

**DUPLICATE**

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COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. **W.S. 832**

Witness

**William Desmond,  
Coolenagh,  
Newcestown,  
Co. Cork.**

Identity.

**Member of Newcestown (Co. Cork) Company  
Irish Volunteers, 1915 - ;**

**Lieut. and later Captain of same Company,  
1st Battalion, Cork III Brigade.**

Subject.

**Irish Volunteer activities,  
West-Cork, 1915-1921.**

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

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File No. **S.2125**

Form B.S.M. 2

**DUPLICATE**

WILLIAM DESMOND,  
COOLENAGH, NEWCESTOWN,  
CO. CORK.

O.C. 'H' (NEWCESTOWN) COMPANY, 1ST (HANDON) BATTALION,  
CORK III BRIGADE,  
AND MEMBER, WEST CORK FLYING COLUMN.

I joined the Irish Volunteers in November, 1915, being then about 19 years of age. Even if I had wanted to, I could hardly have joined the National Volunteers before that, they being under the control of the Redmondite Party. Such action on my part would have been frowned on by my father, who was an ardent O'Brienite.

My only other brother was away and, consequently, help on the farm devolved on myself and partly on my one sister. Still I managed to find time in the early period of my membership of the Volunteers to attend parades for drill and training.

It was Terence McSwinsky who came to Newcestown to start the Volunteers there. He was accompanied by Donal O'Callaghan from Cork. Roughly about 20 men joined first. I was one of them and we organised a Section. John Jordan and Dan Canty, Newcestown men both, joined the Section at the same time and were in later years to be members, along with me, of the West Cork Flying Column.

John Jordan and myself lived on farms which were held under the old landlord system and we felt that the Volunteer

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organisation might lead to something that would free people such as ourselves and our families from this grinding rack rent regime. If the freedom of the country could be attained, that would serve to clear landlords such as ours, all loyal pro-Britishers, out of the country eventually.

Our training in the first few months consisted chiefly of foot drill and section drill, with route marches as well. Donal O'Callaghan used come out every Sunday from Cork and take us in hand and bring us on route marches generally in the Beal-na-Blath, Crookstown and Kilmurray direction. We had no arms and no means of obtaining them at that particular period. The Kilmurray, Crookstown, Lissarda and other Sections from the district used generally congregate at Crookstown and on one occasion Terence McSwiney addressed us all there on a parade and emphasised the necessity for organising for the fight to come.

We travelled by train to the City of Cork for a big Volunteer parade there on St. Patrick's Day, 1916. Our Section still numbered roughly 20 and we had no uniforms or articles of equipment, not to mention arms. But we did notice that the City Volunteers and a good many from the country, too, were not alone in uniform but, more important still, were armed. This was an inspiration to us but even more of an inspiration was the fact that Donal O'Callaghan used cycle the 23 miles from Cork to Newcestown and back every Sunday to take charge of our parades. He used always wear uniform on those occasions too. Any time Terence McSwiney came he used cycle the distance also.

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The first we knew of the insurrection in Easter Week was when we heard of the fighting in Dublin. Just at the same time we heard of Volunteers from the Bandon locality marching through Kilmurray on to Macroom but they returned without effecting anything. We heard later they had gone to meet the arms being brought from the 'Aud' which were to be landed on the Kerry coast. On hearing of the Dublin fighting we stood to, awaiting any orders that might come through, but nothing happened.

Though the R.I.C. had been used to watching our parades from the time we organised first, no member of our Section at Newcestown was arrested after Easter Week, though in the town of Bandon a number of Volunteers were taken up and interned.

A quiet period followed for us and in the beginning of 1917 we re-organised our Section and took part in another parade in Cork City on St. Patrick's Day. This time, of course, no one carried arms, but still the fact that the parade was held and that there seemed to be thousands of Volunteers there was an indication of how things were moving.

Our weekly parades with drills and skirmishing continued, all under the watchful eyes of the R.I.C., who, however, never interfered with us. It was William Crowley from Bandon who now used to take charge of us and carry out the training. Then came November 1917 and our Company was formed.

Our strength was approximately 70 and we considered it

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justified the forming of a Company. William Crowley, who belonged to Tinker's Cross Company (later Laragh Company) and was a Lieutenant in it, may have been present the night we formed the Newcestown Company and elected our Officers. John Allen was our unanimous choice as Company Captain. Though only about 25 years of age he had been in the R.I.C., and was a trained man. Dan Canty was elected 1st Lieutenant and Seán Lordan 2nd Lieutenant. We had also a Company Adjutant, Patrick O'Mahony, and a Company Quartermaster, James Kelly. It was not until 1918 we divided the Company into four Sections. I was made a Section Commander then.

Our normal training continued as before and then with the threat of conscription in April, 1918, came a sufficient reason to go a step farther and we collected what arms we could, all shot-guns and their ammunition, from the people who were friendly disposed. The girls made haversacks for us, for holding rations, in case we had to take the field. Each man was supposed to have, was ordered, in fact, to provide himself with a blanket and proper covering in the shape of a heavy coat as a preparation for active service. In the Company we had about 10 shot-guns and two short Webley revolvers, with about 15 rounds for the revolvers and about 10 cartridges for each shot-gun.

We helped to organise the protest against conscription and got the people to sign the roll at the chapel gate on the Sunday when this was being done all over the country.

When the so called German Plot in the Summer of 1918 came about and arrests were being carried out everywhere, the members of my Section, along with Seán Lordan, our

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2nd Lieutenant, living in the Section area, slept out at night. The blankets came in useful here. We carried what arms we had with us. The other three Sections of the Company did the same in their own area. We knew where the other Sections would be each night, so as to get in touch with them in case of emergency. However, no arrests were attempted among the members of our Company.

We carried on our training as usual and got a few more shot-guns. In September of this year we had a dance at Murragh for the purpose of raising funds for the Company. We made, roughly, about £50. This was to be expended on arms and equipment.

Then came the General Election in December, 1918. There was no election in our constituency, Mid-Cork, as the Sinn Fein candidates were returned unopposed. Twelve of our Company, including myself, John Jordan and Dan Canty, the two Lieutenants, and Patrick O'Mahony, the Company Adjutant, were sent to assist in the Waterford election. Sinn Fein Headquarters was in No. 56, Grand Parade, Cork, and we had to report there. There was only transport for nine of us and we travelled by night in ponies and traps. To our surprise, when we arrived on the Grand Parade in the morning there were three of our Company there before us. They had walked the whole distance from Newcastle!

We went, under command of Seán O'Sullivan, with a number of Cork Volunteers, by train to Waterford. On arrival we doubled to a hotel, to get quickly through a hostile part of the city. After a meal we marched in

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formation to the Sinn Fein election Headquarters at Durand's Garage.

We were some four days in Waterford and were always on hand to keep the peace when called upon. We had a few encounters with the Ballybricken and Ballytruckle pig buyers, staunch supporters of the Redmondite Party. It was quite a strain waiting all day ready to turn out at a moment's notice. At the same time it was perfect training. It was real camp life. We had our Quartermaster and Mess Sergeants and parties were detailed to look after billets and messing and be on guard. We carried no firearms, of course, only wooden clubs. It was all an experience, anyway, and the discipline imposed on 600 of us all gathered there together was all to the good.

On our return from the Waterford election, we formed a Sinn Fein Club in Newcestown. I was elected President and we organised the Club for any future political work. All the members were Volunteers and they paid 1/- entrance fee and got membership cards and a weekly subscription of 2d was paid. We had a new Quartermaster in the Company now, Patrick O'Riordan, and he was Treasurer of the Sinn Fein Club and a very good one, too.

We still had some of the arms fund raised at the dance at Murragh but in March, 1919, we held another dance there. We had about £30 out of this.

We were now 'H' Company of the 1st (Bandon) Battalion of Cork III Brigade. This was early in January, 1919. Hugh Thornton came as a training instructor from G.H.Q. and

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his influence and work carried us further. He was great, alright. From the time of his coming we carried out raids for arms on hostile houses where we knew arms were kept. This continued all through 1919 and into 1920 and resulted in the Company getting 30 shot-guns (in addition to the 10 we had already) and an amount of ammunition for them. We only got one revolver, however, a long Webley.

Hugh Thornton didn't stay with us all the time, of course. He travelled around to the other Units of the Brigade once it was formed. He came to us once a week during the most of the year 1919.

John Hales was Battalion O.C. and Jim Mahony was the Adjutant. They used to pay periodical visits to our Company when we paraded. These parades for drill and general training continued throughout 1919. We could have no range practices as it was only shot-guns we had. We got two dozen bayonets to fit on the shot-guns. Our numbers increased and by the end of the year our strength was up to 120.

