, Bantry and Castletownbere further inland.

The idea was that no able-bodied man fit for British military service would be left in the area and that, by withdrawing further inland, we could at least attach them to more I.R.A. units that we knew possessed some arms.

Having received the full co-operation of the Bantry Volunteers, I decided to travel to Ballyvourney and Macroom where I put a similar suggestion to the leaders there. My suggestion was readily agreed to. Our plans were never put into effect because some time later the conscription scare died down.

Following the mythical German Plot in May, 1918, headquarters sent word down that we should nominate a suitable candidate for the forthcoming Sinn Féin election. As our constituency was divided into two Comhairle Ceanntair, Cahirciveen and Kenmare, it was decided that we should be unanimous in our selection. The Kenmare representatives met the Cahirciveen representatives and we decided on nominating Fionán Lynch. A short time later Fionán and Mr. Dixon, B.L., came down from Dublin, addressed a meeting at Kenmare; and I was appointed Director of Elections for the Kenmare area, Jeremiah O'Riordan being the nominee for the Cahirciveen area.

From then on I devoted my full time to organising the area for the election. My principal work consisted of forming election committees throughout the area in the various Sinn Féin Clubs that were already in existence and the collection of funds to meet election expenses. As the area proved itself definitely in favour of Sinn Féin, Fionán Lynch was eventually returned without a contest on the 4th December, nomination day.

When the Sinn Féin Executive saw that things were so satisfactory in Kerry and that no contest would be held

there, I was asked to report to Dublin to assist in organising there. I reported to No. 6 Harcourt Street to Seán Nunan, now Secretary for External Affairs. He instructed me to see Murt O'Connell, now Clerk of the Dáil, and work with him in the constituency for which the Countess Markievicz was standing.

On the day following the general election 1918, Dick Coleman, who had died in Usk prison, was buried in the Fenian Plot, Glasnevin. He was buried with full military ceremonial and Volunteer uniforms were provided for the firing party. The police were there in strength, yet no arrests were made. I returned to Kerry on the following day.

After the discovery of the mythical German Plot when several of the leaders were arrested and imprisoned, the R.I.C., the eyes and the ears of the British Government in Ireland, became very active with the result that several prominent Republicans went on the run. We, the Volunteers, were instructed to avoid arrest as far as possible. The British Government, by the wholesale arrests of the leaders and the dogged and harrowing tactics of the R.I.C., thought the Republican movement would collapse and, to crown their activities, they issued a proclamation banning all Irish pastimes catered for by the Gaelic Athletic Association, the Gaelic League, the N.A.C.A., etc. It is well known now that the G.A.A. and the Gaelic League were covering names for I.R.A. and I.R.B. activities and that several secret meetings were held under their names and on their premises, as many of the prominent officials of the G.A.A. were members also of the I.R.B. and the I.R.A. The ban came into force when all counties in Ireland were engaged in County and Inter-County Championships, football and

hurling. Our local hurling teams were in the same position.

We had made arrangements before the proclamation for a hurling match between Kenmare and Kilgarvan to be played in Kilgarvan. Knowing that the proclamation was issued, I thought this was a case of a genuine test as to right against might. We therefore decided to play the match and sent word around that the match would be held. The Kenmare players arrived, followed by a body of armed R.I.C. who were reinforced on their arrival at Kilgarvan by the local constabulary. They proceeded to the playing field where a good crowd had already assembled. I, in the meantime, had issued instructions to have all available hurleys and sticks in readiness and that the active supporters or followers of the teams should keep in close proximity to the R.I.C. who had at this time arrived on the field. The Head Constable had prior to this read the proclamation at the gate forbidding us to hold the match. I was the appointed referee. I ignored his orders, went on the playing pitch, blew my whistle and ordered the teams to fall in. This they did without any hesitation. I started the game and the match was played without further hindrance. Although the R.I.C. took the names of the players, myself included, no more was heard about the incident. There were several fixtures made for that particular date but, to my knowledge, our match was the only one that was held. This only goes to show that the armed forces of a mighty Empire could not force her tyrannical laws on the will of a determined people. I may add here that the playing members of both teams were all Volunteers. The proclamation died a natural death so far as we were concerned on that day.

R.I.C. activities continued to increase but law and order were fast crumbling up. Prisons, jails, interrogations, etc., held no fear for the young men and women of the country. The morale of the R.I.C. was being undermined and they and their families were ostracised, with the result that several R.I.C. with patriotic outlook resigned. To my knowledge, some of the local men from my area who had joined the R.I.C. did actually resign from the force. No physically fit man dared at that time to join the ranks, but it must be said that a goodly number were old men with families who were anxious to complete their period of service, and a good number too were sympathetic and did useful work in conveying important information. Our local Sergeant - Sergeant Blake - came under those headings but he found it difficult to pass on information, as no one at that time was seen in company with or speaking to the R.I.C. I always considered him a straight, peaceful man who never went out of his way to look for trouble. He was transferred sometime later but, before leaving, he passed on some very valuable information regarding two local Volunteers who were actually spying on their comrades and passing on all available information they could collect to the R.I.C. barracks. It was late before this information became known; the Truce was on; otherwise the spies would have been suitably dealt with. But the stigma remained and it is well-known to this day, which, in my opinion, is a far greater punishment on them and their families than any we would have imposed on them for this dastardly crime, for only a coward, a reprobate and a traitor could act in such a manner! Thank God, in their class we had very few and no one suffered from their despicable betrayal! But for this, the chief credit must go to the local Sergeant and his men who, so far as I know, never made use of the information or took any action.

The results of the general election in December 1918 had openly issued a challenge to British rule in Ireland. The Irish Party was now non est, only two members returned. The British Government, Lloyd George and his satellites, were not only shocked but were also furious when the results were made known. The voice of Ireland had spoken. Johnnie Bull Buidhe had got his marching orders. But, like the dying wasp or the snake in the grass, Lloyd George, Wilson, Churchill and company, instead of abiding by the results, planned and connived their revenge similar to, if not worse than the tactics used in Russia to-day. Ireland had spoken. Never in her whole history did she feel prouder. The results animated and inspired the young people in the country to fever pitch. The challenge was made. There was no going back. The Volunteers of the country now knew where they stood. It gave them new heart, courage and determination to know that they had at their back a united country on their march to freedom. While the spirit was high and the Irish Parliament elected, the majority of the chosen candidates were the young men who had withstood the fight against England's might in Dublin in 1916, but having the Parliament and men, our fighting supplies were very small and the means of securing them slow and uncertain. So the greater part of the next few months was spent in training, planning and securing all the local shotguns available which, in our case, were very few as the British Parliament had issued orders for the surrender of all the shotguns in the area. It was only then left to us to devise the best plans and means of attacking the local R.I.C. barracks and capturing whatever arms were available there.

While these plans were under consideration, I got a

sudden call to Liverpool in April, 1919, to attend the funeral of my brother who had died there, which closed my chapter of activities and associations with the movement in Kerry.

A few days after my arrival in Liverpool, I met and contacted a goodly number of the old I.R.B. men, such as Neil Kerr, Stephen Lanigan, Phil Coyne, Tommy Cunningham, etc. I gave them my latest news from Ireland and they explained to me the position in Liverpool then. From them I learned the functions of the I.R.B. and also Sinn Féin, which seemed to me to be the only two bodies actively operating there. As there was at that time a big influx of young Irishmen coming to Liverpool, it was suggested that a large number of those men might be members of the I.R.A. and Sinn Féin in Ireland and that some immediate steps should be taken to investigate the position. I was there and then asked if I would take over the job, as I seemingly had plenty of organising experience in Ireland. I said that there seemed to be plenty of room for organising and that, as far as I could see, the police authorities were not very aggressive. I told them that I was wanted at home in Ireland but they prevailed on me to remain over. After due consideration, I consented, although I had a return ticket in my pocket, and helped to reorganise the Volunteers. This was some time about the middle of April, 1919.

It must be understood that before the Rising of 1916 there was a Company of Volunteers established in Liverpool, but before the Rising the majority went to Dublin and afterwards fought in the Rising. I think Frank Thornton, Tom Kerr, Joe Gleeson and Pat King will be able to give all the information necessary on the activities of this Company.

Being a member myself, I needed no introduction to the I.R.B. Centres in Liverpool, so I immediately joined the Sinn Féin Cumann and was glad to find that all officers were members of the I.R.B. They had two Sinn Féin Cumanns in Liverpool and district and I saw that they had room for extension. Very soon after, I opened another Cumann in Great Howard Street, Liverpool, and subsequently one in Bootle. In this way, we were able to rope in a good number of young Irishmen who had recently come over and test them as to their suitability for admission into the Volunteers.

When the Sinn Féin Cumann in Great Howard Street was opened, an old man and his wife joined up. This man was the late Hughie Morris who afterwards took a very important part in the fight for freedom. Some weeks after his joining, I had a conversation with him and he informed me that he was the man who drove the wanted men from the Bishop's Palace to the landing stage in Liverpool where they sailed for America. This was after the ambush of the van (the Manchester Martyrs). I need hardly say that I felt very proud at having discovered another very important link with the past, who had remained in seclusion and oblivion for over fifty years but who, when the call came again, threw his whole energy into the movement and rendered assistance and help of the greatest importance. At this time he had a small shop with an annexe in Boundary Street, Liverpool, one of the main arteries leading to the Liverpool docks. Here he and his family lived. Directly opposite his shop was a flour mill, operating night and day. At that time we had plenty of sympathisers but we had very few who would expose themselves or their families to any risk by storing arms or ammunition. Hughie was

approached and without a moment's hesitation he willingly placed at our disposal the annexe already referred to, which in reality was an old hallway in the house. From that time until the signing of the Treaty, this was one of our chief dumps for the receiving and storing of arms and ammunition. It is hard to believe when I state that a lorry drove up to Morris's shop at 12 o'clock noon on a particular weekday, stopped, the tarpaulin was thrown back and there were delivered into this annexe six machine guns which he took in himself, stored away and held in these stores until arrangements were made for shipment to Dublin. Hughie Morris is now dead, a great unknown, buried in oblivion! May he rest in peace!

