ROINN COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 827

Witness

Denis Collins,
Oldcourt,
Kinsale,
Co. Cork.

Identity.

Member of Ballinspittal Company,
Bandon Batt'n. Irish Vol's., 1917 - ;

Lieut. same Company later.

Subject.

Bandon Battalion Irish Volunteers,

1917-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S.2132

Form B.S.M. 2

ORIGINAL

STATEMENT

BY

DENIS COLLINS, OLD COURT, KINSALE,

CO. CORK.

LIEUTENANT, 'C' (BALLINSPITTAL) COMPANY,

1ST (BANDON) BATTALION, CORK III BRIGADE,

AND MEMBER, WEST CORK FLYING COLUMN.

In the Winter of 1914-1915 a Volunteer Company was formed at Barrel's Cross, less than a mile from where I lived and where I live now. I was only 14 or 15 years of age and I used be watching the Volunteers drilling on a Sunday and had a notion to join. At the same time I sized them up and came to the conclusion that none of them would ever fight for Ireland. And hardly one of them ever did.

After Easter Week the Company fell through. Actually four members of it marched to Macroom to take part in the expected fight which, of course, did not happen. One of the four was active during the Tan War.

In November, 1917, there was the reorganisation of the Volunteers in the area and the Ballinspittal Company then came into being as a Unit of the Bandon Battalion then belonging to the one Brigade in all Cork. There were several parades during that Winter and the man in charge of the Company at that time was John Collins of Gortnacrusha.

As a result of police supervision of our movements, the Company Captain apparently lost heart and was missing from parades, the result being that the Company dwindled

down to about four of us. One of the four was a pre-1916 Volunteer and he said the best thing we could do was to become a Section of the Ballinadee Company. This was done and our activities then were chiefly organising feiseanna, putting up flags in prominent places and generally making ourselves a nuisance to the R.I.C.

In the Spring of 1919 the few of us who were in the Section planned to disarm four British Officers returning from the public-house at the Old Head to the Barracks at Kinsale. One of our party only was armed - with a shot-gun but no ammunition - and he stood out on the road while we lay behind the fence ready to jump on the Officers when they leapt off the side car they used travel on.

They came along as expected about half-past ten at night, singing away, and we thought they would be no trouble to us. Our man with the empty gun called on them to halt and to put up their hands. "Look", shouted one, "a Shinner with a gun !" He pulled the driver back off the seat, grabbed the reins and lashed the horse to a gallop and got away.

We heard afterwards they were not armed at all, but the next night they were out they came armed, and actually had target practice with bottles in the yard of the pub at the Old Head. However, we did not make a second attempt for the R.I.C. spread all over the place on the watch, though they blamed the Ballinadee lads for the whole thing.

From this time until the Spring of 1920 we reorganised

properly. The Battalion Staff came around and there was a strong Company formed of about 40 men. John Fitzgerald of Kilbrittain was put in charge for training purposes. He was O.C. Kilbrittain Company. We elected Robert Fitzgerald our Company Captain, John Ryan as Lieutenant and myself as 2nd Lieutenant. Lawrence Donovan became Company Adjutant and Michael Galvin the Quartermaster.

We started the first thing after being organised, to get arms, and raided for shot-guns and ammunition in the district. We got about 22.

We got .22 rifles at the same time but they were not very reliable. We had no revolvers then. By the Spring of 1920 we were fully organised as a Unit and in April of that year the R.I.C. evacuated Ballinspittal Barracks. They were not long gone when the Barracks was knocked by us in co-operation with Kilbrittain Company to prevent re-occupation. We destroyed the roof, doors, windows and floors, making a complete wreck of the building.

We were informed that two Officers from the garrison in Kinsale used be in a house about a mile down the road from the Old Head and where the wife of one of them lived. We assumed they would be armed and surrounded and entered the house one night to disarm them, but they were not there at all. We were very nice to the civilian occupants of the house and they thanked us for that and said there would not be a word from them about the raid, and neither was there. As a precaution the seven or eight of us who raided the house were masked, as well as carrying shot-guns, but we

might have been recognised all the same. This happened about June, 1920.