Liam Deasy, the Brigade Adjutant, used also pay periodical visits to us during 1919. He would inspect us on parade and address us on the necessity for discipline and keeping up the strength and attending all parades.

During three months of the Winter 1919-1920 we organised an Irish class in the school at Newcestown and had the National teacher, a Mr. Murphy, to take charge of these classes which were always held at night. We paid him £20 out of our Company fund for his work. There were about



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40 in the class, including girls. While it wasn't exactly military duty, still it was work of national importance.

A quantity of guncotton had been seized by the Bantry Volunteers and, on instructions from Liam Deasy, Jim Lordan and myself went with a horse and butt to the Coppeen Company area and collected about 15 cwt. of the guncotton. We brought it to our own area, dumped it for the night and loaded about 10 cwt. of it the following day and brought it on to the Crosspound Company area. We kept our 5 cwt. in dumps for future use. This job was carried out by us in January, 1920.

In the same month the Company carried out a series of raids for arms on the houses of the hostile element in the area between Newcestown and Enniskean. The Company was divided in two for the purpose, each being given a certain number of houses. John Lordan was in charge of the half-Company I was with. We raided three of the four houses we were allotted and were successful in each, getting shot-guns and ammunition. We came to the fourth, Woods of Castlelands. Woods was an ex-D.M.P. man.

One Section tackled the front of the house, while the other, my Section, went round the side. I knocked on the door into the living room after getting in at the back of the house and it was opened by a girl. When she saw the revolver in my hand she banged out the door in my face. The next moment a shot went off behind me from a shot-gun, perhaps accidentally discharged, but, anyway, the charge passed over my head and through the door, hitting the girl

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inside in the arm. She cried out and Woods came out through another room door near us and commenced blazing at us with a revolver.

On account of the shooting of the girl, we thought it better to retire and got away after replying to the ex-policeman's fire. We only fired a few shots as John Lordan had come round from the front of the house when he heard the shooting and ordered us to retire.

We occupied some of our time in making buckshot and filling shot-gun cartridges, also making grenades by filling billycans with guncotton and iron scrap. Each Section of the Company was employed in doing this munition manufacture.

Tom Hales, O.C. Cork III Brigade, and Tadhg O'Sullivan, Brigade Quartermaster, often visited us at this time. They used come at least once a week. The O.C. Brigade was concerned with the organisation and training and the Quartermaster with armament.

Our raids for arms and our manufacture of ammunition and grenades were a preparation for an intended attack on Farnivanes R.I.C. Barracks. This was in an isolated part of the parish, about 5 miles from Newcestown, and was garrisoned by a Sergeant and four Constables. On the same night Kilbriain R.I.C. Barracks was attacked. John Hales, O.C. Battalion, was in charge of that operation, while Tom Hales was in charge of the Farnivanes attack.

The Newcestown Company was mobilised to the extent of about 80 men, being armed with shot-guns - about half the

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number only - while the others had revolvers and grenades and in some cases just bayonets. We did bring a mine we had made, with a charge of gun cotton in it and a long fuse. Whatever went wrong with the plans, however, our Company wasn't in the attack at all and returned home feeling very much disgusted.

The following day I was ploughing in the field. It was about 12 o'clock and the next minute I found myself surrounded by police and soldiers. The local Sergeant and a Constable were there and they questioned me very closely as to where I was the previous night. I told them I was at home all night and they asked me was I not in the attack on Farnivanes. Now, after the failure to bring our Company in on the proposed operation, I didn't even know the attack had been carried out and so I was able to reply very truthfully that I knew nothing about it. They questioned my father, too, about my movements and he said I was at home and in bed all night. Apparently satisfied, they went away and left me.

The same party visited a few more of the Newcestown Company that day but arrested nobody. After this and on the advice of my Company Officers I went on the run right away and stayed at home no night after that.

About a week after a number of enemy raids were carried out over a wide area and the following of the Newcestown Company were arrested: John Allen, O.C., Dan Canty, 1st Lieutenant, John Lordan, 2nd Lieutenant, James Lordan, his

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brother, and Denis O'Brien. They were all interned in Wormwood Scrubbs where they went on hunger-strike and were all released some months after - in May, 1920. As a matter of interest, there was no raid on my house. I wasn't at home, anyway.

Consequent on the arrests, we had to have a change of Officers. Richard Hurley, a local man and a deserter from the British Army, had joined the Company, so, as a trained man, he was made O.C. I was promoted 1st Lieutenant and Daniel O'Mahony 2nd Lieutenant.

We now carried out a number of daylight raids on hostile houses in the vicinity of Castletown Kenneigh. We were masked and armed and we got some shot-guns and equipment such as a bandolier and a few haversacks, also a gas mask. This was in April, 1920.

We looked after the farms of those members of the Company who had been arrested and were in Wormwood Scrubbs. The Volunteers of the Company were organised and brought horses and farm implements and we ploughed and harrowed the ground and put down the seed. We set apart one particular day to do this and did three farms in that day. While the work was on we had scouts out to guard against surprise by the enemy who might appear to upset the whole job out of spite. In addition, of course, some of us were on the run and we had to avoid being caught.

In May there was a Bandon District Council election and John Allen and John Lordan were returned unopposed. They were still in jail at this time. All the preliminary

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work, such as filling in the nomination papers properly and handing them in, was my responsibility.

In May also we planned an ambush on a British Military cycle patrol consisting generally of about 20 which used travel from Bandon out along the main road towards Enniskean. They used vary their distance and didn't appear every day. However, Tom Hales took charge of the job and had the ambush party in position at Killowen, about four miles from Bandon. There were 14 of us altogether, armed with shot-guns and our tin can bombs. We waited from morning but the enemy patrol never turned up so we retired after dark. We were disappointed but, anyway, it was training for us.

Three of the Company, one with a rifle and the other two with revolvers, opened fire on an R.I.C. man walking to Mass one Sunday. He was not hit and managed to escape by running on towards the chapel.

While the prisoners in Wormwood Scrubbs were on hunger-strike, we made a collection and gathered about £20 to purchase comforts for the members of our Company there. Nurse Lordan, a sister of the brothers Lordan in jail, brought over the money to make the necessary purchases in London and to look after their needs generally as they had just been released and were recuperating in sympathisers' houses.

About the end of May or beginning of June, after Farnivanes R.I.C. Barracks had been evacuated, about 20 of our Company were mobilised and we destroyed the building, burning it to the ground. This job was carried out in the

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middle of the day without interruption.

We attempted two ambushes, principally for the purpose of securing arms, one in Newcestown village and the other at FarranThomas a week after. Both were to be carried out against military cycle patrols which used occasionally come through these two points from Bandon. On neither occasion which we had planned for did they turn up.

Our Company Officers and the other two were home now after release from Wormwood Scrubbs and they took up their appointments once more, while I went back to my Section.

Liam Deasy sent orders for about six of our Company to join forces with Volunteers from Castletown Kenneigh, Coppeen, Ballineen and Enniskean to attempt to disarm a military cycle patrol, numbering about 50, which used operate between Dunmanway and Ballineen. We took up position between these two places at Carrigmore, about two miles from the village of Ballineen, under Dan Harte, who was V/O.C. Brigade. We were there on two occasions but each time no enemy appeared.

Brigade and Battalion Officers were often with us during the Summer months to see the progress of our training, but Denis Lordan, Brigade Training Officer, was with us the most and supervised intensive training in field drill, such as extended order formation, firing while advancing, taking advantage of cover while advancing under fire, and so on. He used give lectures to us when the actual training in movement was over, impressing on us the necessity for discipline, obedience to orders at all times, punctuality

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coming to parades, etc., etc.,

We had surprise mobilisations, too, and it was quite a job when I got a sudden order to get the twenty or more men of my Section notified to appear at a particular place, especially when I might have to have it all done within an hour, getting to the scattered houses of the men and having them at the mobilisation point on time. Sometimes they had to appear with their arms and that meant going to the dump for them. Sometimes, too, the mobilisation took place in the middle of the night.

During a County Council election in June we were asked to assist in the area around West Cork from Drinagh to Mauinatrahane, Skibbereen, Castletownshend and Ballygurteen. Seven Volunteers and one Cusann na m-Ban gurl, Nurse Lordan, carried out this job. It had to be in an area where we personally were not known, as we were personating real voters. Nurse Lordan voted as a number of women voters while we acted instead of the rightful male possessors of votes. We got our instructions from the local Volunteers outside the polling booths and nobody challenged us inside and we completed our thoroughly dishonest tour successfully, the Sinn Féin candidate, Seán Collins, better known as "Shafter", being returned, while his opponent, Timothy Sheehy, got very poor support.