Early in May, 1919, active steps were taken to start a Company of Volunteers in Liverpool. The young members of the I.R.B., some recently returned members of the old Liverpool I.R.A. and myself set to work to form the nucleus of a Company. Tom Craven was elected temporary Captain. About the middle of June we had sufficient numbers to form a Company. I was elected Captain, Tom Craven 1st Lieutenant, and Phil Coyne 2nd Lieutenant. This Company - about 60 strong - embraced both Liverpool, Bootle and the surrounding districts, such as, Birkinhead, etc.

It was then realised that a unified control was imperative. I called the Company together and explained this to them, pointing out that there were in existence certain defined and well-established lines of communication, that we would only operate through those lines as a Company and that any man who transgressed in this direction would be severely dealt with. The lines referred to were those already established by the I.R.B., Keil Kerr, Steve Lanigan, etc. In other words, this meant that we were

taking such orders as concerned them (the I.R.B.), a body unknown to the greater number of the Company. The Volunteers, it will be understood, made very good ground for recruitment in the I.R.B. afterwards and a good many of them became members.

There was only one incident where two members of the Volunteers raided and secured a few revolvers but, instead of passing them on through the channels referred to, they took them to Dublin and sold them. I had both men court-martialled and dismissed. This was early in the campaign and any weapons afterwards secured by the Company were passed through the channels referred to.

I may add here that those channels remained open and active until the signing of the Treaty. Not even one round of ammunition was captured or lost, although machine guns, revolvers, explosives and ammunition were passing through those channels daily. This I think in itself was a record.

Now having unified the Volunteers and the I.R.B., there were other organisations in full sympathy with the fight for freedom, such as, Cumann na mBan, the Gaelic League, the G.A.A. and the Irish National Foresters, and to bring them under our control was our next move. There was in Liverpool a society known as the United Irish Societies of Liverpool whose functions up to then were very few. This Council was in existence for a number of years but very rarely functioned except in such cases as public meetings, public demonstrations, e.g., the Manchester Martyrs parades, etc., and of course during the war years (1914-1918), I am sure, never functioned at all. We realised that this Council, properly manned by trusted men, would enable us to organise all the existing various

bodies referred to, as well as prove a cover for the activities of the I.R.B. and I.R.A. who, by the way, were never associated with the Council in name, but at the same time manned and directed its functions. All existing Irish organisations were communicated with and asked to affiliate with the Council and send delegates to represent them. But here great care was taken as to who the delegates should be. The I.R.B. and I.R.A. had roots (members) in those organisations, well known for their patriotic outlook and naturally these were the men elected. In this way, we were able to solidly unite all Irish organisations and speak as one body.

It may be asked - Why the control? Why the unification? Why the I.R.B. and I.R.A.? I must make it emphatic that our first task and mission was the purchase of arms, explosives and ammunition and, as already explained, set lines of communication were laid down, manned by unrepenting Fenians like Neil Kerr, Steve Lanigan, Jim Murphy (Chester Castle) and Hughie Morris (Manchester Martyrs), etc., with highly and well trusted men on the boats (B. & I., Cork, Newry and Dundalk), such as, the late Eddie Kavanagh, Billy Vernon, Paddy Weafer, Larkin, etc. Any attempt made to open up new lines of communication individually or collectively would, I am certain, prove disastrous and, I am also certain, would not meet with the approval of Headquarters, Dublin, I.R.B. and I.R.A.

The above is only a short synopsis in organising the securing and purchasing of arms and ammunition and the channels of communication. But the I.R.A. activities did not rest here. Although primarily these were the main functions of the Liverpool Volunteers, other channels of

supplies and communications had to be kept open before the above stage was reached.

Now that the I.R.A. and I.R.B. had got the United Societies of Liverpool definitely under control, no individual body was allowed to carry out any public demonstration or other activity without the permission of the Council of Irish Societies.

On the first Sunday of August, 1919, the Irish National Foresters made an application to the Council of Irish Societies for permission to hold a march-past parade on that day. This was granted, but the Society deemed it advisable that all other Irish bodies should join in the parade, including (unofficially) the I.R.A. I was appointed chief marshal of this parade and the organisation was handed over to me. I thought it was a good time to unfurl our national flag and, without acquainting anyone except the flag bearers and the staff members of the Tomás Clarke Sinn Féin Cumann who made the flag, a full-size national flag was produced. The route of march was from the Queen's Square (in the centre of Liverpool) to St. Patrick's Catholic Church (Southend) where all attended Mass. When I had arranged the parade and we were about to move off, I had the flag unfurled. The American flag, which flew from a building on the opposite side of the Square, dipped and saluted. I could not say who was responsible for this courtesy. The parade then moved off with the national colours to, as I said before, St. Patrick's Church, Southend. After Mass we marched back to the Rotunda, a distance of 3 to 4 miles, through the principal thoroughfares of Liverpool, where I dismissed the parade. I would like to note here that in Ireland at that time men and women were being sent to jail for several

months for displaying a small hand-flag bearing the colours, but our display of the flag in Liverpool was not subjected to any police interference.

Incidents like the above inspired and certainly helped to swell the Sinn Féin membership and afterwards to bring self-determination into operation. I must state, however, that at that time the Liverpool police force was on strike, and law and order did not exist. It would be hard to state what would have taken place under normal conditions but, whatever the subsequent results would have been, in this case we were determined that our flag should be flown and carried.

In September, 1919, after a meeting of the Sinn Féin Árd Comhairle in Liverpool, I was appointed General Secretary to the Sinn Féin movement in England. Our first task was to draft a Sinn Féin Constitution for England. The late Art Ó Briain, who was President, Fintan Murphy of London, James Moran of Liverpool and myself set to work and drafted the Constitution, which was submitted to and approved by the Sinn Féin Ard Comhairle. This Constitution followed the same lines as the Constitution that applied to Ireland, the only difference being that we amended it to suit conditions in England.

Soon afterwards arrangements were made for the local Cumanns to appoint delegates for the Ard Fheis in Dublin. I was appointed to represent Liverpool. Before I left for Dublin I was asked by the Comhairle Ceanntair of Sinn Féin to try and arrange for a public meeting to be held at Liverpool in the near future and, if possible, to get Arthur Griffith, Eoin MacNeill or some of the leading lights to speak at the meeting.

The Ard Fheis in Dublin was suppressed but an impromptu meeting was held in Fleming's Hotel, Gardiner Place, which I attended. Afterwards I went to the Sinn Féin Headquarters, No. 6 Harcourt Street, to arrange for our Liverpool meeting and to see Arthur Griffith.

When I arrived at 6 Harcourt Street, I had a chat with the late Seán Milroy. I put my proposition before him. He said he could do nothing for me and that I had better see Griffith myself. This I did. Griffith told me that he had made up his mind not to speak in public for some time. He was not long out of jail and looked tired and like a man that could do with a good holiday. I would not take no for an answer but persisted, putting our position in Liverpool before him. He listened quietly. After due consideration, he consented to come and we there and then fixed a date in November for the meeting.

I next visited Michael Collins in an attic in Harcourt Street. He was a much-wanted man at this time. I gave him the low-down on the Volunteers and their work in Liverpool. He was pleased with the work and told us to carry on.

I immediately returned to Liverpool and set about making arrangements for the coming meeting. The meeting was advertised, mostly through Cumanns, posters and outside churches where handbills were distributed. The Stadium was secured for the meeting and packed to overflow (10,000 at least present). It was not big enough to hold the crowd and other means had to be adopted. The Picton Hall, which is beside the Stadium, was secured and the overflow of the meeting was marshalled there. From the steps they were addressed by other speakers. Christy Byrne, Wicklow, who was then on the run under the name of

Flanagan, Joe MacDonagh and others spoke.

The meeting was a huge success. There were at least 15,000 to 20,000 present. Arthur Griffith was very pleased with the reception he received. Ireland's trials and position were well and forcibly explained. An appeal was made, asking those present to link up with Sinn Féin or Self-determination in their areas. This they certainly did.

Self-determination Branches sprang up practically in every area like mushrooms. In a very short time Branches were everywhere. The latent spirit of the Celt was springing into activity again. It gave us food for thought.

At the next meeting of the Comhairle Ceanntair Sinn Féin, held immediately afterwards, we decided to hold collections at every church door within the diocese of Liverpool in aid of the prisoners' dependants in Ireland whose breadwinners were either in jail or on the run. The response was great. From that time until the Treaty, these collections were carried out at each Mass every Sunday. The amount collected averaged £200 per week.

The Dáil Éireann Loan was opened about this time as well, to which Liverpool and district subscribed over £4,000.

The initial credit for this collection work must go to the Volunteers and Sinn Féin. The late James Moran, Secretary of the Irish National Foresters, was Chairman of the Funds. This man, although not a member of the I.R.B. or the I.R.A. but in their complete confidence, did more active work for the movement in Liverpool than will ever be known. He was capable and trustworthy, with plenty of vision and foresight. We realised that his services

outside the I.R.B. and I.R.A. were far more valuable to us than by taking him in. He worked, so to speak, as a free lance but was always guided by his Irish-Ireland conscience. May he rest in peace!

Our next move was to bring the Self-determination Branches directly under the control of the United Irish Societies. We had to have at least one or two key-men in each Branch. In order to do this, we had to fall back on the I.R.B., I.R.A. and Sinn Féin, or, in other words, to employ the physical force movement to control and guide. This meant extra work for the Volunteers but, if the unification of all Irish societies was to be maintained, this was necessary and, in the end, paid some valuable dividends. When the membership was increased, as in the case of Self-determination Branches, valuable and good material was often the result. Some good material was lying latent and was now brought to active life. Information leading to resources, such as, arms and ammunition, was often revealed.

