

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21  
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21  
NO. W.S. 853

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 853.....

Witness

Peadar de Barra (Barry)  
Corrogs,  
Newry,  
Co. Down.

Identity.

Member of Corrogs (Co. Down) Company,  
Irish Volunteers, 1918 - ;  
Brigade Staff Officer, 1921-1922.

Subject.

Activities of Newry Battalion,  
Co. Down, 1918-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S.2157.....

Form B.S.M. 2

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## STATEMENT BY PEADAR BARRY

"Corrogs", Newry, County Down.

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When the Volunteers were first organised in my area in the year 1918, I joined the organisation. I joined the Corrogs Company. The Corrogs Company was known as "B" Company, Newry Battalion. At the time that I joined, William Grant, Newry, was Battalion O/C. The Company Officers of Corrogs Company were Edward Ryan, Captain, and Hugh Gribben, Lieutenant. The members' roll at the start of the Company was approximately 25. The Company grew in numbers until at the end of the year 1920 we had about 60 members enrolled.

In the year 1918 there were no military operations carried out. The Company activities were Company drills, Company route marches and lectures on military subjects.

In the year 1919, about May, we got orders from headquarters of the Newry Brigade to mobilise for a raid on Ballyedmond Castle. This castle was situated between Rostrevor and Kilkeel. About twenty of the Corrogs Company were mobilised for this operation. Each man got orders to equip himself with a bicycle on the night selected for the operation. Hugh Gribben took charge of the Corrogs men. About 11 o'clock on the Saturday night selected for the raid we proceeded to Rostrevor and passed through that village. We were joined by Volunteers from Warrenpoint Company. We proceeded to the vicinity of Ballyedmond Castle. At this point we were separated and put in small batches on different outposts to protect the men raiding the Castle. I was posted to a position on the roadway close to the castle entrance gate. Our duty at this post was to prevent surprise. We were told that if we noticed any unusual or dangerous movements by locals or by members of the Crown Forces we were to send a pre-arranged signal to the men engaged on the road at the castle to warn them of the approaching danger. A number of us had revolvers - not all. During this operation

I had little contact from any of the men from the other outposts or with the men engaged in raiding and searching the Castle. It was also part of our duty at this outpost to intercept people who became aware of our presence and take steps to prevent them giving information to the R.I.C. or military about our actions.

We remained in our position for about an hour when we heard the signal which was arranged for calling off the operation. This calling-off signal was a blast on a bugle. On hearing this signal we returned as previously arranged to the Square at Rostrevor where a lot of other Volunteers joined up with us as a preliminary to each unit returning to its home area. This mobilisation at Rostrevor after the raid was part of the plans made to ensure that no individual or number of individuals would be left at the conclusion of the raid.

In the year 1919 a general collection for the Republican Movement was taken up. We got orders to collect the Dáil Éireann loan. I and a number of others in the area made a canvas of all those able to and likely to subscribe. Our efforts in this respect met with success as a substantial sum was collected locally. Another collection which I took part in with other members of the Corrogs Company later on was the collection of an arms' levy. A list of potential subscribers was made out and an appropriate sum of money was apportioned to each man on the list. These lists were handed to members of the Company in each townland who made the collections, received the monies and issued receipts.

#### General Raid for Arms, September, 1920.

The next operation carried out by us was a series of raids on Unionists' houses in Narrow-water district. We had to use force in gaining admission to two of the houses we raided. In all we raided about a dozen houses. Accompanying us on these raids was

Willie Grant, Battalion O/C. We got four or five shotguns in these raids and some shotgun ammunition. All these raids were carried out on the one night.

Later on we raided the residence of a Mr. Moorhead, who was then Lieutenant Deputy/for County Down. Local rumour had it that a quantity of Ulster Volunteer rifles was stored in this man's house. In carrying out this raid we met with no opposition whatever and after a thorough search of the premises we were only able to locate a rook rifle, a few shotguns and a large telescope. During the progress of this raid I was in charge of an outpost on the road opposite Moorhead's house. Amongst the people who were passing our outpost at the time on the road during this raid was a "B" Special. Bernard Murphy, who was with me at the time, and myself halted this man and searched him. We found in his possession a fully-loaded small bore revolver. After we disarmed the man he made a burst and escaped from us. A lot of police activity took place the next day in the area, but no arrests were made by them.