At this time - Summer, 1920 - Special Services were organised throughout the Brigade. Each Company had to select three men to attend training centres in their Battalion

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areas to receive instruction in the particular branch they were to specialise in. There were classes for Engineering, Signalling, Intelligence, Police Duties, First Aid, Transport and Supply, and Scouting. The Camps were held in different places and had to be well guarded. John O'Callaghan (of Newcestown Company) was in charge of the Engineering classes, Dick Russell was Signalling, Liam Deasy and Flor Begley were on Intelligence, James Lordan of Scrahan was Police Duties, Jerome Mahony, a chemist, was First Aid, Pat Finn and Patrick Kelly were our Company Transport and Supply men ( I can't remember the name of the Battalion Staff Officer who instructed them in their particular duties). Denis Lordan went round the different Battalion training centres instructing in Scouting. Company Despatch Carriers to the number of five were appointed under Paddy Walsh.

Some Camps were for three or four days, others, maybe, for several weeks, depending on the subject for instruction. This meant putting each Company in the Battalion and each Battalion in the Brigade on an active service footing or ready for it.

An extra Section, No. 5, was organised out towards the main Bandon-Enniskean road at the extreme limit of the Company area. There were roughly 20 men in it, the same as in the other four Sections. Names of Section Commanders were:

- |        |                         |
|--------|-------------------------|
| No. 1. | William Desmond.        |
| No. 2. | Tom Lynch.              |
| No. 3. | Jerh. O'Brien.          |
| No. 4. | John Lyons.             |
| No. 5. | James Lordan (Scurahan) |



In July a prison was instituted in our Company area. It was a vacant labourer's cottage in the townland of Greenhill and came to be known as the Black Bog. Here we incarcerated offenders against the common law, such as petty thieves, robbers and men suspected of giving information to the enemy forces, that is, informers and suspected spies as well. Our Company took full responsibility for the Black Bog and we had a continuous guard over it, day and night, for the period of two months during its use as a prison.

The ordinary offenders, after trial or on confessing their crimes, were sentenced to a period of compulsory labour at some farm. Two suspected spies, both from Timoleague district, were, after examination of their cases, released on conditions that they give up their associates among the enemy and their suspected activities, else their punishment would be the extreme penalty. An informer was, after being found guilty, transferred to another area for execution.

Tom Hales, Pat Harte and Charlie Foley, a member of our Company, were arrested at Laragh. Foley was released on the spot but the other two were brought into Bandon, the stronghold of the Essex Regiment, or rather of that portion of it under the command of Major Percival. Liam Deasy and Tadhg O'Sullivan came along with the news of their arrest and mobilised us to go to Laragh with a view to effecting a rescue. We did get to Laragh, some seven of our Company, all armed, of course, but found out from Frank Hurley, the O.C. Laragh Company, that our Brigadier and Vice Brigadier were by this time in the Military Barracks in Bandon.

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In passing, I might mention that on that occasion I drank poteen for the first time.

After the above arrests, new Officers had to be appointed in the Brigade, and Charlie Hurley was selected as Brigadier. It may have been at this time that Ted Sullivan was appointed Vice/Brigadier. John Lordan was moved from our Company to be V/O.C. 1st Battalion in place of Charlie Hurley, and Dan Canty was made our Company O.C. instead of John Allen who resigned from the Volunteers at that time, I being appointed 1st Lieutenant instead of Canty, and Daniel Walsh (a native of Waterford) was appointed 2nd Lieutenant in place of John Lordan. John O'Callaghan was put in charge of No. 1 Section in my place. All these appointments were made by Brigade in August, 1920.

Now I was, after recommendations, sworn by Liam Deasy as a member of the I.R.B., and became a member of the Brigade Circle. Liam Deasy was its Centre. Weekly meetings of the Circle were held at different places and I attended these until my arrest the following year.

In September our Company got orders to prepare a billet in the area sufficient to accommodate 15 men of the Brigade Active Service Unit, just then formed. The billet was at Corcoran's of Bengour and was in a barn loft. Beds and food were provided for the 15 men and they stayed one night and the following day and then moved on to Manch for an attack on British Military there. Liam Deasy was in charge and John Hales, our Battalion O.C., and Tadg O'Sullivan, Brigade Q.M., and Jim Mahony, Battalion Adjutant, were among the party.

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On their way back to their respective Unit areas they again stopped a day and a night in the billet at Bengower.

The Brinny ambush had taken place on the 15th of August, where two members of our Company participated and where young Fitzgerald was killed.

The Brigade Arms Fund was instituted some time in August and, as a result of orders received, a meeting of our Company Officers made out a list of all the farmers in the Company area with a percentage sum according to their known means to be collected from them. These sums varied for the individuals from £1 to £10. The levy was carried out with good results as far as our sympathisers were concerned. The hostile farmers who refused to pay had stock seized to the value of the levy imposed on them. Beasts seized in this way were driven off to fairs far away and sold there and the proceeds put in the Arms Fund. Animals seized in other Company areas were brought to fairs near to us to be disposed of for the same purpose.

Where seizures and consequent sales were made, we were scrupulous enough, if the money received was greater than the actual amount of the levy on the owner, to have the difference in the cash handed to him, only the bare levy being retained by us.

It is interesting that some unfriendly farmers, when they saw we were quite serious about making seizures of some of their stock, paid over forthwith what we had demanded of them and what they had at first refused without then putting

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us to the necessity of making the seizures.

As a result of the levy in the Newcestown Company area we realised about £250, all of which was turned over to the Brigade Quartermaster.

In September a special parade of the full Company was called and each man was sworn in by the Brigade O.C., The oath taken then was, of course, to bear allegiance to the Irish Republic. By this time the Volunteers generally were known as the I.R.A.

At this time what might be called law and order was getting little or no attention from the R.I.C. so in each Company area police duties were taken over by the I.R.A., Not that there was much in the way of crime, but licensing laws, maintenance of order at fairs and other public functions, detection and bringing to account of petty thieves became the business of the Volunteers. People hostile to the national movement, too, so far as the ordinary law was concerned, got a fair deal. In some cases, where unscrupulous employees of theirs thought they could take advantage of the fact that these people did not favour Irish Nationalism they made demands out of all reason for their own ends. They did not reckon that the I.R.A. would come down on them for this sort of conduct, but they found out their mistake when their employers were treated as victims and given the same security as if they had been ardent supporters of the national cause; in other words, the I.R.A. looked on all being equal citizens when it came to a question of justice being administered.

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Despite the equity displayed towards all shades of political opinion, it was not appreciated by everyone. John Lordan's and my landlord was one, for instance. He was one Thomas W. Wright of Clonakilty and a member of the old landowner class. Our respective fathers were paying a rack rent and John Lordan and myself decided to call upon Wright to ask him to reduce our rent to a level with some of the tenants who were our neighbours and whose rents had been reduced under previous Acts. We went and put our case before him, but not by any means humbling ourselves as in the presence of the great. He refused pointblank. We persisted and he threatened to send for the police but we stood our ground and eventually he got in his clerk and there and then gave us each a receipt for a half year's rent, without receiving a penny from us. When the next gale day came - in April, 1921 - things were too hot generally for Mr. Wright to take any proceedings when no rent came his way and we heard no more from him. However, all the years before that he and his family had got more than their due from my father and his father before him and from all the mere Irish who were his tenants.

In the Autumn of 1920 a branch of the Cumann na mBan was formed in the Company area. About 25 girls were in it; Maggie Lordan, a sister of Nurse Lordan and of John and Jim, was in charge and the second in command was Hannah Corcoran, later to be my wife. She herself had five brothers in the Company. Another girl of the same name had five brothers in the Company too. In fact, most of the girls had brothers in the Volunteers. All the girls did excellent work for us.

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They were trained in first aid, they carried despatches, they prepared billets, they had changes of clothes for lads on the run and they even acted as scouts when the Column would be in our area.

On the 10th October, 1920, a training camp for Officers and men of the 1st Battalion North of the Bandon River was ready at Lordans of Coolenagh. Owing to the Newcestown ambush, the camp was transferred to Crosspound, in Ford's house there.

On the night of the 10th October I was down at one of the Corcoran's houses preparing to send out scouts and armed guards as protection during the period of the camp. This camp was to last for one week, and the first scouts and sentries were being mounted beforehand. I was in the middle of my preparations when Seán Hales, O.C. Battalion, rushed in and said 'The military are in Newcestown. Come on and we'll attack them'.

All of us who were there, about ten in all and about ten in the other Corcoran's house who had been called upon also, went off at the double in the direction of Newcestown, a good mile away. Some of us, including myself, had shot-guns, more had rifles.