A garrison of Marines was set up in the Coastguard Station at the Old Head. A patrol of 12 or 13 of them used come on Sunday night as far as the Old Head. We assembled at Garrettstown, the whole Company of us, and decided to attempt to disarm them. Jack Fitzgerald from Kilbrittain came there and was put in charge. We all volunteered enthusiastically for the job. We made our way to the Old Head, unarmed, on a Sunday night in July, 1920, the idea being to jump over the fence on the Marines and take them by surprise, the weight of numbers, 30 or so, being likely to tell. We sent out scouts before us and unfortunately were just about one minute late. The Marine's patrol had gone. Still Jack Fitzgerald was delighted with our enthusiasm to take part in this operation.

The Training Camp was set up at Clounboig to the East of Kilbrittain. Our Company Captain looked for Volunteers for active service and three of us volunteered, himself and myself and another. This was in September, 1920, and we spent a great week in the Camp. We were up at six in the morning and were kept going until eleven at night. Tom Barry was in charge, and the Brigade Staff was there, including Charlie Hurley, O.C. and Liam Deasy, Adjutant. There must have been 50 or 60 Volunteers in training. We were all billeted in the local houses.

The British Manual of Field Training, 1914, was used and we had close order and open order drill, and each of us

in turn was put in charge of Sections to give us practice in command. We had rifle practice with targets and bayonet practice as well. Each man had a rifle provided for the duration of the Camp. We had bomb throwing with dummy grenades though two live ones were tried out one day. However, they did not explode. They were made perfectly on the pattern of the Mills bomb, perhaps in the factory in Cork. The detonators of the practice ones may have been defective.

For security purposes the local Companies provided a screen of scouts and sentries around the Camp. Actually two R.I.C. men passed along one day about 50 yards away only, but never observed what was going on, and the Camp carried on without interruption.

After the Training Camp was finished I returned to my own district, working at home by day and sleeping out in some neighbour's house at night. I was put in charge of the Ballinspittal Company in the absence of the Captain on active service, and used have two parades a week, passing on the knowledge I had gained at Clounboig.

After the Ballinhassig and Newcestown ambushes, the Captain and 1st Lieutenant came back from the Column. They took part in the Arms Fund collection in the Company area. About £200 was collected, practically everyone paying up on request. The rate of subscription was based on the valuation of a man's place; I think it was 2/- in the £.

Just as the Fund was complete, Bob Fitzgerald, our Company Captain, and Frank Hunt who had been collecting with

him, were arrested by British military. They were caught in their own houses, a guide accompanying the military, and it was thought they were identified by some one they called on during the collection. They were both interned until after the Truce. In Kinsale the British informed Bob that he was the Company Captain. In the lorry going to Cork two Tans were urging him to jump for it but he wisely refused. Then they seized him to throw him out, but a Sergeant of the military escort interfered and ordered them to stop it and to keep their hands off.

The 1st Lieutenant of the Company became Captain and I became 1st Lieutenant and the Quartermaster became 2nd Lieutenant. The Company was gradually getting stronger and by the end of the period - about a month before the Truce - eight recruits joined, making a total of about 60.

I could not be at home day or night during the month of November, 1920, for the military were raiding a lot around the area and gave great attention to my house. They used be asking for Collins and Galvin and actually arrested two other men of those names but released them again shortly.

I had a lucky escape one day at my own home when the place was surrounded by military and just had time to push a revolver into a rick of hay and then passed myself off as the workman when questioned. I got a distance and saw a soldier prodding the rick with his bayonet but my revolver was not got. I had had it at Barrel's Cross the night before when watching for a suspected spy and only came back to my

own place for a short while in the morning.

Jack Ryan, our Company Captain and myself were mobilised for the first attack on Kilbrittain R.I.C. Barracks. This was on Sunday morning, 2nd January, 1921. The whole party, about 25 in number, left Ryan's of Clounboig, the Battalion Headquarters at the time. Seán Hales, O.C. Battalion, was in charge of the operation. Every man was armed with a rifle, except for the men who carried a mine. They put it in a trap and the mare refused to move. When it was taken out the mare started off and when it was put in again she again halted. One man fired a shot from a shot-gun but it was no use. The mine had to be carried by hand.

The different Sections were told off to their positions when we got close to the Barracks. Jack Ryan and I and Davy O'Sullivan, the O.C. Kilbrittain Company, were sent to the back to watch for any R.I.C. who might escape that way when the mine would go off. It was a calm moonlit night and freezing, and any sound could be heard, such as water running. There wasn't a sound from any member of the Column which showed how well trained they were. We listened for the explosion of the mine; in fact we were told it was so powerful that we should keep our hands over our ears. However, it didn't go off and the first thing we heard was the explosion of a bomb which was thrown against the mine to make it go off. This didn't work, however, and a few more bombs were tried but the mine refused to explode. The R.I.C. were firing away and kept it up as well as throwing out plenty of Mills bombs and they kept it up till dawn, after we had left

the scene. We had to abandon the mine. It had been made at Clounboig by Peter Monahan, a Sergeant in the Camerons stationed at Cobh and who had deserted to us.