#### The burning of evacuated barracks.

In response to a general order issued by General Headquarters to burn all evacuated barracks, I and about four or five other members of the Corrogs Company travelled to Mayobridge and set fire to the evacuated barracks there. This attempt to burn the barracks did not prove fully effective. When we were leaving for Mayobridge to carry out this operation we got orders to be careful to ensure the safety of the inmates of the dwelling-house adjoining the barrack premises. When we arrived at Mayobridge we proceeded to prepare the floors of the barracks by sprinkling over them inflammable material which we then set alight. When the Barracks was alight and burning we rapped up the inmates of the adjoining house and informed them that the barracks was on fire. We then left. But we did not inform these people-named Fagan-that we were the I.R.A. carrying out a military

order to burn the barracks.

As soon as we left the vicinity of the barracks the Fagans collected some of their neighbours and all took a hand in putting out the fire. This they succeeded in doing. This activity by the Fagans and their friends necessitated our returning to Mayobridge on the following week and completing the destruction of the evacuated barracks.

At the time of our first visit to Mayobridge the other members of the Company proceeded to Rostrevor village and destroyed an evacuated barracks there. A large percentage of the man power of the Company took part in this Rostrevor operation as in the Rostrevor district the population was unionist and hostile.

An incident which took place at the end of October is worth relating. I was not personally on this activity. Some members of the Corrogs Company noticed a coal boat in Warrenpoint docks flying the owner's flag. These men proceeded to the boat and forced the crew of the boat to fly the flag at half mast as a mark of respect to Terence MacSwiney who had died a day or so previously. Other members of the Company went around and warned the proprietors of some local dance halls to close their halls for dances as a mark of respect to Terence MacSwiney. Some of these halls ignored our orders and were personally closed by us while dances were actually in progress.

Warrenpoint Ambush.

In or about February 1921, orders were issued to ambush a police patrol in the town of Warrenpoint. About twenty members of the Corrogs Company were mobilised for this operation and went into the town of Warrenpoint to carry it out. It was customary for the police in Warrenpoint to go out each night on a patrol of the town. The movements of the patrol had been watched for some time previous to our going in to carry out the ambush. We found by careful

observation that the police had no settled routine route for their patrol. They changed their routes through the town almost each night. This fact forced us on the night planned for the operation to post men at various points to ensure that no matter what particular streets they traversed some of us would have an opportunity at some point to engage them. One particular fact we knew from observation was that every night they traversed a street known as Summerhill which had three cross streets leading off. Parties of our men were placed at two of these intersections in such position as to ensure that the police would come under fire if they traversed Summerhill area. I was not myself a member of either ambushing parties on this night. My orders were to scout and to ensure that the ambushers would get timely warning of the approach of the police.

As far as I can remember a patrol of five men came along into the Summerhill area and were attacked by bomb and revolver fire. Some of the attackers had rifles. I cannot say at the moment if the rifles were used or not. In the exchange of fire the police suffered the following casualties: One policeman killed, two wounded, one of whom subsequently died.

Intensive police activities followed this ambush in Corrogs area. All the houses were raided by police, Special Constabulary and Auxiliaries.

On the morning after the ambush I was taking a horse and cart up the road to a neighbouring house when I met two lorry-loads of Specials. On one of the lorries I recognised an R.I.C. man named Constable Michael Enright. Much to my surprise I found that the lorries passed me without interfering with me and proceeded to my father's house. There they found a picture of Terence MacSwiney which they destroyed. They then arrested my father and took him into Newry, a prisoner.

I found out quite recently from a friend who met this ex-Constable Enright in Newry about a year ago that Enright told him that he recognised me that morning and that if he had identified me his comrades would have shot me. My father, after his release from Newry, told me that this same Constable Enright had saved his life after his arrest when other policemen wanted to shoot him. Enright resigned from the Police Force shortly after these incidents.

About the end of 1919 we raided railway huts and removed crowbars, pick-axes etc., which were intended by us for use in the trenching of local roads. We blocked the Warrenpoint road on one particular night on which some operation was planned for Kilkeel area. This operation did not materialise. The British authorities commandeered local people next morning to remove the large trees which were cut down. On the same night we cut all the telegraph wires between Newry and Kilkeel.