We had got near Newcestown when the lights of two lorries shone down by the school gate just to the West of the village. We jumped in across the ditch on the right hand side of the road and opened fire almost immediately. The lorries were just at our position then.

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The affair was too hurried to take up proper positions and in the dark it was hard to know where the next man was. The British replied to our fire, though Seán Hales had called on them to surrender. On his orders we fell back to the next boundary ditch, while keeping up our fire. The lorries now halted but their occupants continued to fire. They were now about 150 yards from us. Both lorries seemed to be packed with men, but our party had concentrated on the first one, while the other lorry did not suffer much in the firing, keeping further away while the soldiers in it were firing in our direction. The men in both lorries jumped out and took up positions along the road behind the ditch and kept up their fire on us. We eventually withdrew on Seán Hales' orders, because some of the troops had entered the field and as well as we could judge in the dark were making to surround us.

Most of us returned to Corcoran's as there was an amount of equipment there, a mine and bombs and a lot of foodstuffs for the camp. Some of the lads' personal property, such as coats, was there too and we didn't want anything to fall into enemy hands.

However, the lorries went on past Coolenagh and apparently back by Killoven on to the main road and back to Bandon. We heard afterwards they had one killed and a number wounded.

The following day I was sent by Tadg O'Sullivan with a despatch to the Officers of the Crosspound Company, to whose area the camp had been changed. I returned and mobilised the Company and went to O'Mahony's of Greenhill

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where the members of the Brigade Column were already mobilised. Here I saw Tom Barry for the first time. He was in charge of the Column. He seemed to be a very nice sprightly young lad and fell in the men very sharply, carrying out all his orders in a very efficient way. He wore a revolver in a holster on a Sam Brown belt outside his overcoat - I don't think trench coats had become Column wear for a couple of months after that.

Our Company moved with the Column to Sweeneys of Coolenagh. It was Barry's intention to lie in wait there in case the British came out to carry out reprisals after the ambush at Newcestown the night before. They didn't come. The Column billeted in Sweeney's loft from about midnight that night and before daylight next morning we procured horses and traps as transport to move them on to Crosspound. The Company, along with some members of the Column, mounted guard in the vicinity of Sweeneys during the night. We did not withdraw our scouts until after the Column had moved off for Crosspound.

This was Sunday and after Mass at Newcestown a public appeal to subscribe to the Dáil loan was made at the chapel gates by J.J. Madden. He was an organiser for the Loan. He had been in the publichouse in Newcestown when the military raided it the night of the ambush, but managed to escape out the back with Seán Hales.

The Volunteers collected subscriptions for the Loan and issued receipts for the amounts given in the Company area and handed the proceeds over to J.J. Madden.



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Dan Canty, John Lordan and myself, as Company Officers, attended the training camp at Crosspound. We reported there on a Monday morning. The camp was run in a very efficient way, strict discipline was maintained, and everything went as in a military barracks. Fords was a big house and we had billets and a mess there for about 35, the total number there. Scouts and sentries were mounted night and day and patrols moved around about a mile radius from the camp, on the watch for any enemy movement in our direction. Lectures were given at night on discipline, tactics, the use of the rifle, etc., while in the daytime we were practised in close order drill, each of us in turn taking charge of a Section to give us practice in the word of command and in handling men. Then towards the end of the week we had tactics, that is, open order drill, advancing while taking advantage of cover, firing while advancing, and bayonet charges. Of course, we didn't use ammunition but had aiming practice with rifles, sighting, trigger-pressing and so on. Tom Barry was in complete charge of the camp and did all the instruction. Charlie Hurley and Liam Deasy were there and Tadg Sullivan also. He took charge of the kitchen.

On Saturday morning we were moved to ambush positions at Toureen on the main Cork-Bandon road and waited all day there until dark. No enemy came so we moved back to Raheen and were demobilised there and returned to our Unit the following day after attending Mass together, Canty, Lordan and myself, at Cloughduv. We brought our rifles with us into the chapel, much to the astonishment of the congregation. Back with the Company, we imparted the instruction we had

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received at the training camp to our own men at all parades.

About the 23rd October a party of British military, dressed in a nondescript kind of way, none in full uniform, marched out from Bandon and carried out reprisals for the ambush. They burned the publichouse in Newcestown which they had raided that night, and the publican's private dwelling house also. They attempted to burn Lordan's house at Coolenagh and burnt the hay and straw belonging to Corcorans. It looked as if they had had some information about us being at both houses the night of the ambush.

Four of us who weren't staying at home were called from our billets by Nurse Lordan but when we arrived at her house the British had gone and the fire had been extinguished before it did much damage.

Three of the Newcestown Company took part in the ambush of British military at Toureen in October.

Dan Walsh, our 2nd Lieutenant, had to return home to Waterford now and his appointment was taken over by John O'Callaghan of Laravoultig.

On October 31st the whole Company paraded at the funeral of Volunteer O'Brien of Kilbrittain to Murragh Cemetery. Our Company provided scouts around the cemetery so that the firing party, drawn from the Kilbrittain Company, would not be surprised that day.

John Lordan and Dinny O'Brien from our Company took part in the Kilmichael ambush on 28th November.

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About 30 of us drawn from all over the 1st Battalion area, under Charlie Hurley and Liam Deasy (including nine from the Newcestown Company), waited all day on 29th November at Clashinamud, about midway between Killeady and Kilpatrick, but no enemy came our way. We were there again on the 2nd December and coming on to dark two lorries of police and military approached our position at a very fast pace. We opened fire on them and they replied but didn't stop, so we didn't know if we inflicted any casualties on them. We had no one hit.

After the ambush at Gaggin on 8th December, the Brigade Column, under Charlie Hurley, moved to Callaghans of Laravoultig that night. This was in our Company area and we provided scouts and armed sentries until the Column moved on the following evening to Greenhill, where we again provided scouts and sentries. The day after the Column went on to the Coppeen Company area.

On the 14th December Charlie Hurley took a party of us to Ballineen Station for the purpose of raiding the mails on the evening train out from Cork. We went prepared to attack any military on board - they used the train quite a lot - but there were none. Charlie Hurley and two men boarded the train and took out the mailbags, which were brought away to Laravoultig for examination. After Brigade H.Q. dealt with them we returned them complete to Enniskean Post Office the following morning. We often held up postmen and scrutinised the contents of their bags for any suspicious letters. Personally, I never came across any.

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Before Christmas the Column moved into the Company area again and we got all their arms and put them in dumps to take charge of them while the members of the Column were demobbed for the Christmas period. We had two small dumps constructed from old creamery churns imbedded in the sides of ditches. It was mostly shot-guns we kept in there. I made a specially large dump out of a big galvanised water tank dug into the slope of a rising field and effectively covered. It was capable of holding fifty rifles and bandoliers of ammunition. None of the dumps in our Company area, neither these three or others made for the holding of our own Company arms, were ever discovered.

On the remobilisation of the Brigade Column at Quarry's Cross on the 20th January, 1921, I proceeded there with other members of the Company. Six of us joined the Column, we all had rifles with 50 rounds of ammunition per man, most of us had revolvers and each of us carried a bomb. On the following day, about 3 o'clock in the evening, the military were raiding the district and word came to us to mobilise at a pre-arranged place. We took up positions but the military didn't come quite as far as where we were.

In their raids that day the British took our Company Adjutant and a Volunteer belonging to the Company.

That night the Column, including we six, billeted in five or six houses in my Company area, in the townland of FarranThomas. During the night the Newcestown Company was mobilised in another part of the Company area equipped with saws and crosscuts and axes for the purpose of cutting trees

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and blocking roads preparatory to a Column operation.

The Column moved into ambush positions the following morning at Mawbeg on the main road between Bandon and Enniskean. Tom Barry was in charge of the Column here. All the regular Column by this time wore trench coats. No military turned up at Mawbeg.

Two nights before this when Barry and John Jordan went to inspect the ambush position they found a suspicious character on the side of the road. He apparently took them for British military and made it obvious he was a friend. They took him prisoner and after interrogation discovered he was a spy. He was given a trial, found guilty and was executed the next morning. His name was O'Dwyer of Castletown Kenneigh and he was an ex-British soldier.

We again billeted in the Newcestown Company area in four or five houses between Scrahan and Mallowgatton. At daybreak we moved into ambush positions at Laragh on the road between Newcestown and Bandon.

As I already stated, the spy had been executed and was lying on the road a short distance away from us at Farnalough Cross Roads and we expected the military would come out to remove the body. Comdt. Barry had made sure that they were made aware that the man was dead on the road. They didn't come, however, until some time after we had left the position.