A fortnight after we carried out another attack on the Barracks at Kilbrittain and Jack Ryan and myself were again mobilised. The Ballinspittal Company was mobilised to block the roads leading to the Barracks and for scouting purposes. They were, however, surprised by the military when assembling and nine were captured, the remainder escaping. None was armed. The military were dressed in civilian clothes and only carried revolvers. They fired on the escaping Volunteers but didn't hit any. Those they captured were badly beaten, being struck about the head and faces with the butts of the revolvers. They were roped together and kicked and beaten all the way to Kinsale, seven miles of a journey. It certainly looked as if the game had been given away to the British.

The attack on the Barracks went on and a small mine was used: Dinny Manning, a noted weight thrower, heaved the half-hundred weight mine at the Barrack door. It didn't go off and Dinny stood out in the middle of the street and shouted to the police inside "If you hand me out a pencil and paper I'll write down my name for you". The police started sending up Verey lights and throwing out bombs. We only kept up slight fire on the Barracks so as not to waste ammunition, as with the failure of the mine the attack couldn't be a success. No reinforcements came for the police until after we had withdrawn - in fact, they didn't arrive until

dinner time that day.

After this I did not return home but went off and joined the Brigade Column at Ahiohill. Jack Ryan came too. We were with the Column for a month then, until 11th February. We thought we were being moved to Macroom for an attack on the Auxiliaries there but we stopped at Quarry's Cross and were billeted there. Some of the Brigade and some of the Battalion Column were there together, about 30 in all. Seán Hâles was in charge. No particular operation was carried out during this time though once we were nearly surrounded by a big number of military who were unaware of us being strung out all round the fences of a big field.

From Quarry's Cross we moved to Crosspound, back West to Mallowgaton. The full Column was here now about 100 strong, with Tom Barry in charge. All were big hefty men and well armed. We moved on to Mawbeg and were lying in ambush but no British came. A fellow came along on a bicycle and from a glance he threw around Barry thought he had seen some of the lads concealed behind the ditch so he jumped over a low wall and stopped him and asked where he was going. From the way Barry was dressed the cyclist apparently took him to be an Auxiliary or a Tan and said he was going to the Barracks in Bandon with information. Barry brought him to a nearby house and found on him a notebook with the names of local Volunteers in it.

He was executed after trial by Officers of the Column.

I can't remember his name but he had come from some distance, as far away as Ballineen, eight miles about.

From Mawbeg the Column moved South towards Clogagh and from there we went to Bandon to attack the British forces there, both military and police, marching down the road nearly into the town. The idea was to try and capture the Military barracks, first by attacking the curfew patrol of soldiers and when the armoured car in the barracks would come out have a mine outside to blow it up and then rush the barracks through the open gates.

However, the curfew patrol didn't come out and a duel developed with the Column firing on the barracks and the military inside keeping up a tremendous fire with rifles and machine guns. We didn't succeed in drawing them out though and retired before daylight, having had one man killed. Another man was missed when half the Column having been withdrawn was halted at Ballymodan, South of the town and counted. Seán Hales was in charge of a Section of this half Column and he went back with the Section to search for the missing man. The Section went back into the town under the fire of both sides, and the missing man was discovered pinned down by the enemy fire in Bandon cemetery. He came back with the Section safe and sound.

The South half of the Column, that is, the half which operated on the South side of Bandon, went on to Knocknacurra and were billeted there for the night. The night after we crossed the Bandon river by boats from Colliers Quay and landed on the North Bank. We had been joined by the North

half of the Column, which had attacked in Bandon from the North side of the town. We moved to Rearour and billeted there.

After this we attacked Innishannon R.I.C. Barracks. We used a mine here which did explode. It was packed with two kinds of explosives, just to make sure, and one lot went off. It did very little damage, only putting a small hole in the door, as the storming party discovered when they rushed to the barracks. They were back again under cover, however, before the garrison opened fire. We did not fire much on the barracks and withdrew in due course.