Egyptian Arch Ambush.

In December, 1920, we had charge of a dump of arms belonging to the Newry Battalion. This dump was prepared in a ditch and was boxed in in such a manner as to keep the arms stored in the dump dry and safe. The dump was large enough to accommodate about 20 rifles and other small arms.

On the night of the Egyptian Arch ambush a picked number of the Corrogs Company - about twenty in all - were mobilised and they removed all the arms from the dump. Included in the stuff removed from the dump were bombs as well as rifles and rifle ammunition. I cannot state at this stage how much arms were actually dumped.

After we took the arms from the dump we took possession of an empty house to which the Newry Volunteers were to come to remove the arms. We remained waiting in this house from about

8 p.m. and we waited and watched until about 12 mid-night for the Newry men to turn up to take over the arms. These arms were intended for use at the Egyptian Arch ambush.

Around about 12 midnight we saw verey lights going up over Camlough area. Camlough was attacked on that night and the ambush at Egyptian Arch was planned to attack the military and police reinforcements proceeding from Newry to the relief of Camlough. When we saw the verey lights going up we knew that something serious had gone wrong with the Newry men's arrangements for taking over the arms in the Corrogs dump. We remained, however, on duty at the vacant house up to 1 or 2 O'clock a.m. We then re-dumped the arms and returned to our homes.

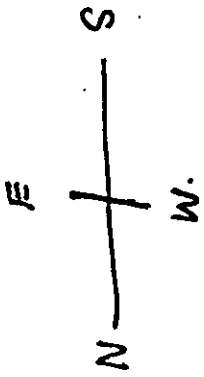
#### Belfast Boycott.

Early in the year 1921 we got orders to enforce the Belfast Boycott in our Company area. We visited a number of small shops within the area, examined their stocks and warned all shop-keepers against their trading with Belfast houses in such items as bread, tobacco and cigarettes. The next step we took was to put the bread carts distributing bread for Belfast firms off the roads. We held up and burned out one bread cart. This was sufficient to put an end to the selling of Belfast bread locally.

#### Raids on Mails.

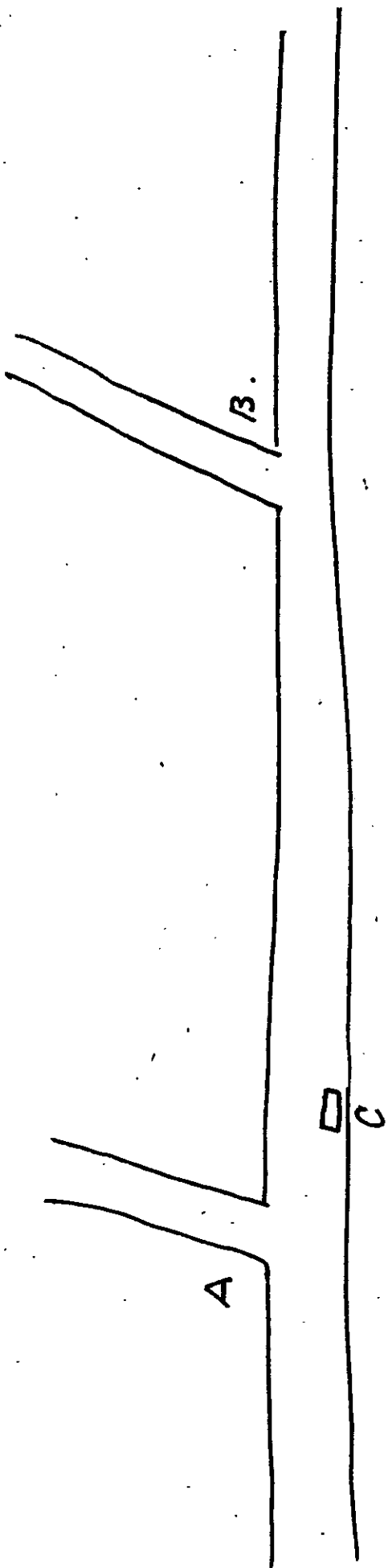
We carried out raids on the mails on a few occasions in our Company area. On one occasion we held up the mail car and removed all the letters for censoring. We told the driver of the car to return to Newry and to inform the police that the raid was carried out at a different location. This instruction was given to the driver of the car to mislead the police and to put them off the scent of those who carried out the raid.