We went for our tea to five or six houses in the

townland of Killowen, Derrycool and Tullyglass. In the meantime Brigade Staff Officers interrogated some hostile people in the locality who took us to be British military. After interrogation two were released and the other was executed after being duly tried and found guilty. His body was left on the road with a label on his coat 'Spies and Informers Beware'. Bradfield of Carhue was the man and he was a farmer. His house was burned some time after. The two suspects released were named

For two days and two nights the whole Newcestown Company had been mobilised and standing to at various points, ready to block roads and approaches and prevent the enemy surprising the Column. Just at nightfall the Column crossed Baxter's Bridge to the West of Bandon and over the Bandon river to the South to billets at Cashel.

We remained in these billets until the following evening and then we moved in for the attack on Bandon Military Barracks, on the Auxiliaries' post in the Devonshire Arms Hotel right opposite and on the R.I.C. Barracks in South Main Street, garrisoned by both regular R.I.C. and Black and Tans.

Comdt. Barry was in charge of half the Column on the South side of the town and Comdt. Hurley was in charge of the other half on the North side. I was with the half-Column under Comdt. Hurley.

We had brought a mine with us and the intention was

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to place it against the Barracks gate, blow in the gate and then storm the Barracks. However, when we got within sight of the building we found there were searchlights playing on the square in front and sentries outside the gate, not to mention barbed wire entanglements all round the building for about 30 yards out. We sent the mine back and waited for any sound of an opening attack by the Southern half of the Column down in the town. There wasn't a sound and after a while, on the command, we opened fire at 100 yards on the Barracks. At the same time fire was opened on the Auxiliaries in the hotel by some sections which had moved across the street into houses opposite. A tremendous fire was kept up for about half an hour by both sides. The British machine guns were brought into action and swept the square that we were firing across. Eventually we got orders to retire, as noises were heard from within the Barracks as if their armoured car was about to come out.

The section I was with, under Comdt. Seán Lehane, had great difficulty getting away as we had to cross the Dunmanway road where it came on to the square and it was swept by machine gun fire from both the Barracks and the hotel. We lost one man, Reilly by name, whether on the roadway or in a field we got into, to fall back on the Convent as was the order. We had some protection behind a low bank which ran up the field. However, it suddenly stopped halfway up and then we had to cross the open field under heavy machine gun fire and in the light of the searchlights till we reached the next fence. It may have

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been in this field that Reilly was killed.

A covering fire was kept up as we retired by a number of us against the Barracks. The next fence we got to was a wall and this was high up and overlooked the Barracks so the whole section lined the wall and kept up fire to the extent of 10 rounds each man upon the enemy position.

We got orders then to retire back to the Convent field where we met some of the Sections which had operated against the Auxiliaries. They had retired up Convent Hill. The half-Column now formed up and moved away from the Convent into the country. As we moved off we adopted extended order formation along the road, every man about four paces apart and keeping to the brow of the road. We moved back to billets in the Crosspound Company area that night.

We remained in billets in this area, not very far away from each other, until the half-Column under Comdt. Barry rejoined us some days later. They had been comparatively inactive, as far as we could gather, on the night of the attack and had no casualty.

We remained between the Kilpatrick and the Crosspound Company areas for some days until, towards the end of January, there was an attempt made to capture Innishannon R.I.C. Barracks. Half the Column was to attack the Barracks proper while the half under Comdt. Charlie Hurley, and in which I was, remained at Brinny to hold the Bandon-Brinny road in case the British came out that way and to cover the retirement of Barry's half-Column up in that direction, their natural line of retreat.



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We were inside the fence and the yard of the house once occupied by the infamous Seán Deary Nash, who was alleged to have the habit of hanging the Papists from a special tree in his grounds.

We withdrew from our position when the half-Column came on from Innishannon, where nothing had happened, and we all moved off again and into billets in the Crosspound Company area.

The Column moved by night in this way: First, two men, then the Advance Guard, roughly about 20 men, 100 yards behind the leading two, then about 150 yards behind the Advance Guard came the Main Body, between 40 and 60 strong, and another 100 yards behind, the Rear Guard, about 20 men. The ammunition, generally carried by horse and trap, usually travelled either directly in front or directly behind the Main Body. Smoking on the march at night was strictly forbidden, but on a long march the Column would fall out, lying against the ditch mostly, and then have a smoke as well as a rest. Sentries would be mounted during these rest periods in advance and in the rear and on the flanks, being withdrawn when the march was resumed.

Two days later the very same operation was attempted on Innishannon Barracks. I was at Brinny again. Some shots were fired at the Barracks and were replied to, but there was not the expected result. We moved back into the country again to billets, towards the Rearour direction. We stayed around that area for a couple of days. The Column then moved back into the Newcestown Company area.

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It was now the month of February.

There was a change of Officers in our Company again. Daniel Galvin was appointed Quartermaster. He had dumps made on his farm for the keeping of arms and ammunition.

At this time an order came through Battalion Headquarters from Brigade that we were to block every road and lane in the Company area to prevent the British moving freely around and surprising the Volunteers. They had been able to move about up to now in lorries or armoured cars and could carry out lightning raids on an area, holding up every man as a suspected member of the I.R.A. We carried out the order very thoroughly, taking a week to do the job.

We also had to help weaker Companies than ourselves, affording protection while they trenched or blocked roads. We did this for Laragh, Enniskean, Castletown Kenneigh and Kilmurray (1st Brigade area).

From 1920 on we had arrangements, which we acted upon several times, for the Company when engaged on this protection duty to fall back for greater security to Joe Sullivans of Gurranreigh. This was also in the 1st Brigade area, about three miles from Kilmurray. This was a very good house and the sons were in the Volunteers. It was to here that the Column came after Crossbarry and billeted at Sullivans and other houses in the townland.

About the 10th February a party of ten of the Newcestown Company, under John Jordan, took up position in the night time along the wall previously mentioned down from

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the Convent and opened fire on the Military Barracks in Bandon. We fired about 15 rounds per man at the Barracks and they returned the fire. We came back again into our Company area.

I took in twelve men of the Company for the Upton train ambush. We came to Tom Kelleher's house at Cross-pound and after seeing Comdt. Hurley there he told us to go back as there weren't positions there for so many men. The ambush was carried out with very bad results for the Volunteers. They lost three men killed, some men, including Charlie Hurley, wounded, and at least one man captured.

As a counterblast to the British clearing road blocks, we in the Newcestown Company were kept busy, both in our own area and helping in others, continuing the blocking and trenching of roads to obstruct enemy transport movements as much as possible.

While engaged on this work one night, with the whole Company out, divided into four Sections, Captain Canty being in charge of one, I having another, a Volunteer had the third and the Quartermaster in charge of the fourth, Canty withdrew his Section before the work was complete. His armed Section, as well as the men working, all withdrew back to No. 3 Section working at FarranThomas. John Lordan, the Battalion Vice Commandant, came along to inspect the work and found Canty and his Section missing. He actually came along to me to get some of my men to finish what Canty had left undone. My particular job was a big one and I couldn't spare any men.

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I was cutting a big trench at Ballyfoliah.

I heard subsequently that Lordan reported the matter to Brigade at the Column billets at Greenhill. Anyway, as a result, Canty was reduced to the ranks and I was promoted to be O.C. Newcestown Company in his place. John Callaghan was made 1st Lieutenant and Jack Corcoran was made 2nd Lieutenant, with Dan Galvin still Quartermaster. Tim Allen had become Company Adjutant some time previously when Patrick O'Mahony was arrested.

About the first week in March, following on my promotion, I was ordered to report to Joe Sullivans at Gurraneigh where Charlie Hurley was convalescing after being wounded in the Upton train ambush about the 16th February. I reported there and was with him for about ten days as his bodyguard. He was, of course, still O.C. Brigade. He used be visited frequently by Brigade and 1st Battalion Staff Officers.

Roughly about the 10th March I brought Charlie Hurley by pony and trap into Newcestown Company area to Lordans of Coolenagh. That was the last I saw of Charlie Hurley when I left him at Lordans until I took him out of a back-to-back trap dead at Harold's gate at Crossbarry on the 19th March, 1921.

The Saturday night previous to Crossbarry we took the rifles, ammunition and whatever equipment we had in the big dump I had constructed and in the dump on Dan Galvin's land and brought them, the whole Company marching in extended order, with scouts, advance and rear guards, to Balteenbrack

near Dunmanway where the Column was mobilised. Here we handed over all the armament to the Column, just retaining a few rifles for our own protection on the return journey. We moved back into the Company area again and on the following Monday night nine of us rejoined the Column at Balteenbrack.

Some time previous to this, Kilmurray Company in the 1st Brigade area asked us to help them with the interrogation of a spy they had caught. This was done and the spy, after trial, was executed. The usual label was put on his chest and he was left in the avenue leading to his house. He was a farmer named Cotter and lived at Curraclough.