The Volunteers, with all the resources, so to speak, at their disposal, never deemed it advisable to increase their strength beyond that of a full Company, which was between 80 and 100 men. They met for training at least one night per week as well as on Sunday mornings, but our big snag was rooms. The weekly meetings were held as half-Companies and on Sunday the full Company was brought together. I must say that the Foresters Halls were always at our disposal and acted as a very suitable alibi.

The majority of the Volunteers worked at the docks. They always had their eyes and ears open and they reported immediately anything important they saw or heard. Dock-land became a kind of Irish colony, especially in the

docks where cross-Channel boats were discharged and loaded. Also there were the coal-heavers who were practically all Irish and who afterwards showed their strength and composition when called upon.

In April, 1920, we decided to call an unofficial strike at the docks as a protest against the treatment meted out to Irish political prisoners who were hunger-striking in Wormwood Scrubbs. The dock labourers and the crews of the cross-Channel boats - B. & I., Cork, Limerick, Dundalk and Newry - came out to a man; and several of the Transatlantic ships, if not actually tied up, had their personnel very much reduced. In the case of the coal-heavers, every man came out with the exception of eight. The number employed was 5,024 and out of that number 5,016 came out on strike, completely crippling the movement of all ships in the Port of Liverpool. Our pickets (Volunteers) were at work at each dock, and the docks only looked a shadow of what they usually were.

During the strike, meetings were held each evening at Canning Place, a large square in the centre of Liverpool, where several speakers spoke. The strikers and sympathisers were marshalled and paraded, from certain centres arranged, to the meetings. I took charge of the north end contingent and another Volunteer officer took charge of the Southend contingent. A special time was laid down for the marching off, both contingents arriving at the meeting place simultaneously.

When the police authorities realised that we were holding public meetings and marching as a body to those meetings, the Head Constable of the North of England, Mr. McCoy, wrote and asked us to meet him immediately at his office in Dale Street. The late James Moran, Pat Clarke,

Peter Murphy and myself were deputised to see him. We went to his office and were received by himself and a Mr. Moore, who was the Chief Detective in Liverpool at the time.

The Head Constable pointed out to us that he understood that we were marching to the meeting at Canning Place from certain city centres but, as there was a by-law in Liverpool that no public parades could be held without the police authority, and if the parades did take place, he should know the route of march.

We informed him of the route of march we had chosen and that we had no objection to giving him that information.

The Head Constable seemed very pleased and he asked us, for God's sake, to maintain law and order.

We pointed out to him that, so far as law and order applicable to England were concerned, we were not interested and that neither were we there with any intention of violating them, but that the object of our meetings was to protest against, condemn and expose British law as applied to Ireland and to our political prisoners now on hunger strike in Wormwood Scrubbs.

The Head Constable said that that was outside his orbit and that his only concern in asking us to meet him was for the maintenance of law and order in Liverpool. We told him he need have no fear, that our parades and meetings would be conducted in such a manner as to meet with the approval of all concerned; and they were. He sincerely thanked us for our co-operation.

The by-law referred to by the Head Constable was in existence for some years. There was in Liverpool a very bitter Orange element; and there is also a strong

Catholic Irish-national element. In former days when parades were held on St. Patrick's Day and on the Twelfth of July, it was nothing strange to see in one street two bonfires: one, the Catholics burning "King Billy", and the other, the Orangemen burning the "Pope". On many of these occasions, riots were common and, in fact, several people were injured and some lost their lives, including a bigot of a preacher named Stone who was killed by a blow of a stone - stone killed Stone! This explained the necessity for the by-law referred to and the police authorities were very adamant about it being adhered to. Our parades and meetings went on without any interference from the police or the Orangemen. In fact, during my three years' experience in Liverpool I never witnessed or heard of an Orange demonstration.

This strike lasted six days. On May Day - it was a Saturday - I marched a body of over 20,000 men and women to Shield Park where a meeting was held and the strike called off.

/Following one of the meetings held during the strike, I was approached one evening by a very prominent member of the Industrial Workers of the World Association, which at that time was regarded as an extreme socialist body, to know if I would become a member. He said to me, "You are a leader of men and you would be a great asset to our organisation". I put the matter before the Council of the I.R.B. and, when it was duly considered, it was decided that no useful purpose could be served by associating myself with that body. It was obvious to us at the time that the I.W.W. saw suitable material in our ranks for their organisation./

By strike action and meetings we had made a

forcible protest which, to a certain degree, left its mark. Here, I may mention that Gilbert Lynch, a 1916 man and now a leading Labour official in Dublin, travelled from Manchester and spoke at our meetings.

The only case of victimisation that I heard of after the strike was in the case of Kit McQuale who was a stevedore in the B. & I. He was suspended, put on the stand with the men and finally dismissed. While a stevedore, he employed many of our men. The late Peter Donnelly, Chief Stevedore of the Dundalk and Newry Steam-packet Company, was a staunch friend and all his employees were Irish.

A large consignment of barbed wire arrived at the Cunard sheds and was transferred to the B. & I. sheds for shipment to Ireland. I was informed of this. There were several of our men working at the B. & I. boats at this time and I had word passed on to them not to load the wire for Ireland, for, as you know, the British authorities in Ireland then were very active erecting internment camps. There also arrived at this time a consignment of boots and stationery for the R.I.C. They were not loaded either. These goods remained in the sheds for several weeks and no one would touch them, taking up, the wire especially, valuable storage space in the sheds. The stevedore, a man by the name of Bell - he was no friend of ours - had a boat specially kept in waiting and, when the men finished their work at 5 p.m., he called out a special gang of men under the charge of an Antrim Presbyterian named Danny McCoats and asked him to stay behind and load the barbed wire into the boat. When McCoats heard the job assigned to him, he became furious and asked Bell did he think he would act as a scab to his fellow-workers. "Remember",

he said, "Mr. Bell! I am an Irishman and I would be damned before I would load one coil of this wire. Come on, boys!" - and they marched away.

The barbed wire was never shipped. I was told afterwards that the Cunard Company had to take it back. Although McCoats was an Orangemen, he proved himself very sympathetic and helpful to our cause. Needless to say, the boots never reached their destination. They remained in the shed for several months, gradually decreasing in numbers until eventually they had all "walked out" the dock gates in pairs or doubles.

Some time later, while we were making our weight fairly well felt in England, Lloyd George, Wilson and company were certainly making theirs felt in Ireland. Murders were the order of the day; jails were filled and internment camps going up in haste for more victims; a rigid censorship existed, publications seized and suppressed, and printing presses dismantled and broken; all carried out under the name of "D.O.R.A." Of this, the outside world would have known nothing were it not for the pen, which never ran dry, the tongue and the mind of the late Arthur Griffith. He penetrated the seemingly impregnable censorship barriers and, through the I.R.B. and Volunteer channels of communication, revealed to the world the atrocities which were being committed in Ireland, much to the discomfort of Lloyd George.

When Archbishop Mannix was on his way home from Australia to see his aged mother, the said Lloyd George had the ship he was travelling on stopped some hours before she was due to land at Liverpool. The Archbishop was arrested, taken on board a destroyer and quietly landed at Wales.

The question may be asked, why. Because Lloyd George knew the reception that was awaiting the Archbishop at Liverpool and the publicity that it was bound to get, so he deemed it advisable to have the Archbishop arrested. Of his arrest, we knew nothing then and arrangements were made for his reception. The Lord Mayor of Dublin, Alderman Paul and other representatives of the Dublin Corporation had arrived in Liverpool for the reception, as well as our leading representatives. The Volunteers were detailed to keep the crowd in order. We appeared with camáns and arrived at the landing stage long before the ship was due to arrive, but even then there was a big crowd present. We set about marshalling them and putting them into some formation, but the ranks began to swell and swell until eventually, when the ship arrived, there were present between 30,000 and 40,000 people. As the passengers began to disembark, tension was running high with the crowd. No Archbishop appeared. The task of holding the crowd back from invading not only the passage but the gangway to the ship itself was becoming very acute. Just as we were actually losing control, an announcement was made that the Archbishop was not on board. Oh, what pandemonium!

Quick action was then necessary. We decided to tell them that we would march to Canning Place, hold a meeting there and explain the position. Some of us had by then learned of the Archbishop's arrest but not his destination. We immediately announced our intention to hold a meeting and asked the crowd to fall in quietly in marching order, which they did. I marched the main body to Canning Place, while Phil Coyne marched the remainder to the Stadium. Having got to Canning Place and having packed the crowd like sardines, I with difficulty got to

the fringe of the crowd. The speakers, including the Lord Mayor of Dublin, Alderman Paul of the Dublin Corporation and the Liverpool representatives, James Moran, P.J. Kelly, Pat Clarke, Harry Harte, etc., were on the platform speaking.

Directly opposite was a publichouse, crowded to overflowing with people shouting and singing (contrary to the licensing regulations of Liverpool) and making it impossible for the speakers to be heard. Tom Kerr and I were discussing what steps we would take to stop them when the Chief Detective, Mr. Moore, came up. I said to him, "Moore, this is a disgrace! Clear that publichouse! It is your place to maintain law and order". He only smiled. I said to him, "Wain a minute'." Tom Kerr, four other Volunteers and myself, all armed with camáns, forced our way into the pub and up to the counter. I raised my camán, struck the counter full force, putting glasses jumping, and ordered the pub to be closed in the name of the Irish Republic. The manager of the publichouse turned all colours. We ordered the crowd out and, in less than three minutes, the pub was empty and closed. We came back to Moore who had been looking on and I said to him, "That's the way we do things in Ireland!" He again smiled. He then asked us where the remainder of the crowd had gone and we told him they had gone to the Stadium. "The Stadium?", he shouted. "With whose permission?" We told him it was with our own permission. "You devils!", he said. "When are you going to stop?" He immediately proceeded to the Stadium but, before he arrived, it was not only open but full of people. He passed no comment.