P. BARRY:  
ED. O'HARE

JAS O'HARE  
GER MURPHY.



On the morning that we stopped the car after the raid was carried out and convenient to where it was carried out we walked into a Unionist pork butcher named Weir who knew us all. We called him aside and told him that if any report was made to the police we would know definitely that he was the only person who had seen us. He promised not to divulge what he had seen and he faithfully carried out that promise.

In March, 1921, a number of the Newry Battalion officers <sup>who</sup> were on the "run" and unable to live or move about in Newry town came out to Corrogs and made Corrogs district their headquarters. Amongst those officers were the following :- John Quinn, Malachy Quinn, Daniel O'Doherty, Pat Casey, Andy O'Hare, Eddie O'Hare, Jim Murphy, Tom McPolin, Paddy Murray of Hilltown, Walter Cullen, James Monaghan and perhaps a few others.

On one particular day about the end of April, 1921, a few others and myself were sent to the Belfast-Newry Road with instructions to cut all the telegraph communications on that road connecting Belfast and Dublin. We proceeded to carry out our instructions at a place named Sheepsbridge. The following day Edward O'Hare, Bernard Murphy, James O'Hare and myself were sent to the place where the wire was cut to seize a portable telephone which the repair gang who were then engaged in the repair of the cut wires were using.

When we arrived at the place where the men were working we scouted the position and found that there were about six men engaged on the repair work and they had with them a portable telephone. Edward O'Hare and myself did this scout work and we returned to the other two men - Murphy and James O'Hare. We decided that Murphy and James O'Hare would take up a line of approach to where the men were working from the south end of the road and that we would approach the men from the northern end and in this way we hoped to surprise them. To approach the position from both sides was essential as the repair men had a motor car on the scene which we wanted to seize and which could be used by them to give a quick alarm if they got away with it.

Edward O'Hare and myself approached the position where the telephone was at point "C" and the other two men came down to the main road at the position marked "B". When O'Hare and I arrived about 100 yards from the

bend of a bye-road leading to the main road at "A", we saw six Specials approaching us on the road. We first noticed these men coming round the bend at point marked "A". We noticed the Specials first before they noticed us and we stood and looked over a ditch to give the impression that we were local men having a look across the countryside. We did not want to initiate an attack on the Specials as we had only a revolver each and the Specials outnumbered us and were each fully armed with rifles etc. We then casually turned and retraced our way slowly up the bye-road. When we had proceeded 15 to 20 yards at a slow pace we heard a shout, "Hi boys, take your time!" We pretended that we did not hear the shout. So we carried on walking. The next cry from the Specials was, "Halt!" We still pretended not to hear them and continued walking slowly. The next thing we heard was an insistent order to halt accompanied by a mouthful of profanity. After this third challenge the Specials opened fire on us. I said then to Eddie O'Hare, "We might as well die fighting". So we both drew our revolvers. I turned and fired one shot in the direction of the Specials. The Specials then lay down on the road and we cleared across the road ditch. We were four fields away from the road before we heard anything more happen. The Specials then commenced a regular fusillade of shots.

The other two boys who were going to the main road at the position marked "B" on the map saw the Specials' lorry on the road and the Specials getting out of the lorry before we saw them. They could not give any alarm to us. Nor could they give us any effective help after the shooting commenced. They had only two revolvers like ourselves. We were all strangers in this district and we did not know the attitude of the local inhabitants towards us. Our knowledge was confined to the direction we should go towards our homes in Corrogs. We headed for home. The shooting by the Specials continued for at least thirty minutes. During this time we feared that our other two men were under this fire. As it turned out, they were as far away from the fire as we were.

Edward O'Hare and I returned to the scene of the shooting the next day in an endeavour to find out if there was any damage done. All that we could gather was that there was an ambush laid for the Specials and we were

told that the police got orders from their officers not to follow us as it was feared that we were acting as decoys to lead the Specials into a trap. It was reported in the press a few days later that there was an ambush laid for the police.