Tom Barry was in charge of the Column which was now at Hurleys of Drommfeigh. He ordered me to take eight men and go to the villages of Ballineen and Enniskean and arrest those shopkeepers and publicans who had been appointed by the British as civil guards, responsible for reporting I.R.A. movements and also for getting together gangs of men to fill in trenches and clear roads in the district around their villages. We secured four of these unwilling guardians of law and order, the fifth was missing: vintner, , vintner, , vintner, all of Ballineen, with shopkeeper, of Enniskean. The fifth man, shopkeeper, of Ballineen was not at home when we called. We also arrested

Volunteer in Ballineen to take We also got a car, put it in

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a safe place out of reach and dismantle it.

We brought these men along and handed them over to Comdt. Barry at Lisnagalth. They were all tried and fined £100 each. The was ordered out of the country and he went.

The Column moved on to the Crosspound Company area and on St. Patrick's Day in the morning we moved into ambush positions at Shipool. We remained there all day but nothing turned up.

My teeth were paining me terribly at this time and the evening after I procured a horse and trap and with its owner (a Volunteer) and his sister we drove into Kinsale and there I got the offending tooth pulled. When I got back the Column had already started for Crossbarry and I overtook it at the Upton Industrial School. Around Crossbarry we went into billets.

We mobilised in the morning, the 19th March, and took up positions while it was still dark. I was in Denis Lordan's section at the time, just East of the cross coming down from Ballyhandle. The next thing I was called out by Barry and Deasy and Tadg O'Sullivan. They were on the road, we were inside the fence after taking up our position. They ordered me to proceed to Humphrey Forde's house where they told me Charlie Hurley was and to stay with him. I proceeded to carry out the order, bringing with me a short Webley, Barry having taken over my rifle and ammunition before I left him on the road.

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When I was within about 100 yards of Forde's house I suddenly got the order to halt and put up my hands. I saw the military lying inside the fence with their guns trained on me. The next thing I got the order to come inside the fence. The old overcoat I was wearing had a hole in the pocket and as I was climbing over the ditch through a lot of bushes and briars I managed to slip the revolver through the hole in the pocket and down to the ground between the briars. The only thing I had in my possession was a torch I had taken from Dr. Crowley when I arrested him.

I was searched after being taken in over the ditch and they found the torch. They asked me my name and I told them it was William Desmond but gave my address as Ballintubber. They asked me where I was going at that hour of the morning and I said I was going working for my sister who lived at Crowhill near Upton.

After some time the military and myself proceeded down to Forde's house across the fields. Here I met Major Percival for the first time. He came up across the fields from Forde's house. The soldiers who had taken me didn't belong to his regiment, the Essex. They were belonging to the Hampshire Regiment, stationed in Cork at the time.

Just about this time I noticed the hay and straw at Forde's was ablaze. We moved back towards the road again, after Percival had questioned me in the same way as the others did. I gave him the same answers. He was a tall vicious looking man and moved with an easy gait. I noticed, incidentally, that a number of the soldiers had bags or

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sacking twisted about their boots.

When we got to the road there was a back-to-back trap held by two civilians and in it, with the head to the rear, the body of a man was stretched, dead, as I guessed. He was dressed only in pants and shirt and was barefooted. I was ordered to get between the shafts of the car and with the other two men to pull the trap along the road. When I got the chance I whispered to the man at one side of me who was the man dead in the trap. The answer was he didn't know. He didn't know me either, apparently. After a while, when I got the chance, I asked the man at the other side and the answer was the same. I found out afterwards that one of these men was Humphrey Forde himself but he wasn't giving a stranger any information.

About this time now, just as it was bright, the firing started at Crossbarry. I heard Percival give the order 'Come on, Kinsale party' and I was told come on with them. The other two men were left halted with the trap. An old man, whom I didn't know at the time, was walking at the back of the trap. I heard afterwards he was Humphrey Forde's father.

We got in over the fence again and moved on in the direction of Crossbarry. I saw military coming from every direction. I was taken along through a lane and the Officer in charge halted his party there and I heard him giving the number of yards - 600 - at which to fix their sights. He gave the order 'Five rounds rapid' and they fired. Fire was returned by members of the Column and when that happened the British made me stand up on the ditch, 'so that his own



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so-and-sos will shoot him now'. They also said 'If any of our fellows are shot you know what to expect'. They got very angry about this time and started clubbing me with the butts of the rifles and beating me around, while I was still on the top of the ditch. Some of the other soldiers interfered and said I was their prisoner and they prevented any further beating at that time.

After some time when the firing was not so hot our party advanced down towards a stream in the direction of Crossbarry, I being given a box of bombs to carry. As we were crossing the stream I stumbled and let the box of bombs drop into the water. I nearly lost my life over this. They beat me again for doing it. We didn't advance much further. The box of bombs was taken from me and we retired back to where the trap had been left.

In the meantime, Percival and his own party had gone on towards Crossbarry where firing had slackened off except for a shot now and then.

I was made get between the shafts of the trap again and with the two others and the old man walking behind I was made pull it down to the actual scene of the ambush. It was a sight I won't easily forget. There were soldiers dead and wounded lying all over the road between Beasleys and Harolds. There was a lorry which had apparently run up against the fence after the driver was shot and a soldier still alive and wounded wedged between the lorry and the fence along by Harolds. Further down the road another lorry was on fire. At this time I saw no sign of I.R.A. casualties, only military.

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I expected the whole Column to have been wiped out but there wasn't a sign of one of them.

It was then we were ordered to take the body out of the trap and when I realised who was there I nearly dropped dead myself. I got the greatest shock I ever got, I think, when I saw it was Charlie Hurley. We were ordered to bring him in and lay him down in the yard beside some of the dead soldiers. We then collected the wounded British and carried them into Beasley's and Harold's houses, where they were attended to by soldiers and by some of the women of those families. We also had to shift the lorry and take the wounded man out from where he was pinioned between it and the fence. Then we had to collect the dead soldiers, 18 of them, and we laid them side by side in Harold's yard. We were getting kicked and beaten all the time by the military.

There were altogether six prisoners, including the old man and myself. We were kept under close observation with a guard over us in one of the farmyards. A couple of the prisoners were brought off down the road, it was alleged, to lift one of the mines set there by the I.R.A. I was not taken out for this job. After a couple of hours Major Percival appeared and we were all put through an interrogation by him. He asked me did I know anything of the man who had been shot away off at the farmhouse. This was Charlie Hurley but I denied all knowledge of him. Some junior Officer remarked upon my breeches and leggings, saying, 'This fellow looks like a so-and-so Commandant.'

My questioners tried to make out I was one of the I.R.A. and that I knew all about the preparations for the ambush.

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I was threatened with all sorts of penalties but continued to express my ignorance of the whole thing. It ended and we were brought out on the road and here I saw three bodies lying. They looked as if they had just been dragged along the ground, covered with dust and muck and blood. I failed to recognise any of them but guessed they were I.R.A. casualties in the fight.

The old man, Humphrey Forde's father, was released there and then. Two of us had to lift the dead Volunteers into one of the lorries. We had to bring out Charlie Hurley's body and put it in the same lorry. Then we, the prisoners, were distributed all over the lorries. There were fourteen lorries all told. I myself was made get into the lorry that had the four dead bodies. There was a party of military in it too. The whole convoy then set off for Bandon, arriving at the military barracks there about four o'clock in the evening.

Including myself, there were fourteen of the Newcestown Company with the Column at Crossbarry. That morning, one of the Company (included in that number) was taken prisoner by the British at Kilpatrick and brought along in one of their lorries. When the firing started at Crossbarry he managed to escape from his captors and join the Column while the fight was on. He helped to carry away a machine gun captured from the British. He was lucky. I was not so lucky myself. As a matter of interest, the Newcestown Company furnished the biggest number of men present with the Column at Crossbarry that day from any one Company out of all the Battalions in Cork III Brigade.

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It is, of course, a matter of history now that the fight at Crossbarry, which, though it started as an ambush, developed into a regular pitched battle, was the one which stands out from all others during those years as being the action in which the biggest forces were engaged on both sides, the British, however, being immensely superior in strength, not to mention armament, to their opponents. The West Cork Column numbered 114, the enemy might be numbered in thousands, coming from Bandon, Ballincollig, Cork, Kinsale and Macroom, and having the advantage of modern motor transport to bring them quickly to the scene and to pursue the retiring I.R.A., should they have been so disposed. I must pay a tribute to Comdt. Barry, the Column leader, for, apart from his handling of the action that day, succeeding in getting the Column away safely from a position that was practically surrounded by an overwhelming force.