The Column moved North to Brinny, a few miles away, and then on to Ballymurphy. We had a sing song in our billet here that night and the next day moved to Quarry's Cross, and then to Newcestown. Then we went South and crossed the Bandon river by Baxter's Bridge, West of Bandon town, and then South East to Kilbrittain.

We went into Bandon from Kilbrittain looking for the Curfew patrol which didn't turn out and we moved back to Kilbrittain. From here we went West to Ahiohill, then to Burgatia near Rosscarbery for the purpose of attacking the R.I.C. Barracks there.

That part of the Brigade Column referred to as the 1st Battalion (Bandon) Column remained in their own area while the Regular Column left Kilbrittain. There were 32 of us at Burgatia House and our plans for the attack on Rosscarbery were spoiled this time when we were attacked ourselves at Burgatia.

A postman who called about ten o'clock in the morning after we had spent the night there was allowed to leave (as his non-return would have aroused suspicion) after promising Barry faithfully that he would say nothing of seeing armed men about the house. He didn't keep his promise, apparently, for about two or three o'clock that day there was firing at the front of the house. Scouts were out but were unarmed. Not till military arrived in lorries from Clonakilty was any move made by the enemy to approach the house and then it was only under cover of heavy fire from concealed positions. A small cover party kept up fire in the general direction of the enemy while three Sections of eight men each made their way out, being joined eventually by the fourth Section (the cover party) and all made their way to the seaside of the house, Barry having given the order to retreat towards the Galley light. We stayed on the road till the enemy had gone and then we went back and burned Burgatia House. The loyalists who lived there had left with the military. We had one man wounded and, as far as we knew, the enemy had one man wounded also, a R.I.C. Sergeant from Rosscarbery.

During the firing Barry asked for someone to volunteer to ride down the avenue and see the strength and general positions of the enemy. Daly it was who volunteered and he went and got a horse out of the stables, jumped on its back and galloped down the avenue. Galvin from Barrel's Cross was told off to cover him. The horse was shot under this brave lad who had volunteered to ride straight into the enemy fire, and, as it fell, the rider instead of jumping to his

feet and running for it, fell with it and rolled over and over across the avenue and into the watertable up along which he crawled to the safety of the house. Arrived there, he went directly to the stables for another horse but he wouldn't be allowed make the second attempt. He was an ex-British soldier, incidentally, and served with the Column to the finish.

After burning Burgatia House Barry split the Column into two halves, sending one half, with which I was, to Kilbree and took the other half into Rosscarbery and attacked the Barracks there. He caught some of the enemy out in front of the Barracks when he got there and opened fire on them. There was a good bit of firing which we could hear from Kilbree. Barry and his party came back to Kilbree without having suffered any casualties.

We billeted in Kilbree for the night and our one wounded man was attended there by a doctor. His wound wasn't very serious, he having got shot in the leg. From Kilbree we went on to Reenáscreena and remained the night there.

On the following night we left Reenascreena about 8 o'clock and commenced a march to Kilcoe S.W. towards Schull. We actually did 22 miles on this march with only a few short rests on the way. At the finish, someone informed us there was a wedding party in progress in a house in the locality and Barry sent a couple of men to get away any Volunteers who were there to have scouts mounted around our billets as we were too tired to do this for ourselves.

One of the locals doing guard, fiddling with a revolver of which he was rather ignorant, accidentally shot another Volunteer whom he was relieving. The sound of the shot roused us in our billets and we had to move on, after seeing that a priest and doctor were got. We marched another eight miles that night and eventually came to rest in the broad daylight after crossing country on the last lap of this forced march.

After a day's rest we moved again and arrived at a place called Mount Kaid near Drimoleague. Some of the 1st Battalion who were coming to reinforce the Column joined us here and brought the news of the shooting of Paddy Crowley at Maryboro' near Timoleague, and of the big round up at Barryroe and at Ballinspittal. Four of us were sent back to our own Company there to investigate the position and see how the local Unit stood.

We got on a commandeered side-car and watched the Column marching away to attack Drimoleague Barracks and the sight of it going off in the darkness made us lonesome.

At Drinagh we let the side-car and its driver go and I'm sure he wasn't sorry to part with us. I went into the Post Office to get some cigarettes and picked up an 'Independent" and here among the list of shootings which used be published there was the name of an Uncle of mine - Dan Moloney of Lislevane. At the time, too, his three sons were in jail.