Chief Inspector Moore was a Limerick man. I must say that, in all my dealings with him - some of them from

his point of view not very pleasant - I always found him honourable and straight. There was nothing petty, personal or vindictive about him and he never made himself aggressive or objectionable. The same also applied to Head Constable McCoy. They both took the line of least resistance. The incidents I have already quoted have proved this.

The roots of the movement were rapidly spreading. Contacts and links were now established in many centres in England, such as, Manchester, Birmingham, Newcastle-on-Tyne, etc., where active agents were busy collecting supplies of arms and ammunition. I worked at this time a strong link with St. Helen's and other mining districts in the area, with very good results. A lorry was purchased and was actually travelling on those routes, collecting supplies of arms and ammunition. Reference has already been made to this lorry in the Morris case. I introduced Neil Kerr and Steve Lanigan to a big cattle shipping agent, named McGrath, and he placed at our disposal a shed in his yard for the housing of the lorry, as well as a key to enter the yard. In addition, a certain number of Volunteers, Tom and Jack Kerr (brothers), Paddy Daly (now a doctor in the Army), the late Seamus MacGeahey and others were detailed to collect arms, etc. They travelled extensively through England on this mission.

Supplies came to us from London and Scotland, especially Glasgow, where Joe Vize, Director of Purchases, and Joe Furlong were doing valuable work. It was well realised that the Liverpool transmitting channels, so ably and carefully manned by the men already referred to, were the safest. Consequently 90 per cent. of the supplies were transhipped through Liverpool.

We had also several capable, trustworthy seafaring men operating on ships sailing to all parts of the world. To mention only a few, Dick O'Neill, the late Jerry Hurley, the Darragh brothers, Dan and Jack, Frank Darby, Harry Short, Barney Downes and others brought back on each trip supplies of guns and ammunition, sometimes running great personal risks and danger to themselves, but this I think they never took into consideration.

We had, in addition to those mentioned, an Englishman and a Freemason, whose ship ran from Liverpool to Antwerp fortnightly, doing his bit. On each of those runs he brought back a number of parabellums and Peter-the-Painters, safely deposited them in a certain publichouse, was paid and walked away without asking any questions. He must have brought about six revolvers from each trip.

I am not in a position to say what quantity of supplies came from other ports. Supplies continued through those channels until the signing of the Treaty. Even though Neil Kerr, Steve Lanigan, Tom Kerr, myself and others were arrested after the fires, Paddy Daly, already referred to, was so well coached in the inner work that he was able to carry on in our absence. He was a young man then and great praise is due to him. Of course, at that time, no matter who went, there was always a man to take his place.

I have one very sad and tragic incident to relate and that was the accidental shooting of young Neil Kerr. Some .45 automatics were received and, while his brother, Tom, was examining one of them in the cellar of 93 Scotland Road, young Neil was standing by. Tom thought the gun was empty, pressed the trigger and shot poor Neil through the forehead; death being instantaneous. The father, Neil

Kerr, who was in the vicinity, arrived a few minutes later and saw Neil was dead. While his son's blood was hot on his hands, he took the gun, disposed of it, came back and informed the police. They arrived and asked for the gun. There was no gun to be found. In actual fact, Neil Kerr (the father) during his short absence had the gun shipped to Ireland that night. There was a man!

Neil Kerr got a military funeral both in Liverpool and Dublin. I took charge of the main body on parade in Liverpool and Frank Thornton, who arrived from Dublin, took charge of the bodyguard. When we arrived at the Dublin boat, Head Constable McCoy was awaiting us. The parade lined up along the Basin. McCoy came over to me and asked me would everything be all right. I informed him that it would. He said, "So long as you give your word, I am perfectly satisfied". He then drove away. After the boat had sailed, the parade broke up and we went home. Another true son to Ireland laid to rest! He was one of the Liverpool Volunteers who, with his brothers, Jack and Tom, fought in the 1916 Rising. May he too rest in peace!

The accidental shooting did not result in any police inquiry. An inquest, of course, was held but no information was given as to how precisely the shooting took place or where the gun was that shot him. Seeing that they were up against a stone wall, they let the proceedings fizzle out.

We had practically daily contact with Dublin. The men on the boats, after disposing of their supplies of arms and ammunition, brought back to us despatches - some of them urgent - from Michael Collins and company. Some had to be dealt with perhaps immediately, such as, making arrangements for the personal safety and afterwards the

getting away of wanted men.

We had established the services of shipping agents early in 1919 and trusted men like Kit O'Reilly, Tommy Hoare and Barney Kiernan were always willing and ready to co-operate with us. They rendered valuable services when required.

It was through this co-operation that Dr. McCartan, first Irish Envoy to the U.S.A., and afterwards Eamon de Valera and Harry Boland were got out to America. The task of getting safely away important men such as these was a very responsible undertaking. The greatest secrecy, tact and watchfulness had to be maintained and the best brains had to be employed, as the slightest slip would spell ruin but, with men like the late Neil Kerr and Steve Lanigan, I think these tasks were in very capable hands.

Michael Collins always outlined the plans. From our side, these plans were carefully examined and studied in detail. When all hitches were removed, the all-clear was given, that is, we sent word back to Dublin that we were ready.

This meant contacting one or more of our shipping agents referred to and ascertaining the lay of the land, such as, the ship's name, the crew, their composition (Irish, English, foreign, etc.), the numbers that could be trusted, the job and the functions the intended man or men we were getting away would have to fulfil, as well as seamen's cards and photos. All this and far more were left to the shipping agent.

In addition, there had to be on board one or more of our trusted men under whose care the man or men would be

placed. In the cases of McCartan, de Valera and Boland, Dick O'Neill and Barney Downes always filled the role and, in my opinion, better men could not be found. When the vacancy or job in the particular ship was made, the new member (that is, the man we intended to get away) of the crew had to be coached, if time permitted, dressed and presented.

As far as I can remember, de Valera went out as a ship's greaser. He was dressed or made up for the part and, to give him confidence, he was paraded in the trams, etc., through Liverpool. To use the words of the late Neil Kerr (who was himself at one time a seafaring man), "he did not look the part". However, in spite of personal disadvantages, de Valera got to the U.S.A. and back without being arrested, and that was what was wanted. The same tactics and camouflage were used in getting Dr. McCartan and Harry Boland away.

It must be remembered that those acts were carried out in the enemy's country, where the greatest secrecy was important, but the I.R.A. and I.R.B. men in charge knew their work. Sealed lips was the order of the day. Michael Collins knew this as well and made use of it to its utmost, especially in Ireland where he not only undermined but completely crippled the British Secret Service movement there. With men and minds like these, all tasks were small.

Neil Kerr and Steve Lanigan were directly responsible for the getting away of the men already referred to. Although I knew that these men were going abroad, I personally had no contact with them.

In addition to wanted men, we had also bogus men -

Dublin Castle agents - calling on us and wanting to join the I.R.A. I generally interviewed these men, who looked the part and presented their Volunteer cards which I always took, retained and had them passed back to Dublin, or wherever they said they belonged to, for investigation. I told the parties concerned to call back to see me, fixing a day and time, but in all those cases the so-called active Volunteers never returned. The bogus Volunteers referred to were actually Dublin Castle spies. From the investigations carried out in Dublin and other places, we generally found that the Volunteers, whose cards they presented, belonged to men who were in jail, the cards being in their possession when arrested. We had several such ruses. To my knowledge, not one of them was successful which meant that we had always to be on the alert.

As things were daily becoming more active in Ireland, the pressure there also increased our activities. More duties were assigned to us. After very careful consideration, I found that I could not, as Captain of the Volunteers, devote to them the time and the energy that I considered necessary. I decided to resign and revert to the ranks. I put my proposition to the I.R.B. Council. After fully explaining my position, which in short meant that I should either withdraw all my connections with my other activities or to revert to the ranks, they considered my position and agreed to my resignation. I then summoned the Company to a meeting, handed in my resignation and reverted to the ranks. Tom Kerr, a very capable man, then 1st Lieutenant, was unanimously elected Captain. Peter Roland was elected 1st Lieutenant and I think Phil Coyne 2nd Lieutenant. My resignation by the men I knew and trusted was regretted, but they certainly had a good successor. Personally, reverting to the ranks never

cost me a thought. The fight was for Ireland and I took my orders from my superiors. As they considered that I could be more usefully employed in other fields of activity, it was not for me to question the matter. My resignation in no way undermined the morale of the Company. The majority of them understood the position and knew I was acting according to orders. The work of the Company continued.

As atrocities in Ireland became worse - murders, burnings, shootings, arrests, jailing, etc. - Collins and company thought that the time for action in England was ripe and that something big should be carried out there.

Plans were first submitted for the blowing up of the Liverpool docks but, after careful consideration, were turned down as the required number of trained men were not available and, if they were, we had not sufficient explosives for this job.

The second plan that came up for consideration was the burning of the cotton warehouses and timber yards. This was gone into very carefully and the plans were sent to Dublin for approval.

While this was being considered in Dublin, Tom Kerr carefully marked out the places for destruction which he had submitted in the plan, allotted provisionally the tasks and the number of men necessary for each warehouse and timber yard. He brought the O.C's of each party with him and pointed out what was to be done, so that, if the plans were approved, each O.C. knew his task.

Wholesale burnings were then taking place in Ireland, e.g., Cork, Balbriggan and Trim, so that I am sure reprisals in England of a similar nature at this time

would be considered very appropriate, as we believed "an eye for an eye".

Our plans were approved. Unfortunately, however, Dick Mulcahy (now General Mulcahy) was raided and, as he only had time to escape through the roof in night-attire, all his papers, including our plans, were left behind and captured. The plans, which were initialled T.K. (Tom Kerr), were published in one or two of the Liverpool evening papers some days before the cotton warehouses and timber yards fires took place. Judging from the reports already received from the parties engaged in the fires, the authorities must never have tumbled to the significance of the evening papers. Otherwise, they would have taken steps to prevent the fires. For us, however, this was a good job because we were but poorly equipped with arms for the undertaking.