After the firing the Specials returned to Newry for reinforcements and all the district surrounding where the shooting took place was raided that evening by a large force of police.

In 1920 and 1921 the Rev. Father McGinn, C.C., was attached to Burren Chapel district and resided in Warrenpoint. On a few occasions attempts were made to molest him by placing stones on the road where he was expected to come cycling. On another occasion a rope was tied across the road which fortunately he saw in time as otherwise it might have had fatal results.

There was a friendly R.I.C. Sergeant in Warrenpoint at this time. Father McGinn went to him and told him that the police had failed to afford him the protection to which he was entitled. Father McGinn gave the Sergeant an account of the various attempts that were made to injure him. The Sergeant expressed the opinion that owing to the state of the country the police could do very little to help him. Father McGinn then said that he was going to ask the Volunteers to afford him the protection necessary to safeguard his life. He went to the Volunteers and asked for an armed party to give him protection while engaged on his priestly duties.

During the month of October, 1920, when the October Devotions were being held regularly in Burren chapel, six or eight of the Corrogs Company provided armed guards for the priest whenever he required them. These guards were never interfered with by the British Authorities. The local "B" men seemed to have accepted the position as a matter of routine. And they never made any further efforts to molest Father McGinn.

Corrogs Ambush - 8th June, 1921.

On the morning of the 8th June, 1921, Frank Aiken, O/C., 4th Northern Division, came to Corrogs area for a consultation with Sean Quinn and some of the other Newry officers whose names I have already mentioned. He remained in Corrogs during the day and towards evening he was taken to another house which was considered a safe place for a rest or a sleep. Andy O'Hare accompanied Frank to this place. At this time a patrol of "B" Specials, generally about four to six in number, was known to patrol some of the local roads a few times each week. That evening an order came to John Quinn, who was in charge of us, to ambush this patrol. Dominick O'Doherty and Pat Casey of Newry were with us when this order arrived. About four scouts were sent out unarmed to try to locate the patrol and to bring the information back to us. The ambushing party, which I shall refer to as 'the column', were selected and mobilised in wait for the scouts to return and report. When the scouts departed on their mission we proceeded to the shooting rendezvous and waited there. Just as we were preparing to leave for the rendezvous and had gone about 100 yards up a steep field from the roadway I saw one of the Warrenpoint Cumann na mBan cycling towards us and waving her hand as if she had something to give us. John Quinn told me to go down and get whatever this girl had. I knew this girl well. She was Maeve Crawford. When I met her at the door she handed me a dispatch and she told me that when she was approaching Corrogs from Burren direction she contacted four men on bicycles whom she did not know and of whom she had suspicions that they were Specials. After giving this information she departed and I proceeded up the hill following the others. The others, in the meantime, had noticed the four men on the road that Miss Crawford told me of. The Column then rushed in the direction where they could intercept the men at the corner of a hill on the road. Although I was racing after the Column I did not get up with them when the first shots were fired by the Column. This shooting resulted from the Specials,

as it turned out to be, calling on the Column to halt. When the shooting started one of the Column, Teddy McEvoy, shouted to me to go and warn other officers that the Specials were engaged with our Column in the vicinity.

After the initial exchange of shots the four Specials decamped on their bicycles towards Newry, not, however, before one of them got a bullet wound in the heel. The Column then returned to McNally's, the house in which Frank Aiken and Andy O'Hare were staying. The position was discussed there and all were of the opinion that it would only be a short time before the men who were firing on us would return to the area with ample reinforcements to comb out the district for armed I.R.A. men. Frank Aiken gave orders to us to get all the available rifles from our dumps and to prepare to receive the Specials when they would arrive. This was approximately 8 p.m. He also gave orders that the McNally house should be cleared out of any incriminating evidence that the house had been used by the I.R.A. A number of <sup>us</sup> searched McNally's and removed some shotguns and ammunition and surplus beds and bedding which were there for the use of men on the 'run'. We got all the stuff into dumps or other safe places.

All the armed men then took up positions along the side of a hill overlooking the main road from Newry at the junction of the Ballyholland, Grinan and Corrogs roads and close to where the previous firing took place.