We got another side-car in Drinagh to bring us to Kilmeen and there a man provided us with a pony and trap and drove us

to Ahiohill. Here we were told two lads had been shot down the road that night and we found it difficult to find a billet. At last a man who had been threatened by the British, so he told us, and warned not to put up any "Shinners" or he would be shot, welcomed us in, made a fine meal for us and gave us a bed.

We got up the next day and struck across country, walking this time. We had left our arms with the Column. We came along by Inchy Bridge above Timoleague and then coming nearer the latter place we heard the noise of cars on the road. We hid behind the fence and peeped over. There were all traps and side-cars with local people in them. We got out on the road and discovered they were coming from a funeral in Timoleague, so we thought it exactly right if we got into a couple of them as passengers. Two of the traps had only two people each so we four divided and each pair of us got a lift. In the trap I was in there was a Volunteer from my own Company and I told him in reply to his questions that I had come back to keep the Company going and that I wanted a change of clothes and was going to sleep at home just for that night. After the long walk across country it was very pleasant to get the lift from friends and to be brought quite a bit of the way nearer to home.

I slept soundly that night in my own bed and didn't waken till daylight. Something made me wake suddenly and leaning up on one elbow I looked out of the window. Down below at the front gate stood a soldier fully equipped and with rifle and fixed bayonet. Before I had time to do

anything an Officer of the Essex Regiment came into the room: "Where were you for the past month ?" he asked. "At home", I replied. "No, you weren't at home. You have been away for a month now and you only came back yesterday. Where were you ?" he continued. I swore I was never away from home during that time except for the last day and that then I had been attending a funeral, giving name of the deceased. It was no use.

"Get up and get dressed" he ordered. I did so. Then I asked him could I have a cup of tea and a bit to eat before I was taken away. He refused to allow me to have any such thing. I asked could I bring a razor with me. He refused this also. I was made come and brought along the road and put into a lorry.

We moved down the road till we came to Mannings. Here Major Percival and Major Spooner stood in the yard with David Manning with his back to a wall. Though I could not hear every word that was said I could grasp that the two Officers were trying to get some information out of Manning but without success. Suddenly Percival shouted to a Sergeant to fall in twelve men as a firing party. The Sergeant fell them in right opposite Manning. Percival and Spooner kept up the cross-examination and were prodding Manning with the muzzles of their revolvers. I could see Manning shaking his head as if refusing to say anything. Percival and the other drew back and told the Sergeant to put the firing party in the loading position. This was done but Manning showed no signs of fright or of weakening. At length Percival had the firing

party dismissed and Manning was put in the lorry with us and brought to Kinsale Barracks.

We were only out of the lorry and standing on the square a minute when back we were put again and brought to Charles' Fort. All the time we were here, about a week, a Sergeant and some Tommies, all belonging to the Essex, could not do enough for us. They got us cigarettes, plenty of food, liquor for any who wanted a drink and cards for us to play. The Sergeant said he had the greatest sympathy for anyone who was a prisoner as he had been one for four years in Germany during the War and was working on the land for a German farmer. He said the German family he was staying with was exceedingly kind and when food was short with them during the latter part of the War, they made sure he was never short and treated him as a friend.

We appreciated this N.C.O.'s attitude and that of the men under him. They seemed to be permanently on garrison duties and didn't go round the country making war on the people like the majority of their regiment. We were very sorry to leave there when we were transferred to Victoria Barracks in Cork.

We were brought to Kinsale Station handcuffed in pairs. There were eight of us prisoners altogether. Four of us were put in a compartment of the train with four soldiers opposite, one being a N.C.O. I noticed his rifle was at full cock with the safety catch on. Before the train started an officer came into the compartment and handed the N.C.O. an

automatic pistol. He told them that if they heard one shot - just one shot fired - while on the way to Cork, that we four prisoners were to be shot right away. This order was probably given because the train ambush at Upton Station had happened shortly before.

During the whole journey to Cork, the four armed men opposite us were exceedingly fidgety and nervous, and the N.C.O. in particular. He was trembling the whole way as I could see looking at the hand that held the automatic, while he could not keep a grip on his rifle at all. Several times he loosened his grasp of it and it fell forward against my chest. Whether he was afraid the train would be ambushed or whether he was fearful of the job he had to do on us if they were hit up, I don't know, but we were glad when we arrived in Cork.