We, the less fortunate ones, found ourselves in Bandon in the hands of the enemy. On the way in in the lorry I was beaten with the butts of rifles and threatened with a nasty end if there was any attack along the road. When the lorry stopped on the barrack square the four dead Volunteers were just thrown out on to the ground. I was kicked out after them and fell on the bodies. All the soldiers standing around swore and cursed at me. With the other prisoners I was ordered in to an office and when my turn came I was handed a pen and told to sign my name in a book, the same as the others had done. I was just about to do so when I received a blow across the bridge of my nose from a revolver held by a soldier. My blood spurted and spattered all over the book.

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This was regarded as particularly nasty conduct on my part; the pen was snatched from me, I was thrown out of the room and kicked into a cell. All the prisoners were together in the one cell and all showing signs of illtreatment. Humphrey Forde had a very bad black eye.

After some time the door was opened, we were kicked out on to the square, lined up and questioned again. Then we were kicked back into the cell again. Every time we were told to do anything, it was accompanied by kicks or by blows of rifles. I was brought out again and brought upstairs to an office and there questioned all over again by Percival, while other Officers looked on. I was asked all about Crossbarry, but particularly who was the man shot in the farmhouse. I denied any knowledge of his identity or indeed of knowing anything beforehand of the events of the day. Everything that was said was written down by Percival. I was ordered back to the cell again. 'Take him away', was what he said to the H.C.O. in charge of my escort.

On my way back to the cell this time I noticed that there was a machine gun mounted with the muzzle pointing towards the cell door and a gun crew manning it. My attention was drawn to it in no uncertain manner by the escort as we passed it by.

Later on we were given tea and hard biscuits, but, while I drank the tea, the biscuits were beyond me, partly on account of the visit to the dentist the day before and partly on account of the soreness of my face from the blow of the revolver across the nose. There was straw in the cell and

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we were told to lie down. In fact, we were told, before the door was locked, not to try to escape !

Darkness had hardly come when the door was opened and in burst a gang of Auxiliaries furiously drunk. We were sworn at vilely by them, kicked about as we lay on the straw, then made stand up and kicked out on to the square. We were questioned by the Auxiliaries in a silly, drunken fashion and beaten around the square. Then the soldiers took us over again and kicked us in once more to our cell.

Coming on to about ten that night we received a visit from another bunch of Auxiliaries. They were drunk too. They kicked us about the floor and threatened us with their guns. They departed and we were left alone till morning. At least we were not molested but a Sergeant and several soldiers paid us visits on a number of occasions during the night as if to make sure that none of us had escaped.

During the night, too, I found myself almost choking. I awoke with a start to find that the blood flowing down from my nose had run into my mouth and blocked my throat, so that I got a real choking sensation. It was with difficulty that I cleared my throat and tried then to get some rest, uneasy as it was with my battered nose and beaten body.

It was in this way I passed my first night as a prisoner of the British, and it might not be out of place here to pay my tribute to those people who looked after me so well during the period I was on the run and on active service, and who at their own risk helped me to evade arrest with perhaps a worse ending to it than I got when I was eventually captured.

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They were Aherns and Longs of Lissarourke. It was all the more to the credit of the latter family that there was a brother serving in the R.I.C., Joe Sullivan of Gurraneleigh was another, one of the very best. At Bat Hurley's of FarranThomas and John Kehily's of Killinear there was always a warm welcome. There were others, too, too numerous to mention, and who put all their resources at my disposal, food and shelter and lookouts to warn me of any approaching danger. I can only state that I am grateful to them all.

This reminds me of one particular escape I had. I had had many but this was the closest. I had come home in February, 1921, to do a bit of work on the farm and was opening drills when I heard shooting close at hand. I didn't know whether it was directed at me or not, but I was taking no chances and, leaving the horses standing, I ran for the side of the field and into a small river. I waded along in the water until I got under an overhanging bank where I took shelter. I could hear soldiers' voices all round me but I stayed under cover and then the voices died away. After about half an hour I ventured to peep out and there was a soldier only 30 yards away from me. Luckily his back was turned towards me and I drew my head in quickly again and stayed in my hiding place for a good while longer. I came out when all was clear and I made a vow that I would keep away from home in future no matter what work required to be done.

I might mention that after the soldiers' departure and while I still lay hidden two girls of the Cumann na mBan,

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Babe Jordan and Lena Corcoran, untackled the horses when they saw them travelling around the field with the plough after them, and took them to my home.

To return to Bandon Military Barracks. About six o'clock in the morning the prisoners were ordered out to get a wash. We were brought over to the bathroom and while still with some of our clothes on us, after washing and then drying ourselves with old towels that were lying around, we were lined up and a cold shower suddenly let go over our heads, drenching us and the clothes we wore. This was considered great sport by the soldiers who laughed a lot at our plight. In fact, every morning while in Barracks in Bandon we went through the same thing.

After putting on the remainder of our clothes we were brought back to the cell and got our breakfast, which was comprised of tea and the dog biscuits again. We were then detailed, two men at a time, to draw coal for various parts of the barracks. About 11 o'clock we were paraded and had our photos taken, apparently by English newspapermen. This happened several times that Sunday.

The four dead Volunteers were still stretched on the barrack square and every time we were brought out we had to pass close by them. Indeed, they looked an awful sight.

Sunday night passed with inspection by flashlight from a party of soldiers, making sure we were still there, several times during the night. And so Monday came with our shower-bath again, our breakfast of tea and dog biscuits, our coal



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fatigue and a dinner of some kind of stew, the same as we had got the previous day.

About 4 o'clock another prisoner and I were taken out and had to lift the four dead bodies and put them on slanting boards against the barracks wall to be photographed.

Some time after this we were taken out again and brought outside the barracks gate and made carry in from a van drawn up there four cheap coffins, just made of white boards, nailed together, and with no mountings or other finish to them. We had then to put the four dead bodies in them. While doing this we were questioned again if we knew them. Of course, we said no. Actually, with the exception of Charlie Hurley, I didn't know, or anyway recognise, three of them. I myself put Charlie Hurley into the coffin and I did it as tenderly as I could under the circumstances, without drawing any undue attention to myself.

We carried the coffins to the waiting van outside the gate and then were brought back to the cell. I still didn't know any of my fellow prisoners and I daresay none of them knew me so we all kept our minds to ourselves, for there might easily have been a spy planted among us by the British. We said nothing to each other that mattered.

Tuesday came with the same programme for us as on the other two mornings. There appeared to be unusual activity about 10 o'clock. We were ordered out on the barrack square again, driven there with the usual kicking. A big number of coffins, 18 altogether, were mounted on trestles. They were better looking coffins than the ones our men went into. We

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were lined up with soldiers lined up all around us. We were told we were I.R.A. soldiers and to stand to attention. This we didn't do and didn't pretend to know any military orders or drill. There were clergymen there and they read a burial service and sang some hymns. Arms were presented several times by the military and finally the coffins were put on Crossley tenders and driven out of the barracks gates.

The afternoon passed without incident and that night about 8 o'clock I was taken up before Major Percival again and the first thing he asked me was why did I tell him all the lies about myself. I denied telling him any lies and he said, 'You are not from Ballintubber or from Crowhill either but you are from Coolenagh, Newcestown. We know all about you. You are a prominent I.R.A. man and you will be shot in the morning'. I said, 'If you shoot me, I can't help it, but you will be shooting an innocent man'. He said to the H.C.O. with the escort, 'Take him away'. The night passed the same as the others and the morning too.

I expected my time had come, but nothing happened beyond the usual threatenings by the soldiers. All day Wednesday passed in the same way and that evening some prisoners were brought. Two of them were from my own area and I contrived to give them the tip not to recognise me. They were released later. Actually, they weren't Volunteers.

After breakfast we were handcuffed in pairs and marched down to Bandon Station and taken off by train to Cork. There we were put on board tenders and brought up to Victoria Military Barracks.

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Just as we entered the barracks square we heard all the crying from nine or ten women in the barracks. It was only later we learned that these were relatives receiving the bodies of the half dozen Volunteers who had been surprised and massacred by the British at Clogheen, outside Cork, a day or two before that.

After details of us were entered in a book in the guardroom we were shoved into a cage inside the gates. There were about 60 prisoners there before us. We slept in galvanised iron huts and had for bed and bedding three boards on low trestles and three blankets, but no palliasso.

The food was reasonably good and there was no physical illtreatment. Nearly every day some of us were taken out for interrogation, always with the same result. Nobody knew anything.

I got some treatment for my swollen gums at the medical hut by a Red Cross orderly, but no attention for my nose.