After the necessary preliminaries had been made, such as, purchasing bolt cutters, paraffin oil, waste cotton and rags, etc., the Company was summoned to a meeting at 93 Scotland Road, Liverpool, and introduced to the late Rory O'Connor who was sent over to take charge of the operations. He was very pleased to see that the Company had responded to a man and were ready to carry out the assignments given to them. From him we understood that similar operations were to take place in London and Manchester. He said he was going to Manchester and would be back to see us again before the fires.

Rory O'Connor returned from Manchester and spoke to us again on the Friday night before the fires. He asked us had we any questions. I asked him what would be our position after the fires, or how were we to act. He

replied, "Keep quiet for a fortnight and repeat similar operations". I pointed out that some of us were well known to the police authorities and that I did not think we would be available in a fortnight's time, as perhaps the majority of us here that night would be under lock and key, but that I thought we should start a second line of fires after the first line had been got going, on the early morning of the same night; our object would be the big shops in the principal thoroughfares of the city and afterwards the outskirts; then we should form a flying squad, continue our activities until arrest or perhaps laid to rest. To this, however, Rory would not agree. I knew that after the fires some of us would be arrested and that those arrests might do great harm, if not destroy the work we were engaged in, as already described.

For the fires, the parties assembled - no man missing - to a given point already arranged and on that memorable Saturday night - November 27th, 1920 - at 8.30 operations began. Each party varied from 3-6 men, according to the size of the job, but I could not say how many parties were employed. In less than 5 minutes a line of fire, 8 miles in length, from Seaforth to Gaston was started, resulting in the complete destruction of 14 cotton warehouses and 4 large timber yards. The fire alarm was raised. Liverpool and Bootle fire brigades were soon on the job, as well as the available brigades within a radius of 20 miles, and continued to work all night - in some cases, for several days - but their efforts were useless. All were completely destroyed.

I am sorry to say that the task assigned to me and my party was not so successful. Our cotton warehouse was situated in Bank Hall, a cul-de-sac, with a police

Bridewell quite near. When we arrived there, I put Tim Sullivan and Peter Somers on watch. I laid down the paraffin oil and the cotton waste, which I was preparing to saturate with paraffin oil. I had beside me a Volunteer named Tommy Moran from St. Helens, also a native of Mayo, and another young boy of about eighteen, from Mayo too. As I was getting the cotton waste ready, Moran asked me for the loan of the cutters and said he would go around the corner and cut the bolt of the warehouse. I agreed as I was only too anxious to get the job started and away. In less than three minutes afterwards, I heard a frightened cry and, standing up and looking out, I saw about 10 yards away Moran struggling with two detectives. Then they saw me and the young Volunteer.

One of the detectives said, "There's another .....! Draw your gun and go for him!" I drew my .25 automatic and said, "No! I am going for you". I said very sternly, "Let that man go!" - I said it three times. I walked closer, discharged my revolver and wounded one of the detectives in the shoulder. He shouted, "My God! I am shot!" "Before I am finished," I said, "you will be worse. Face the wall!" They released Moran and I told him and the other Volunteer to vamooze, which they did. The detectives were now against the wall. I pressed the automatic again, with no response, although there were 5 or 6 rounds in the magazine. It had jammed. So there was nothing left for me but to vamooze too. I cleared out of that street and was gone over 80 yards when they blew their whistles. The night was ideal for the job, one of the Liverpool fogs and a slight drizzle. The detectives seemingly did not follow me.

I made my way to Scotland Road, to St. Joseph's

Hall where I reported to Rory O'Connor. Before going into the hall, I met a staunch man, named Bert Quinn, and passed him the gun which he took and afterwards handed it over to someone responsible. Soon after, I went home as I had summoned a meeting of the Sinn Féin Ard Comhairle for Manchester on the next day.

I got up early next morning, Sunday, got my breakfast, heard Mass and went by train to Manchester. All the Sunday papers were ablaze with the Sinn Féin Liverpool fires, estimating the damage at 2½ million pounds.

The only incident and arrest, so far as I know, concerned a Volunteer, the late Matt Fowler (his real name was McGinty). Someone gave the alarm and the police arrived. He opened fire and a young fellow who came into the line of fire was shot. Fowler was afterwards arrested and, I believe, received very rough treatment.

When I arrived in Manchester, excitement was high. I learned that Captain Paddy O'Donoghue summoned his Company too and, when their mission was explained, only himself and a few volunteered for the job. Rory O'Connor afterwards told me that he was very disappointed.

Our meeting was held that evening. I asked the late Seán Milroy, who happened to be present, to preside as the late Art O'Brien, the President, was unable to attend. We had a full meeting, including the late Fintan Murphy of London, James Moran and Clarke of Liverpool, O'Connor of Manchester and others whose names I cannot recall. That was the last meeting of the Sinn Féin Ard Comhairle I summoned until after my release from the Rath Camp, Curragh, in December, 1921.

Early on the Sunday morning after the fires, several arrests were made, including that of Neil Kerr, Tom Kerr (son), Stephen Lanigan, Liam Geraghty and Seamus McGahey. On the following night, Pat Clarke, John Boden, Paddy Coughlan, my brother, Denis, and myself were arrested. We were brought to the police headquarters in Dale Street where we were kept in solitary confinement for about three weeks.

When searching Neil Kerr after his arrest, the detectives found a receipt for the bolt cutters in his possession, so they had him returned for trial. They afterwards associated Seamus McGahey with the shooting of the detective at Bank Hall (for which I was responsible). He was put back for trial also.

While we were in Dale Street, my brother and myself were paraded for identification - a night or two after our arrest - and associated with about 10 newsboys of from ten to fifteen years of age. (A mere sham, associating us with those boys as, at a glance, anyone could see who the intended victims were!) Detective Sergeant Burgess was in charge. He marched in two detectives - none other than the men I had engaged at Bank Hall. One had his arm in a sling and shoulder bandaged. He told them to take their time and examine us closely (my brother and myself, although he did not actually mention our names). They passed slowly along the ranks but failed to recognise me although I recognised them. My brother had taken part in the fires too but had been with a different party to mine. We were then brought back to our solitary confinement.

We remained in solitary confinement until the middle of December, 1920, when the following, Steve Lanigan, Liam Geraghty, Tom Kerr, Pat Clarke, John Boden, Paddy Coughlan,

my brother, Denis, and myself were transhipped to the Dublin Bridewell for subsequent internment. Neil Kerr and Seamus McGahey were kept back to await their trials.

One morning we eight prisoners were marched from our cells to the receiving office (where we had been searched when arrested), handed back our belongings and handed over to a G-man from Dublin Castle whose name I never got to know, although I must say I would like to know it as he acted the gentleman. I am sure things would not have been so pleasant for us on our journey to Dublin, were it not for him. He had under his charge 8 or 10 Black and Tans who certainly looked the part. They looked more like gangsters or animal gang associates than members of the police force, and they acted and showed it every chance they got. The G-man (who seemed to have no love for them) was very hard set to restrain them. When we disembarked at Dún Laoghaire, lorries were there awaiting us, manned also by Black and Tans. The party of Tans at Dún Laoghaire asked the party who had escorted us from Liverpool why they had not done us in! We were taken to the Bridewell, Dublin, where we spent another three weeks, not alone in solitary confinement but under the most appalling conditions.

The eight of us were put into one room with a concrete floor, the approximate size of which was 18 feet by 12 feet, badly ventilated and having a lavatory installed, which was flushed from outside the room - and this was only done when they thought fit, as it was often left there a whole day without being flushed. It can be realised the atmospheric conditions of this room when eight men were kept in solitary confinement for three weeks.

We only left the room for identification parades, which were many, and once to have our photographs taken.

The people who came to identify us were always well concealed and looked at us through slit blankets, exposing only their eyes. I think a lot of these identification parades were in connection with Bloody Sunday.

The food situation was in keeping with the room. The first couple of days, all the food we got was a piece of rough bread (about 4 ozs.) broken off - no knives - and a half a mug of cold watery cocoa twice a day, morning and evening. After this, however, when our location became known, the Cumann na mBan saw to our wants (Leslie Price, now Mrs. Tom Barry and President of the Red Cross; also the late Mrs. McMahon, who was sister of the prisoner, Liam Geraghty, and mother of the late Phil McMahon and Major McMahon, now in the National Army). The food situation certainly improved due to the good and kind friends mentioned above.

The bedding situation was chronic. All they gave us were three or four dirty, badly-holed blankets as a covering for eight men. There were fixtures on the walls, five wooden plank beds. Our first move was to loosen them and put them on the concrete floor side by side. We decided on a two-night-watch as, under no stretch of imagination, could we all lie down together. We agreed that a party of four would lie down and rest, if possible, from 10 p.m. to 2 a.m., when they would be called and the remaining four would lie down then until 8 a.m. The bed clothing, as already stated, was a snag, so the four on watch stripped themselves to their shirts of all their clothes, which they gave to the resting four, and vice versa when the four who were resting got up. The four on watch had a most difficult time trying to keep themselves warm by marching up and down the room and, if energy permitted, doing

physical jerks. I can say now that, although the conditions were trying and the Christmas of 1920 was spent under those conditions, I never heard a man complain!

Also installed in the ventilators of the room were dictaphones, but of them we were aware. Consequently reference was never made to anything that might be of value to the listening police authorities but, for their entertainment, we adopted story-telling - the late Liam Geraghty was noted for it - as well as fictitious tales and absurd arguments. This shortened our day but gave the listeners little food for thought.