During the time I was in Victoria Barracks between 17th or 18th February and about the end of the first week in March the trial of the Volunteers captured in the fight at Dripsey was going on. And then we were there the morning they were executed. There were five of them, and a Tipperary man brought in and condemned by a drumhead courtmartial was shot along with them. We heard the volleys that killed them.

Our cage was by the main gate and we saw the covered lorry that brought the bodies down to Cork Gaol for burial as it passed out of the Barracks.

The following night there were six soldiers shot in the city as a reprisal. All members of the garrison out on pass rushed for the safety of the Barracks and when they had got in

they staged a demonstration against us. They tried to storm the wire to get in and attack us but the provost-corporal in charge of the cage stood up to them, threatened them with his revolver and when they didn't desist he turned out the guard with fixed bayonets and posted them round the cage. He told the mob of Tommies who were thirsting for our blood that he would not hesitate to use his revolver if they persisted in their attempt to get in at us. He said, in addition, that the guard would use their bayonets if necessary.

The threatening crowd withdrew and, having gathered up all the loose stones they could find around the square, they assailed our huts, into which we were locked, of course, with showers of these missiles for an hour. They gradually dispersed and we were left in comparative peace.

There was no quiet in the Barracks, however, presumably because of the shootings. Armoured cars and lorries were in and out all night.

The provost-corporal mentioned above was a very good friend of ours. I think his name was Coleman. He was an Englishman but was a Catholic. When spies, apparently suspects picked up during curfew, were shoved into the cage among us, this corporal promptly told our O.C., Henry Mahony, of them. He also, I believe, smuggled letters in and out of the cage for I.R.A. Intelligence outside.

The following day a burial service was held over the six soldiers' coffins on the square. They were just outside the cage and the whole garrison was on parade for the ceremony.

We were in our compound looking through the wire and the orderly officer came in and told us we would be allowed remain there during the ceremony if we stood to attention. Henry Mahony told him we were not asked to stand to attention when the dead bodies of our own comrades were being brought out of the Barracks the previous morning and we certainly were not going to do so now. We were locked into our huts then until the funeral had passed out of Barracks.

We used pass the time kicking a raggedy old ball within our compound and I used be in goal with my back close up to the wire. The British had an order that at certain times in the day and after 6 o'clock in the evening no one was allowed to cross the square. One evening during our game I heard footsteps crossing the square and coming near the cage and then stopping directly behind me. I wondered who was the important person who could cut across the rules like that and turned round to see. It was a man in civilian clothes and was actually a near neighbour of my own who had joined the Irish Guards and had fought through the 1914-1918 War.

We looked steadily at one another, with only the wire between us. Neither of us gave a sign of recognition, I because I did not wish to show my fellow-prisoners that I would talk to someone who might have been there for no good reason. He might have been and probably was a spy, for on different evenings after that he used come out of a doorway across the square, always dressed in civilian clothes, and come over and gaze in through the wire at us for quite a while and then without a word turn away. No soldier was allowed do this, so we were very suspicious.

I heard afterwards he was seen in military police uniform down the city and also in civilian dress along with the Tans. He was also identified as being one of the principal actors in the burning of Cork in the previous December. He went home in 1922 and was shot very soon after. His name was Jimmy Donovan from Ballinspittal.

One of the prisoners with us in Cork was Professor Alfred O'Rahilly. He spent a great deal of time writing letters to 'The Freeman's Journal' and other papers. However, one day he came out on the ration party across the square to the Cookhouse. On the way back he saw a notice over the gate of the cage, which I, who had often been on the ration party before, had never spotted. He drew the attention of everyone to it. It read 'This is a cage for rebels and murderers'. The Professor kicked up a terrible scene over this and demanded to be brought before General Strickland. He spent the time waiting in stalking around the compound in a terrific rage. He was eventually brought out but whether it was actually General Strickland himself he saw or not I don't know, but the soldier who conducted him back to the cage took down the notice.

From Victoria Barracks after a stay of about three weeks there, we were brought by sloop down the river Lee and landed in Spike Island in Cobh Harbour. We were interned until the general release in December following the Truce period. As regards what happened during our stay there there isn't very much to tell. There was the usual prison

camp routine and nothing exciting. I was moved from there before the revolt and the burning by the prisoners of their quarters.

