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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 862

Witness

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Identity.
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Subject.

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1917-1921.

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ORIGINAL

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STATEMENT

BY

MICHAEL SPILLANE, BOHERCAEL, KILLARNEY,
OFFICER COMMANDING, 4TH (KILLARNEY)
BATTALION, KERRY II BRIGADE.

AND

MICHAEL J. O'SULLIVAN, 5, NEW STREET, KILLARNEY,
VICE-OFFICER COMMANDING, 4TH (KILLARNEY)
BATTALION, KERRY II BRIGADE.

1917.

Following on the general release of prisoners late in 1916, the R.I.C. were intent on arresting a man, Jim Reardon, who had shot two policemen, one dead and another wounded, who had been putting up a proclamation in Firies, about seven or eight miles from Killarney, near Farranfore. They never got Reardon. The shooting took place on Easter Saturday, the 22nd April, 1916, at midday. Jim Reardon was Captain of Firies Company. He saw Constables Cleary and McLoughlin from Farranfore R.I.C. Barracks putting up a proclamation forbidding all meetings, assemblies, etc. He went over to read it and then tore it down. The two R.I.C. men thought to arrest him and tried to club him with their carbines. Jim Reardon drew his gun and shot them both. One of the two, Cleary it was, died later from his wounds.

After the general release, when Stack, Ashe and Brosnan were out, a reception was arranged for them on their arrival in Killarney. These three fell in with Michael Spillane in fours and all the crowd fell in behind them in the same formation. It was so spontaneous, Ashe was astonished at this display of spirit. This was in early Spring and after that the Casement anniversary was organised and held in Tralee. Some men got up at six o'clock in the morning and actually

walked across the mountain. This was on Easter Sunday; there was a procession two or three miles long marched out to Banna Strand, seven miles away. Ashe and Fionan Lynch spoke from the old Fort where Casement had been captured. The R.I.C. followed the parade but did not interfere.

Occasions like this kept the spirit alive and growing stronger each time. After the Casement ceremony the local Volunteers organised a big Aeridheacht in the Cricket Field in Killarney. They had their pipers' band and, furthermore, each bandsman, who was also a Volunteer, was able to sing and it was a great draw. Fionan Lynch and Piaris Beasley spoke at this. This was such a success that a similar Aeridheacht was held in Rathmore, fourteen miles away. This was also in the area of the Killarney Battalion, which was reorganised now, Michael Spillane being Commanding Officer. At Rathmore, the Aeridheacht was a great success. The Kiskeam Fife and Drum Band was there and a great crowd attended. The R.I.C. were refused admission because at the Cricket Field Aeridheacht in Killarney they had been let in and they had taken notes.

Another Aeridheacht was held at Ballindeagha and there the R.I.C. were kept out by Mick Dennehy (now Garda Siochana Superintendent in Roscommon), Con Morley and John Sharry. As a result they were arrested subsequently and sentenced to three months after being charged in Killarney Courthouse. A huge crowd assembled outside with the band, which played while rebel songs were sung. There was consternation among the pro-British crowd.

Aeridheachts were held in Anabala, Ballyhea, Beaufort, Listry, Coolich (two were held in this area), and Ballinatourig. These were all within the Killarney Battalion area. The band was present at every one of these and proved a great draw. Enthusiasm was very marked in these places compared with a year or two before this.

The Brigade, which was in existence since 1914, seeing how successful Mick Spillane and Michael O'Sullivan, as O.C. and Vice-O.C. Killarney Battalion, were in organising the Companies and the Battalion, got them to organise the Volunteers in other parts of the Brigade area, which then covered the whole County Kerry. Actually there was only the one Brigade in Kerry at the time. Paddy Cahill, Tralee, was Brigadier, Dan Maloney, Castleisland, was Vice O.C. Diarmuid O'Connell, Cahirciveen, Mick Moriarty, Dingle, and Mick Griffin, Listowel, were Staff Officers. Mick Spillane was also an Officer on the Brigade Staff as well as being O.C. Killarney Battalion. Both he and Mick O'Sullivan commenced organisation in a district, whether country or town, by having an Aeridheacht, and always brought the band, and, if possible, secured a well-known man in the district to speak and often, failing that, spoke themselves.

They got Frank Fahy to speak at Milltown when he was spending a holiday near Ardfert. They succeeded in bringing Piarais Beasley to Dingle.

The cost of running these Aeridheachts would have been considerable were it not for the voluntary labour and

and the free provision of eatables by the Cumann na mBan and their friends. Transport costs were kept down to a minimum by using a waggonette and horses instead of motors. Running concerts brought in money too.