I was selected as a hostage each day for about three weeks and was handcuffed and then mounted on a lorry, sometimes being thrown into it, and chained to a machine gun. I had to make the journey to and from Ballincollig Military Barracks, with the usual advice that if anything happened on the way I would be the first to be shot.

During the time in Cork, nearly every day the prisoners were lined up inside the cage for an identification parade and officers and soldiers would come along outside the wire to see if they recognised any one who might have taken part

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in I.R.A. activities against them. No one was ever picked out while I was there.

At the end of three weeks about 40 of the prisoners, including myself, were shifted to Cork Gaol, where we were told we were to await trial. Each of us was put in a separate cell here. We were allowed mix together and have exercise and actually the conditions were better than in Victoria Barracks.

On the 1st May the 40 of us were brought in lorries to the quayside and put on board a naval sloop and shut down below. The ship moved off and we were landed on Spike Island. On arrival there we found some unusual excitement and then discovered that two prisoners had escaped that morning.

I was placed in Hut 16, Block A. We could mix during the day and were allowed exercise on the barrack square, where we used play football. We had our own organisation to run the camp inside the British lines and had our own Camp Commandant, Hut Leaders, Orderlies, Cookhouse Staff, etc., We were allowed write letters and receive parcels at this time. Two letters out per week were permitted, but, of course, they were censored. We also attended Mass every morning in the gymnasium, a priest being stationed permanently on the Island.

Conditions were reasonably good until the Truce came about and we felt we shouldn't be detained any longer. We demanded our release and, of course, it was refused. We

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decided on going on hungerstrike. The strike lasted about five days. Beforehand we were examined by our own doctors, prisoners among us, and those they considered unfit to undergo the hungerstrike were exempted.

Orders came in from outside to cease the hungerstrike because it was considered that the fight was by no means over, and that men after such an ordeal might be unfit to engage in active service should the opportunity come their way.

The ordinary prison camp life carried on until October when the Treaty negotiations seemed to be breaking down. We thought that hostilities might start at any moment, so we decided to break up the prison. Hut leaders were selected by ballot and I was now leader of Hut 16. We used fall in our men in each hut in the forenoon and march them into the open air in military formation. The British did not interfere with us doing this. When lined up we would be counted and checked by a British Officer. After that being done, we marched our men in again and dismissed them within the huts. Then we would go about ordinary camp routine.

Now we got orders from our own Camp Commandant to barricade from the inside the doors of the huts with bed trestles, boards and palliasses piled up against each door and against the windows too. Actually, though called huts, they were all big rooms, 20 each in two storeys of a high stone building.

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When we had the doors and windows barricaded we started ripping up the floorboards and using them as firewood in the grates. When the British became aware of what was going on they started breaking in on the ground floor. It took them about an hour before they succeeded in breaking through our barricades upstairs. They came in with handles of entrenching tools which they used as clubs. They carried rifles and fixed bayonets too. After a tussle we were all driven out, some with bruises from the clubs, and were herded together on the square, about 600 of us all told. Our officers were picked out and put under arrest and taken away to another part of the barracks. They were put in detention cells. We were ordered back into our cells again.

We held a council of war after a new camp staff was formed and decided on remaining quiet for the night and starting the opposition in the morning. This we did. We barricaded the doors and windows and resumed breaking and burning British property.

The troops forced their way in once again and we were marched out on to the square again. We were all herded into the gymnasium, where we normally heard Mass. We barricaded the doors and windows of this building and commenced destroying the interior fittings. After some time the military broke in here too and we were driven out on to the barrack square once more. We were lined up there for about an hour and the prisoners who had been arrested the day before were brought back to us. We were all marched out then into what they called the moat and were kept there all that day, all the evening and all the night, out in the open.

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Shots were fired at us during the night and actually one man was wounded.

It rained that night, too, and several prisoners fainted from the cold and exposure and from want of food. Our Camp Commandant had an interview the evening of the next day with the British Commanding Officer and gave the latter an undertaking that no more damage would be done to the huts, provided we would be removed from Spike Island with all possible speed. Accordingly, we all returned to our huts and life became normal. As a matter of fact, so pleased were the British with the turn of events that the first meal we got on going back to our huts was the best we ever had on Spike Island and was served to us by British Orderlies under the benevolent eye of the Commanding Officer.

Little did that well-meaning gentleman know that we had an ulterior motive in our sudden change of front. Out in the moat some of us had noticed that there was a possible way of escape out of the compound at the back of our huts into the moat. From there we considered it might be quite easy to get away outside the line of sentries and down to the water's edge, where there was usually a boat drawn up.

Camp life, as far as the British supervision of us was concerned, became rather lax. They gave up the daily count outside the huts and had only an occasional check of that sort. However, a count each night once we were locked in and which had always been routine was continued.

In the meantime plans were being made for the escape

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of some of the prominent officers of the different Brigades who were held prisoners. An iron gate, chained and padlocked, was set in an archway that led from the compound into the moat and the fastenings were closely examined, always after taking precautions that no British were around at the time. Our own tradesmen in the camp had toolkits for mending shoes, clothes, etc., and a shoemaker's rasp was used as a file to cut through the chain. Six selected men stayed behind one evening under cover of the archway when it was time for us to return to our huts. When the night count was carried out upstairs in our hut, as was the usual procedure, five of us dropped down through the broken floor into the hut below and took up our places for the count before the British Officer had come downstairs to carry out his count in the huts on the ground floor. Our plan succeeded admirably and the escape of the six was not discovered until the following evening about 3 o'clock when we were paraded for one of the occasional counts on the square.

The men who escaped were: Humphrey O'Mahony, our Camp Commandant, Bill Quirke, Commandant of 'B' Block, Dick Barrett, Tom Crofts, Martin Condon and a Waterford Volunteer named Eddy, a sailor, selected to man the boat. This he did and brought them all safely to the mainland, although the night was stormy.

The British were mystified for a long time as to how the escape was carried out. However, they took no reprisals against us.

During our stay on Spike we saw some of the cells where



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United Irishmen had been imprisoned. They were built into the moat and had heavy iron doors without any window opening either inward or outward, and a stone slab served as bed. Whatever we had to put up with, we felt that these men had a much worse time for they were completely isolated from each other and the conditions under which they had to exist must have been appalling.

After the escape conditions were normal again and about a week after - this was in October - we were all handcuffed in pairs and taken down to the water's edge, put on board two naval vessels and were brought across the water to Queenstown. We were entrained there and travelled part of the night until we arrived at a station which we found out afterwards to be Maryborough. We were marched to the Gaol and locked up there, four men in a cell. Maryborough Prison at this time was very clean and very well kept. The convicts had been moved out to make room for us. We thought how easy it would be to get out by tunnelling under the wall, so a small number of us commenced, unknown to the great majority of prisoners, to make a tunnel.

We worked away for about three weeks until we thought we were near the outer wall. About this time the British were giving parole to prisoners who had deaths or serious sickness among their relatives. I was selected to apply for parole to go home to see my father, supposed to be ill. Actually, it was for the purpose of making contact with the people outside in connection with our intended escape.

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I got my parole alright and met Dick Barrett, Tom Crofts and Bill Quirke in Cork. They were in hiding since their escape from Spike. I gave them the plan of our tunnel and they promised that when they would get word from us they would be outside the prison wall to meet us and help us in getting away.

I also saw the O.C. Leix Brigade in Maryborough on my way back and told him that Crofts would get in touch with him when everything would be ready. Together we carried out a survey of the ground outside the prison and he showed me exactly where he would meet us when we would emerge from our tunnel.

It was coming on to about the 1st December at this time and once back in the Gaol again I had informed my comrades of the arrangements and we carried on with the tunnel. The next thing was the announcement that we were to be released on the 8th December. The British had not discovered the tunnel so we showed it to them before we left. We thought it a suitable farewell gesture on our part.

It is nice to record here that the entire body of prisoners on leaving the Gaol were entertained in all the hotels in Maryborough by the Volunteers and Cumann na mBan of the town. This was only in keeping with their good nature, for during our stay in the Gaol they were always sending us in parcels as a means, so far as they were able, of lightening our lot.

It is now 1953, going on 32 years since the last of

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the events recorded above had happened. I am giving this statement to Lieut.-Colonel Saurin and I would like to end by paying him some small tribute for the patient way he listened and helped me to record this personal record of mine of those fateful years.

I will conclude by hoping that by my efforts in those times I was in some small way helping to achieve some part of the freedom we aimed to win for our country, and I hope, too, to live to see the day when we shall have attained full freedom for the 32 Counties of Ireland.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_  
(William Desmond)

Witnessed: \_\_\_\_\_ LIEUT.-COL.  
(C. Saurin)

Date: 19<sup>th</sup> April 1953