Early in January, 1921, we were removed from the Bridewell to Mountjoy Prison where we were given on our arrival a hearty welcome by our compatriots already in prison there. The 'Joy to us was a hotel after our experiences in Dale Street, Liverpool, and the Bridewell, Dublin. I think the late Phil O'Neill, better known as "Bard of Kinsale", once paid tribute to it in song as a first-class hotel when he was the guest of His Majesty, the late George V, King of England. In it we had a bed (even though a prison one), exercise and the pleasure of meeting and speaking to (again even in jail) friends in arms. All this, to our minds, would endorse O'Neill's description without sarcasm.

The 'Joy was then divided into two wings, political and criminal, and the line of demarcation (being one of the causes for which the late Tomás Ashe laid down his young life) was well defined and adhered to. Consequently no mixing or associations ever took place between the wings. The only times we saw the criminal prisoners was when they were on exercise in the yard. Amongst these prisoners were some of our own men, including those

captured after the rescue at Knocklong, Ned O'Brien and Foley, and Paddy Moran, later executed for Bloody Sunday operations.

Amongst the prisoners in our wing were some of the leading lights, including the late Arthur Griffith, Eoin MacNeill, Eamonn Duggan, Mick Staines, Joe Vize and the party of Cork Volunteers who went to form the bodyguard for the late Terence MacSwiney when his remains were being removed from London for interment in Cork. There were six of those Cork Volunteers. When arrested, their uniforms were confiscated and they were put back for trial. When their trial were arranged, "wearing Volunteer uniform" was the chief offence but, when the authorities went to produce the evidence, there was no evidence available as the uniforms had mysteriously disappeared. The case collapsed but what subsequently happened to those men I now quite forget.

Neil Kerr and Seamus McGahey were being charged in Liverpool about this time and proceedings were on. I went to the late Eamonn Duggan (then Minister for Justice) and explained to him that McGahey was an innocent man, that it was I who shot the detective. I said I was willing to go back to Liverpool and stand my trial, but Duggan would not hear of it. He emphatically turned it down, saying that McGahey was not there, that it was not he who shot the detective and that they could not convict him. But poor Eamonn Duggan's law and British justice were as far apart as poles! He also said that Collins, who knew of the case, would not approve of my going back. I then approached Arthur Griffith, but he too would not hear of it as, he said, how could they convict an innocent man.

The innocent man, Seamus McGahey, was not only

tried but convicted and sentenced to ten or twenty years' penal servitude which he took, like the man that he was, without murmur or comment. He was released a week or two after our release, but he did not know that this would happen when he went to pass the best years of his young life in prison cells for the sake of a brother Volunteer. He was sincerity personified and his fidelity will show the brotherly love which existed in the ranks of the I.R.B. and I.R.A. May he rest in peace!

We had in the 'Joy amongst us a suspect - definitely proved afterwards - so that great care and tact had to be used, although at that time the majority of the warders were decent and some of them highly trusted; and I am sure some of them could give a good account as to how MacSwiney's guard of honour uniforms disappeared.

The most amazing prisoner in the 'Joy at that time was the late Arthur Griffith. He was the first man on the exercise ring every morning, took his exercise and from then until the following morning confined himself to his cell where he wrote all day and well into the night, condemning the barbaric atrocities committed in Ireland in the name of law and order. He encouraged the young men to hold fast and true as ultimately their objective would be reached. He was in close touch with Collins, even though in jail, and his correspondence was despatched daily. This Collins received.

I remember one incident in connection with these despatches. I was having an interview from a well known member of the Dublin Cumann na mBan, Veronica Ryan. When Micheál Staines heard who it was, he asked me to take the despatches but, if a certain warder accompanied, I was not to hand them over to my visiting friend as they did not

trust this warder. Unfortunately for me, it was the same warder who accompanied me. I arrived at the interview box, which was a very big counter where the prisoner stood inside and the visiting friend outside with a warder. The counter was at least ten feet wide, the idea being I suppose that the accompanying warder, if he so desired, could hear the conversation. Seeing this, I jumped up on the counter and laid myself full-length, with my elbow resting on the counter and my hand under my chin. My visiting friend put her elbow close to mine and leaned against the counter, while the worthy warder stood by her side. When I saw the stand he had taken, I looked at my visitor and the warder, but never spoke. I remained fully five minutes in this position. No words were spoken. Then I drew myself up to a kneeling position and said sternly to the warder, "Take me back to my cell. But before I go, I am asking my friend one question and that is this: 'Have a good look at that man!'" - meaning the accompanying warder - "Would you recognise him?" She answered, "Yes". "Have another look at him! Would you recognise him?" She answered, "Yes". "Now, have a final look at him! Do you feel certain you would recognise him?" "Certainly I would." "Then tell the boys'" "Take me back to my cell", I said to the warder.

The poor warder turned all colours, began to splutter and asked what I meant. I answered, "You will know very soon. Take me back. I want you to realise that I did not come down here for an interview with you. I have been down before with other warders, but with them I was always able to speak to the party that came to see me. They had the common decency to walk away and face the wall opposite. They were gentlemen". He said something about

letters or despatches, but at the same time he turned about, walked over to the wall and faced it. In the meantime, I had the despatches handed over to my friend. We carried on our interview until the warder turned around and said my time was up. I shook hands with my friend, jumped off the counter and marched back to my cell with the warder, but no words were spoken. When I told Griffith the ruse I worked, he was surprised and delighted.

To pass the time during the long nights when we were all in our cells, a programme was previously arranged and certain prisoners were marked down for songs and recitations. These usually started about 7 p.m. each evening from the individuals' cells and continued up till 10 o'clock when the Rosary was recited, usually by the late Paul Cusack. We had good and willing talent for our programmes and the songs they sang and recitations they recited, if at the time were sung or recited outside the prison walls and were heard by the authorities, might mean for many a man, "shot while trying to escape" or "five years' penal servitude". In addition to this, Thady Kelly (a Limerick Volunteer and seemingly then a permanent fixture in Mountjoy) spoke and said "The Constitutional Movement Must Go On", with all the sarcasm at his disposal. He was generally replied to by some other prisoner who added more fuel to his sarcasm.

From the foregoing, it will be seen that, even though confined within the prison walls of our cell, our voices were able to percolate through the entire prison, rid it of its tradition like the hangman's rope and accelerated in the hearts of those present the determination and endurance necessary to reach our final goal. So instead of coming out of these jails subdued and conquered, the prisoners came out with a resolute

determination, their objective defined and clarified, and nothing but death alone could stop their onward march to freedom.

Arbour Hill is not only known to-day but held sacred to the memory of the martyred dead by the men and women of Ireland. The annual Easter Week ceremonials are held there with the pomp and reverence fitting the occasion, for it holds the grave of our Easter heroes (15 men) who willingly and proudly laid down their lives for Ireland before the altar of liberty. In 1921 their resting place was but a common grave where their mortal remains were laid to rest, covered with quicklime. Quicklime may help to reduce quickly their remains to clay but not their names from posterity, although buried in an isolated corner of a derelict detention barracks. Asquith, Lloyd George and General Maxwell seemed to think differently but, in fact, the breath had scarcely left their riddled bodies before it was inhaled by the living young men and women of Ireland, some of whom for the first time began to realise why those men laid down their lives and paid the extreme penalty. It was to this historic spot I was next brought from Mountjoy jail where my fellow Liverpool friends were awaiting me.

I knew several prisoners in Arbour Hill, including Fionán Lynch, Seán Milroy, Rory O'Connor and many others. The prison was packed so much that there were two prisoners sleeping in each cell and the double cells held four. I spent the first few nights with a young Dublin Volunteer, named Cummins, in a ground floor cell where the tiled floor was not only damp but there was at least an inch of water always present from the damp, dank, weeping walls. We were then removed to a corner cell, first floor, where

Justin McKenna, then a T.D., and John Walsh (a brother of the late J.J. Walsh) were already installed. We remained in this cell until our internment order came through and the four of us were transferred for permanent internment at the Rath Camp, Curragh.

Arbour Hill at that time was a despatching centre and batches of prisoners were continually being removed to Ballykinlar and, later on, to the Rath Camp, Curragh, which Camp at this time seemingly was not ready for internees. Hostages were quite common at this time and several of the prisoners who were prominent and well-known were often taken out and paraded through the city in Crossley tenders. If it so happened that this party was ambushed, the hostage was the first man to die. Several were brought out, but I did not hear of any being shot. We were only allowed a couple of hours' exercise each day and the remainder of the time we spent in our cells with our companions, the dictaphones. The soldiers on the whole were decent and well-conducted and never troubled us much.

In one of the first batches that left Arbour Hill for internment in the Rath Camp was Rory O'Connor, but he soon made his escape. As I have already stated, the Camp was being completed for our reception but seemingly, when Rory and his party arrived, the job was not finished. Among the workers so engaged, Rory recognised a Volunteer of his own Company and got speaking to him. This Volunteer managed to get in an overall, the same as the other men completing the Camp were wearing, and managed to pass it to Rory, also a pass with a number. When the workmen were going out in the lorry after finishing the day's work, Rory, dressed up as a worker, got into the lorr went out the gate and escaped.

The last and final removal from Arbour Hill to the Rath Camp was arranged and, early one morning in March, we were told to pack (what we had to pack) and marched out to the yard where some Crossley tenders awaited us. We were handcuffed in pairs and ordered into the tenders. There were about twenty prisoners in this batch, including all my Liverpool friends.

We arrived at the Rath Camp without any mishap. The tenders were halted before a long shed outside the compound. We dismounted and were marched into the shed where a young British officer with an armed guard, including two Lewis guns, awaited us. This officer looked very aggressive and kept marching up and down in front of us, jerking his .45 revolver. As we were still handcuffed, I could not see the necessity for all the precautions but the young officer must have thought differently. Passing Tom Kerr (one of the Liverpool prisoners) he stopped and asked Tom where he was born. "In Liverpool", said Tom. "What!" he exclaimed, "An Englishman?" "Oh, no!", said Tom, "An Irishman, thank God!" The officer flew into a rage, drew his revolver and said, "I would shoot you, you swine!" Tom only smiled. This drove him furious. He said, "I am an officer who fought in the Great War. And remember, I was not afraid to go down to West Cork too!" (West Cork men should feel proud.)