About 9 p.m. the first of the reinforcements came along - two lorry-loads of Specials followed by others. Fire was opened on the first two lorries from the prepared positions occupied by our men. One lorry succeeded in running the gauntlet and getting down a steep hill into the townland of Corrogs. The second lorry ran into a ditch. I cannot say if this misadventure was due to the driver being hit by our rifle fire or not.

Some of the occupants of the first lorry that passed through succeeded in going up the hill in our direction through an old laneway that afforded first-class cover from view. These men entered the house of the McGill brothers. This house from our position was not even within our view. When the Specials entered McGill's they took out Owen McGill and his brother Stephen from the house and shot them on the street opposite the door. Stephen McGill was shot dead with what appeared to be an explosive bullet as it made a large hole in his breast. Owen McGill was not fatally wounded and was taken up by his sister and put to bed in the house. After the Specials left McGill's house bandages were taken down there by members of the Cumann na mBan.

Immediately after leaving McGill's the Specials who did this shooting went to the house of Peter O'Hare who was only about 50 yards distant. When they were approaching O'Hare's they came into the view of our men in the ambushing party and fire was opened on them. It was here that a Constable Lynass was shot dead in O'Hare's yard. After this incident the Specials cleared off.

The unfortunate aspect of the shooting at McGills was that the shooting took place at a point where the Specials were hidden from our view by the brow of the hill.

The party of Specials retreating from O'Hare's went down a hill towards the road and intermittent fire was carried on for some time between the Specials and our men. The men in the ambush position were then ordered to vacate it as there were roads on their rear which could be used by the Specials to surround our Column. This order to vacate the position was issued about 9.30 p.m. and the Column went from the Corrogs area towards Attical district, passing through the townland of Tamnaharry where some of the column remained.

About 11 p.m. a fresh contingent of police arrived in the district and immediately started raiding O'Hare's, McNally's and McGill's houses.

In McGill's house they removed Owen McGill, the wounded boy, and took him with them in Newry direction. When the lorry in which McGill was being conveyed reached the foot of the laneway leading to McGill's house and about 150 yards from the house, shots were heard. When the police conveying McGill arrived in the military barracks in Newry, McGill was dead. The body of Stephen who was shot earlier was taken away to Newry also. The bodies of these two boys were never handed over to the relatives at the time arranged for the burial. The coffins had been taken on military instructions into the military barracks previously in preparation for handing over the bodies. This procedure did not give an opportunity to have a proper examination made of the bullet wound on Owen McGill's body but it can be taken that he was definitely shot although wounded at the time within 150 yards of his father's house on his way into the military barracks in Newry.

Nothing of importance took place from the night of Wednesday, 8th June, 1921 up to Sunday, 12th June. On Sunday morning about 3 or 4 a.m. a large force of police estimated at 500 men moved into Corrogs Company district and raided every house in the area. Several houses were raided on that day more than once. Every man, woman and child in the area was questioned. Several of the men were rounded up and kept as prisoners or were taken by the Specials from place to place as they moved about.

At the conclusion of the raid the Specials put these men into a house and told them to remain there for a stated time and that if they moved out of it, it would be at their own peril. No Volunteers were captured that morning. The police got no arms or ammunition in their searches. They got no information from their questionings. They held up the congregation going to Mass, searched the people and questioned them. In several places during the raid they fired shots to terrorise the people, I presume.

From mid-June, 1921 up to the date of the Truce there was nothing much to report. The weather that summer was particularly warm with long hours of bright sunshine.



The opportunities to prepare or carry out operations were unfavourable. From the time of the shootings in Corrogs and Corrogs ambush the area was not considered a safe place for men on the 'run' to frequent. Some of the Newry officers did, however, come to our area for a rest of several days at a time. These men did not generally stay in the Corrogs area but at different outskirts in some 'safe' houses which were not then suspected. At this time, owing to the presence off and on, of many of the leading Brigade and Divisional officers visiting and using our area I was taken over by the Brigade Staff for special work. During this time I was mostly taking orders from Sean Quinn. My work was mostly staff work, dispatches, communications, transport and the billeting of men etc.

Signed:

*Peadar de Barra*

(Peadar de Barra)

Date:

*15<sup>th</sup> Bealtaine 1953*

Witness:

*John McCoy*  
(John McCoy)

Date:

*15.5.53*

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