I was transferred to Bere Island on 28th May on a destroyer. Thirty of us travelled to our new prison. The sea was rough and we were kept below and were all very sick. Two of us at a time had been allowed on deck and I chose my time so that I would get up as we were passing the Old Head of Kinsale. This I did and was able to see my own house away behind the Old Head, the house where I am living to-day.

I stayed on deck till we got near Seven Heads and then the rolling and pitching became so bad that I felt myself getting seasick and I went below. No one else came up after this. While on deck I saw that our military escort were all seasick too. Down below the sailors gave us a cup of tea and that was a little relief.

We left Spike Island Quay at nine o'clock in the morning. It was eight o'clock that night when we landed at Bere Island. Once ashore we were brought into a hut and our baggage searched. Then our names were called out and as each man answered he was ordered to say 'Sir' to the officer. This we all refused to do and we were bundled into a corner and told we would not be allowed leave that hut till we each said 'Sir'. We conferred together and decided if called again, instead of saying 'Here' as we were supposed to and adding on 'Sir', we would give the Irish for 'Here' -

'Annso'. and let the British think what they liked.

After a while the roll was called again and each man answered to his name with 'Annso'. Apparently, the British thought we were saying 'Sir' and, satisfied with this, let us all out to our new quarters.

We were allotted to huts of which there were four. Some prisoners were there before us and some came after. There was a total of about 150.

The Truce came and nothing eventful happened on Bere Ireland for some months. We had a very big compound with plenty of room for exercise. We were on the highest part of the island and had a lovely view of Bantry Bay and the mountains all around.

Our intelligence in the internment camp was in communication with the Volunteers on the mainland and it was decided to dig a tunnel from the hut I was in, under the wire, under a soldiers' hut outside and past the guardroom - where we would be concealed from the camp lights. Then a move would be made down to the shore where boats would have come across from the Castletownbere side to take us away.

The tunnel would have to be about 100 yards long. We commenced it, working in threes, and with a rough implement sharpened in our own cookhouse we dug from under our hut as arranged and across to under the hut where the soldiers were quartered. Here we thought we were discovered when one of us directly under the floor after coming up from our tunnel kicked the boards overhead. All was silence in the soldiers'

hut and then we heard the sound of a bolt being drawn back in a rifle. We expected a shot through the floor any moment and then we heard the soldier bursting into song. He sang 'When I dream of old Ireland, I'm dreaming of you.' Apparently he was just cleaning his rifle and never heard the sound of the boot against the floor beneath.

Tunnelling work was hard and in after years it didn't do my health any good. The air was bad and when it put out the candle carried by one of the digging party it was time to withdraw until the atmosphere cleared again. Then, too, we often had to crawl and lie in water and that meant that rheumatism set in.

However, we kept on with the work. When tunnelling from under the soldiers' hut towards the guardroom we had no means at all of ventilation as the distance was so great in comparison with that between our hut and the soldiers' hut. One day we had to chance making a bit of a hole up through the surface of the ground as an airshaft. It was only a tiny little hole and just as we had it finished something came and blocked the light and we could hear a dog sniffing. We heard one soldier shouting to another 'What is the matter with that bloody dog ?'. The other answered 'Rats, I suppose. The place is crawling with them.'

We carried on with our tunnel until some days before we were released and then we were still 20 yards from the finish. We were released on the 8th December.

A couple of days before this when it was decided to

stop the tunnelling, it was agreed among our leaders that we should tell the British Commandant about the tunnel. Before he came there there were some pretty nasty Commandants but he was a very decent sort and softened our lot in many ways, so we thought it only fair in return to let him know for fear it would eventually be discovered by others and he would get into trouble. He was told quietly and so, on the day prior to our release, with great bustle, accompanied by his Adjutant and an escort, he came into the compound and said he was going to search for tunnels. And so he did and found one. We felt we had played the game with him as he had done with us. His name was Major North and we thought him a lovely old man.

We used be permitted to go down to the seashore under armed escort to bathe and in fact we were doing this until quite late in the year. In October, by arrangement with the people outside, five selected men succeeded in escaping while going down to bathe. They slipped away through the open door of a stable as the party passed through a farmyard, being shielded by tall men in front and rere. They got to a dug-out prepared for them and after dark got away to the mainland by boat.

The party proceeded on its way, enjoyed the dip and returned, no one being missed. Even that night when the British came into the huts every couple of hours to carry out the usual count, every bed was occupied apparently. Some of the sleepers were dummies.