It afterwards transpired that this was the officer who some time previously had arrested the late Darrell Figgis in Roscommon. He pinned him up, put a rope around his neck and was about to hang him when another party of military arrived and saved Figgis's life.

After this we were marched into the Camp and

interviewed. All our personal belongings, such as, money (if we had any), were handed in. We got a number, also the number of a hut, and we were then marched off to draw our bedding, consisting of three or four blankets, a musty, sodden straw palliasse and bolsters. Our fellow prisoners then gave us a good meal.

If Arbour Hill is historic to us to-day, so also should be the Rath Camp where we were now interned. This camp was built on the main road leading from the Curragh Camp to Kildare, on the very fringe of a rath where the '98 men of Wicklow and Kildare, after laying down their arms, were brutally and cruelly massacred by the British soldiers and buried in a common grave, now known as the Gibbet's Rath. Interned in the vicinity of such a sacred place with our martyred dead sleeping beside us should, to my mind, be an inspiration to us as I am sure their proud spirits hovered within and around our Camp, watching over us and praying for our liberation as well as the freedom of Ireland.

The Rath Camp consisted of four rows of wooden huts, 20 by 60 , used in the first world war as an emergency camp, hastily erected and hastily evacuated, with the result that when we were interned there it was much the worse of the weather's wear. The roofs were leaking, the floors draughty, the surrounding, especially in wet weather sodden and the so-called roads rough and overgrown with weeds. Not an inviting place to spend a nine months' holiday! The four rows referred to were known as A, B, C and D Lines, with a cookhouse and men's dining hall in the centre. There was also a hut used as a chapel, one as a hospital and one for British military stores.

The capacity of the Camp was about 1,000 men,

capable of holding a war time Battalion but, when it was eventually filled, we had 1,300 and sometimes more men interned there, so that it can be readily realised that overcrowding resulted. In spite of all this, however, the health conditions were excellent and continued to remain so until our release. In my opinion, the conditions must be attributed in the first place to the good weather conditions that prevailed during the spring, summer and the late autumn of 1921. Practically no rain fell, with the result that the prisoners were free from early morning until 10 p.m. during the summer months to roam about, play games, such as, hurling and football, train in running, jumping and weight-throwing as well as several other activities they were engaged in. Besides all this, there was no dearth of medical doctors and students and there was at least one prisoner M.O. for every 100 men.

The reader must not think that, our camp being built on the open plain of the Curragh, the plain was open to us. This was far from being the case. The authorities showed all the kind care that only thoughtful parents could! They not only watched us daily and nightly but built around us an entanglement of barbed wire that even a beetle would hesitate before it would attempt to crawl through. It was at least 60 yds. wide, 10 or 12 ft. high, with a 10-ft. open space in the centre, known as the "dead line". They had pill-boxes (observation posts, of course) erected at each corner manned night and day by armed soldiers. At night, No. 1 post would start off, "No. 1 post, and all is well". No. 2 would repeat and Nos. 3 and 4 would do likewise. And this "All is well" continued the night through and every night until we were released.

When we arrived in the Camp, A Line was only full

but, from that day on, prisoners began to arrive daily from Dublin, Tullamore, Galway, Mayo, Sligo, Roscommon, Leitrim, Kildare, Meath and Wicklow, with the result that the Camp that looked to us on our arrival as derelict and desolate in a few weeks became hive of living men.

Then the work of re-organisation had to begin. We were lucky in this respect for we had in the Camp several prominent I.R.A. men who knew each other and there was not much difficulty in renewing comradeship and fidelity. Volunteer officers from their own particular areas would vouch for their Volunteers and so, in a short time, we had a good idea of who was who.

The next important step was the election of officers. A meeting of hut leaders was held and the following officers were elected:-

Camp Commandant	- Peadar McMahon	
Vice Camp Commandant	- Joe Lawless	
Camp Quartermaster	- Micheál Ó Laoghaire (myself)	
Line Officers	- Mick McHugh	A Line
	Tom Derrig	B Line
	late James Victory	C Line
	Joe Vize	D Line

A medical officer was appointed in charge of the hospital. The first man appointed was the late Dr. O'Higgins of Stradbally (father of the late Kevin O'Higgins) who was afterwards released. Dr. O'Higgins was Coroner for Leix at the time and was very prominent and well respected. The authorities offered him his release if he would undertake to sign a bond for £200 (or £300) which the doctor refused to do. They approached him again a short time afterwards and reduced the bond. He not only

refused but told them, with all the indignation at his disposal, that if they did not release him unconditionally his bones would rot in the Camp compound before he would sign any undertaking. A week later he was released unconditionally. Dr. Brian Cusack was appointed M.O. and Dr. Fehily Assistant M.O. (both prisoners).

The elected officers of the Camp already referred to, I am sure would be willing to put before the Bureau the necessary information as to the organising and management of the Camp and any reference I make now deals only with my duties as Camp Quartermaster and the direct contacts I made.

There is one man (a prisoner) I would like to mention here, and that was our beloved sagart, the late Father Smith. He was that fine type of man that, if you met him in the street, you would stand to look after him. His personality, physique and stance commanded not only respect but awe. He was a man of at least 6' 3" in height, beautifully developed. Stand-offish and domineering would be the first impression one would form of him. Hard, one would think, to approach but, when one had got in contact with him, one very soon realised that those impressions were wrong. He commanded the respect of the Camp and even the most hardened sinners amongst us always paid him his due respects. He was not only sagart aroon but an Irishman as well who always guided his fellow-prisoners in their stand for freedom and who, though a priest first, if it came to a point when he had to assert himself physically, would have no hesitation in doing so. I only met him once after our release and he said to me, "I am neutral, for the unfortunate split has driven my boys into different camps. Seeing this, I could take no sides. You were all my boys!" The grave has opened to receive a

true patriot, emphatically true to God and Ireland. May he rest in peace!

In the Camp there were boys and men whose ages ranged from sixteen to over seventy years. There were some personalities interned in the Camp, including the late Joe McBride (a brother of Major McBride), Tom Byrne (of South African fame who fought with the Boers under Major McBride), Joe Vize (Director of Purchases), Liam Ó Brían (Professor of Galway University), several T.D's (too numerous to mention) and prominent medical men. There were a few badly wanted men who had passed the net of British Intelligence without being recognised and several, of course, with assumed names. Some of the latter were English spies. As well as those, there were about fifty per cent. of the prisoners who were never associated in any Irish-Ireland movement. One can see at a glance, therefore, that we had a "mixed grill".

The actual management of the Camp, including the hospital, was now handed over to us. A medical Corporal and Orderly (British soldiers) were the only two soldiers who slept inside the Camp. The British M.O. called in daily. The work was carried out by our own medical men and students under whose care patients were tended and treated.

I took over the food stores from Lieutenant Mallett, British Camp Quartermaster, including weighing-scales, tables and butcher's knives. He then handed to me a copy of the ration scale and said that he would supply me with rations according to that scale. The scale, with some deductions, was similar to the one in use by the British army at the time. It looked good enough on paper but,

when put to the test, there were always snags arising, such as, short weights (a daily occurrence), no vegetables, rancid margarine, fish (when supplied) sometimes putrid and the bread ration insufficient. This caused a lot of trouble and, although reported daily, nothing was ever done to put matters right.

On one occasion a consignment of fish arrived which was definitely bad. I got our own Medical Officers to inspect it, as well as the British Medical Officer. All were unanimous that the fish was not fit for human consumption and the British M.O. gave his certificate to that effect. The fish was sent back to the Curragh only to be returned again by orders of the D.M.S. as he considered the fish was perfectly good. When the internees who were waiting for their dinner heard the result, a party of them there and then swept the fish off the lorry, carried the boxes to the barbed wire and emptied the contents on and over the wire, leaving it there to smell, stench and decay under the broiling sun of a summer's day.

The margarine was generally rancid and scarcely ever touched. No fresh vegetables were supplied, always split peas in lieu, with the result that these commodities began to accumulate in my stores and in the cookhouse, so much so that I was able to hand over to the White Cross and the Newbridge Cumann na mBan, when the Camp was closed, about 4 tons of split peas and beans, 1,500 lbs. of rancid margarine and 700 or 800 lbs. of tea for disposal, but not without a big fight with the British Camp authorities, especially the Camp Commandant and the Camp Quartermaster. When the Camp was about to close, I sent an order to

Wallace's, Carriers, Newbridge, asking them to send two G.S. waggons and to report to me the following morning at 8 a.m. I signed an order for their admission. When they arrived the next morning at the gate, the Camp Commandant began loading them up with the internees' belongings for the Kildare railway station. I arrived at the gate about this time and asked the Camp Commandant what he meant by confiscating my two G.S. waggons. He said he wanted them in order to remove the luggage to the station. He asked me what I wanted them for. I told him, "To remove my rations". "What?", he shouted, "A soldier does not sell his rations". I said for the first time he recognised us as soldiers. After some further arguments, the G.S. waggons went into the Camp, were loaded up with the rations and went away. They came back again for two more loads which completed the job. These rations were handed over to Miss Kearns and the late Miss Wallace, Newbridge Cumann na mBan, who disposed of the margarine to the local bakeries and gave the tea to the St. Vincent de Paul Society in Newbridge. The remainder they passed on to the White Cross, Dublin, for disposal. This was food - and thought - and my career as a food distributor ended.

While the food problem referred to only dealt with our daily bread, which is man's daily prayer to satisfy the hungry tummy, the mind, ears and eyes of the observers were always active. This the enemy knew quite well. So they decided to inflict on us an Intelligence Officer, named Bultitude, who with a Sergeant (afterwards named "White Liver" by the internees) was always prowling around the Camp. Bultitude was sweetness personified, always smiling, but only until we were about to be released when he took off the mask and showed his true form. Dealing with a man like that and with the "mixed grill" already referred to,

which made up more than fifty per cent. of those interned, great care and caution had to be exercised and the segregation of the seed from the chaff was sometimes very slow. The men employed on this mission, however, were reliable and capable with the result that we were finally able to know who was who, without any suspicion falling on the men carrying out this job.

The first essential was the appointment of reliable Hut Leaders who were known and trusted. In this connection, so far as I know and remember, all the hut leaders were trusted men and carried out carefully the duties assigned to them. There were about thirty men in each hut under the charge of the hut leader whom they appointed themselves. His duties openly were to maintain law and order in the hut, detail men for duty and keep a watching brief over them, always reporting anything he thought important, at the same time becoming acquainted with his men and ascertaining, if possible, the views of every man in the hut. His fellow-Volunteers he coached on those lines also. In this way, he was soon able to give an account of each man in the hut. This, of course, only referred to men who were not known to any Volunteer in the Camp. When his suspicions were aroused, he kept the suspects, naturally unknown to themselves, under observation and their correspondence was seized in our own post office and examined. From information like this, we were able to associate directly or indirectly 28 prisoners. When some of them were openly accused, they fled from the Camp under the protection of the military. This was the work of our Intelligence men and they usually held their meetings in my stores.

The 28 spies and suspects referred to were removed

from the Camp and we never saw them again. To my knowledge, there were in that 28 at least two who could definitely be condemned as spies and the remaining suspects were always associating with them. Of the two, one was a member of a Volunteer unit in Dublin and the other was a member of the Casement Brigade in Germany.

The Volunteer prisoners were now organised into their own areas, that is to say, the areas from which they came before being interned, and elected their officers. They too held their meetings in my stores. This meant that I had to keep at all times unauthorised persons from entering the stores, with the result that they gave me the name of the "Black and Tan". In addition to these meetings, I.R.A. classes were held and the best talent we had gave lectures in explosives, handling of arms and tactical exercises. They were always well attended and were never discovered, although Bultitude, the Sergeant and our Camp spies were always knocking around.

There was attached to the Camp an isolation and detention hut where some of our men were detained in solitary confinement for several months. Commandant Pat King, being one of those prisoners, could give the names and details of the appalling conditions they had to undergo. This was a most uncalled for act and caused a rightful feeling of resentment throughout the Camp, but the Intelligence Officer, Bultitude, and his Camp touts had to show some results for their daily visits. Men were confined to this isolation hut because the British Intelligence authorities thought they were organising within the Camp for the I.R.B.

Escape was the topic of the day, always in the minds of the Volunteers interned, but how to achieve this

was the problem to be solved. It was a formidable problem. Surveying the position from within, it looked hopeless and impossible, guarded as we were on all sides by impregnable barriers. The question was often asked, "Can we find any means of escape?". The problem was analysed and most carefully studied from all angles and the unanimous belief was that an underground tunnel was the only solution. We were fortunate in having men experienced in mining amongst the Volunteers. They were consulted and agreed to undertake the job. After a special survey of the Camp was gone into, a certain hut in D Line was selected. The Hut Leader was consulted and he was in the fortunate position of being able to say that he could trust all the men in his hut, which was providential, as the slightest slip or token would spell ruin.

Work began under this hut. No mind could ever imagine the hardships those men endured in this undertaking. An ordinary bread-knife was probably the only weapon at their disposal. They had to dig a perpendicular hole to a depth of at least six feet, with stairs, through heavy loamy soil before they turned to make the tunnel. The clay was brought up in their pockets and distributed underneath the hut. As the air conditions were bad, men could only work under these conditions for a very short time but, in spite of those appalling conditions, work continued night and day until a tunnel, at least 60 feet long, was completed after some weeks of heavy work and the outer barbed wire line reached. A small wire cutters was secured and a pathway was cut through the outer line of barbed wire as the tunnel ended at the inside barbed wire barrier. When this was completed, a line was laid down from the tunnel to the outer barbed wire to help the escaping men to reach the outside path of the barbed wire. The man

who completed this job came back and reported that all was clear. On that memorable night in September, 1921, 58 Volunteers made their escape to freedom.

This was not the only tunnel operating at the time. Captain Manus O'Boyle was operating one from Hut 20, B Line, but this was never completed. Another was operating from the hospital. There were others as well that I am not acquainted with.

Other internees also escaped from the Camp. Colonel Joe Lawless and a friend of his escaped in the swill cart. Dr. Conlan, wrapped in sheets, escaped in the laundry van. Jim Staines and Brian O'Higgins escaped in the ration cart, and the late Michael Carolan from the isolation hut.

Several internees tried to escape but failed. In one of these attempts, Vincent Staines tried the swill cart method again, only to get a thrust of a bayonet in the arm, the soldier probing the swill between the outer and inner gates of the compound. He was captured and taken back to hospital. His wound was only a flesh wound.

When the British authorities discovered the escape, they were furious - and none more so than Intelligence Officer Bultitude. They immediately dug a trench, ten feet deep and ten feet wide, between D Line and the barbed wire and filled it with water. The problem was solved. The observation posts, flying pickets and the impregnable barriers no longer offered a barrier to the will, brains and determination of the Volunteers.

No visitors were allowed to enter the Camp except a priest who came in for a few hours on a Saturday to hear

the men's confessions. To our great surprise, we were honoured one day by no less a personage than the Commander-in-Chief of the British Forces in Ireland, Sir Neville Macready, the Quartermaster General and their retinue. They called and inspected the Camp. Sir Neville was in mufti. While the others were carrying out their inspection, Sir Neville made his way unaccompanied to my stores. He came in, looked around the stores and asked me if I knew who he was. I said I did not and I didn't give a damn who he was. He only smiled. He started asking questions and then asked me if I had any complaints to make. I asked him was he serious for, if so, I said, pointing to a stool in the store, I could keep him sitting there for a week before I was finished complaining. I picked up an old ledger given to me by Lieutenant Mellot, opened it and began quoting the complaints, the nature of the complaints and the dates they occurred. While we were thus engaged, the whole retinue had arrived. Hearing my complaints which were all about food, the D.M.S. butted in. I said to him sharply, "I am not speaking to you. And when I did" - referring to the fish incident and the margarine - "you certainly did nothing to put matters right!" He shrivelled up. Lieutenant Mellot, the Quartermaster, butted in also when I was speaking about weight shortages. I gave him a similar reply and he looked very small.

After having listened to my complaints for at least a quarter of an hour, Sir Neville and his party moved off, but the Camp Commandant remained and asked me to walk around the playing ground with him. He took me by the arm. He said he was an Irishman (Hannan or Hanna, I think, was the name he mentioned, from Wicklow) and although he did not agree with us, he firmly believed that

we were sincere and that the complaints I had just made were genuine. He then said to me that, if I had any further trouble over the rations, I was to report immediately to his Line Officer who came in to call the roll morning and evening and that, if I did not have the matter fixed up within twenty-four hours, I was to report to him. He was the only officer who, while speaking to the Commander-in-Chief, never showed any sign of an inferiority complex. That I admired. I must say that, in my dealings with him and the M.O., I always found them perfect gentlemen who knew how to treat and respect prisoners; and the prisoners in turn respected them.

The ledger referred to is still in my possession. It contains not only the complaints mentioned but also the name, number and hut or tent of every internee in the Camp. The records were entered by me, or directly under my supervision, and I can certify them as being authentic in every detail.

When the Camp was actually evacuated and only a few of our officers left behind, including Peadar McMahon, Tom Kerr, Mick McHugh and myself, the British Camp Commandant had word sent to us to say that he would like to meet us at No. 1 Hut (known as the internees' Officers' Mess). When we arrived, he welcomed us and produced a bottle of wine. We all sat down around the ordinary soldiers' table - victors and vanquished - and drank from the cup of peace. (Tom Kerr did not partake as he was a lifelong pioneer). The Commandant wished us well and we thanked him. He was glad the fight was over and the whole trouble ended. Was the long fight of 750 years over? And was the whole trouble ended? That was the question. We had only to wait and see. The treaty our plenipotentiaries brought

back from London had first to be ratified by Dáil Éireann and then endorsed by the people of Ireland. On this we could offer no opinion. We stood up, shook hands and parted with the Commandant on the plains of Kildare on the evening of the 7th December, 1921.

I have now finished my statement. This I am prepared to testify as being true in every detail, so far as my memory serves me. It was given voluntarily and willingly, as I deemed it my duty to put before the Bureau of Military History the small part played by me in the fight for freedom, so as to help the future historians to embody my small link (if wanted) in the formidable chain of facts and evidence for the completion of this great work.

I have brought to light the names of men who played important parts in the fight, but they were known to few and, were it not for the work of the Bureau of Military History, their names and their deeds would remain in oblivion and definitely lost to posterity. If, when the Roll of Honour is completed and their names were omitted, to my mind a great injustice would be done. If, in the course of this statement, I have omitted the names or the deeds of any person or persons, this I can sincerely say can only be attributed to memory and I am very sorry.

When I consented to make this statement, I wanted it to be clearly understood that I was actuated only by the one desire, to put the facts before the Bureau of Military History as I saw them, without colour or trim. In my own humble way, I made this clear to Commandant Ivory when he first interviewed me, and that was accepted. I wish the historical bureau of research every success in this great historical work they have undertaken. Ireland

and posterity owe to them a great debt, but this can never be fully realised until the historians have put before the public the true facts in the fight for freedom. May they and we all live to see this great work in circulation, is my humble prayer.

SIGNED: Micheal Ó Laoghaire

(Micheal O Laoghaire)

DATE: 9th February 1953.

9th February 1953.

WITNESS: Wm. Ivory Comdt.

(Wm. Ivory) Comd't.