Next morning, however, at the count out in the compound

there were five prisoners short. There was great fuss and confusion. Men sick in bed made matters worse and worse again when some of us stepped from front rank to rere rank outside and vice versa. At last the Camp Commandant at that time, a Belfastman named Captain Martin, who had no love for us, drew his revolver and ordered us into the huts so that a detailed and careful count could be made. Not one of us moved. He ordered us again and again and then brought in a large party of troops and ordered them to fix bayonets. This they did, though, as was customary, Corporals with the troops did not fix. The whole party was ordered to advance on us but even this did not move us. Then the N.C.Os. were told to fix bayonets and one of them refused. He refused several times and was marched off under arrest. Peculiarly enough, he was a Corporal who had never shown any kind of interest in us at all. What happened to him afterwards we never found out.

Captain Martin made the bayonet party close in on us altogether and then told them to work their bayonets. Every man withheld his weapon except two, one of whom we had thought was a great friend of ours. These two inflicted flesh wounds on two prisoners, one being stabbed in the chest and the other in one foot. After this demonstration in force we realised that things would get real serious when the two men were bayoneted and we moved into one hut altogether. The count that was carried out then only disclosed still that there were five prisoners missing and no satisfaction was got out of it by the British. Captain Martin was removed from his appointment after that.

I will now go back to before the Truce and refer to the bad luck the Ballinspittal Company had in the matter of arrests. Between November, 1920, and July, 1921, about 18 members of the Company were taken prisoners by the British, some being taken when engaged on Volunteer duties and others, like myself and David Manning, when our houses were raided during rare visits home. We suspected no one but thought British intelligence particularly good or that information had been given by some members of the general public.

It was only when I was a prisoner in the Barracks in Cork that another prisoner who had come from Kinsale Military Barracks told me of the odd behaviour of a prisoner there, who was only a prisoner for a short time. This was John Madden, a Section Commander in our own Company. He used be taken out by a R.I.C. man named Guiry to the Barrack Canteen each night and used return quite drunk to the guardroom where the prisoners were.

I instantly thought of the lift I got home in a trap from near Timoleague the day I came back from the Column and that that night, the only one I had spent at home for months, was followed by the raid on the house early next morning and my arrest by British military from Kinsale. Madden had been a passenger in the trap I got the lift in and, as already described, had questioned me on my future movements. This was a perfectly natural thing for every Volunteer to do, just what one would expect, but in the light of the information I got from the prisoner from Kinsale I was very suspicious.

Madden, when he used return drunk from the Canteen, used pump my informant trying to get information out of him and this was suspicious too. I wondered if David Manning and myself, both arrested the same morning, were not kept in Kinsale Barracks but were sent to Charles' Fort, where no prisoners had been before, so that we would not come in contact with Madden any time he would be in there as a 'prisoner'.

The raid on Manning's house, his arrest and careful search of his land had been carried out the day after an arrangement had been made to dump our stock of arms in one of his fences. Madden had been present when this arrangement was made but it was suddenly altered after Madden and some others had left. Madden was not to know that and this, too, in the light of his behaviour as a mock prisoner, was even more suspicious.

Madden sold his farm and disappeared from the area during the Truce. Still, if he was responsible for giving away the game on a number of us, nevertheless, I was always thankful that no lives were lost among us as a result of his treachery. I congratulated myself too soon on this, for years afterwards a man informed me of overhearing a conversation between two ex-R.I.C. men in a public-house in Kinsale when one was telling the other of a letter handed in to himself when on duty in the police barracks there during pre-Truce times. The letter was given in by the wife of the R.I.C. man named Guiry (he who used take Madden to the soldiers' canteen in the Military Barracks). The letter was

from Madden and it was to inform the British authorities of the presence of the Battalion Column in billets around Criosnaleanb, a crossroads between Ballinadee and Ballinspittal.

The conversation in the pub continued with the information that that very night a large party of military from Kinsale closed in on the Section of the Column that was at Criosnaleanb. It was a surprise and in the fight that followed, four Volunteers lost their lives.

The ex-R.I.C. man told his friend definitely that Madden was the informer. His very action in clearing away from his native locality without any normal reason or apparent necessity for doing so was a sure sign of his guilt in the light of the old policeman's evidence. Probably he was paid for all he did. Unfortunately he was never brought to book by us to receive the payment that was his due.

Signed: Denis Collins
(Denis Collins)

Witnessed: _____ LT.-COLONEL
(C. Saurin)

Date: 7th April 1953