Organisation continued and by the means used the foundation was laid and as well as Milltown and Dingle, Caherciveen, Kilgarvan and Listowel were also visited. Kilgarvan was visited at the invitation of Father Murphy, the parish priest, and Father Brennan came out from Kenmare and opened the Aeridheacht. A couple of hundred Volunteers attended and marched at Tom Ashe's funeral in Dublin and brought a wreath.

Dr. and Mrs. Sheehan of Milltown were never afraid to declare their allegiance to the national movement. The doctor's father had been a '67 man and also a member of the Pope's Brigade in the fight against the Redshirts, so the spirit was there. To have the doctor and his wife openly supporting the Volunteers in their locality was a great backing.

Dinny Callaghan from Kilgarvan, who had fought in the Church Street area in Dublin in 1916, came down from Dublin in 1917 to organise the I.R.B., and Michael Spillane brought him round to establish centres in Barraduff and Rathmore. Just then he was recalled to Dublin by Cathal Brugha, who said there was no need for the secret to be maintained any longer as in Easter Week a declaration was made about the I.R.B.

Still on organising work, Mick Spillane and Mick O'Sullivan went to Millstreet at the invitation of Father Joe Breen. They brought the band and supplied items for the Aeridheacht and for a concert later in the day. They went there - the twenty-one miles - by waggonette.

They were also in charge of the Sinn Féin Club in Killarney. When the farmers stopped bringing potatoes into the town this was a blow to the poor people who kept a pig or two. So Spillane and O'Sullivan detailed Volunteer Officers to collect them and bring them in to the Volunteer Hall and sell them at cost price to the people who wanted them and who came in from the various districts for them. The butchers, who were never very Irish, were sending the meat to England. Spillane and O'Sullivan sent around to them and told them unless they kept sufficient meat for their ordinary customers they would see that the meat was dumped into the river at Cork. This happened with one tough man who would not yield. These actions were done through the medium of the Sinn Féin Club which could act when the Volunteers couldn't do things openly and won great support from the people.

Towards the end of 1917 Mick Spillane got orders from Brigade Headquarters not to reside at home. On Christmas Eve the military went around beating up civilians in the streets in Killarney. Amongst others, they attacked an Irish Guardsman in uniform for having a Sinn Féin badge in his coat. He beat three or four of them and the crowd joined in and beat the rest of them. A number of pro-

British supporters were beaten up too. The R.I.C. came down then and they and the military started firing. This was after one of the soldiers had been brought back to Barracks dead. A Constable Keogh was shot, actually by a comrade R.I.C. man, but the police tried to put the blame on the Volunteers. Reinforcements were brought in for several nights and surrounded the district and were trying to arrest Mick Spillane as being the cause of it all, but he escaped.

1918.

Early in this year Johnnie Logan of Baltimore, Co. Cork, came to Killarney and taught Mick Spillane and others how to make bombs.

There was a big anti-conscription meeting in Killarney and all sides turned out for it. John Murphy, ex-M.P., took the chair (self constituted) and suddenly said "Mick Spillane will now address you". Though not much given to public speaking, he did address the crowd and told them what they should do, in no uncertain manner. The R.I.C., of course, were taking notes but stayed outside the crowd.

The Volunteers organised collections for the anti-conscription fund. They also raided railway stations and County Council stores for powder and used it for refilling cartridges for shot-guns. At this time the Killarney Battalion had in the way of arms: about twenty rifles in the Killarney Company and ten revolvers. The other eight Companies had among them up to 100 weapons, principally shot-guns and some revolvers too. The Australian soldiers

visiting the area attended all the Volunteer dances and the Volunteers got many revolvers from them. They used join in with the Volunteers if there was any row with the English soldiers, for they despised the 'Woodbines', as they called the Tommies. Owing to these rows Killarney was put out of bounds to Australians on leave until some of them laid down arms at the Front and refused duty until Killarney was open to them again and it was. Among members of the Australian Forces who did this were Sergeants Jim O'Reilly, Daly and Tangney.

The Battalion was very strong, the Companies being :

<u>Company.</u>	<u>Strength.</u>	<u>Company Captains.</u>
Killarney	about 200	M. Spillane (also O/C. Bn.)
Ballyha	" 80	Tim O'Leary.
Beaufort	" 60	Ned O'Sullivan.
Listry	" 50	Dan Irwin.
Blackvalley	" 30	Jerh. Griffin.
Muckross	" 30	Tim O'Shea.
Lissivigeen	" 60	Pat O'Sullivan.
Kilcummin	" 80	Eugene Moriarty.
Fossa	" 30	Dan O'Shea.

The Battalion Headquarters Staff consisted of :

O.C.	-	Mick Spillane.
Vice O.C.	-	Michael Sullivan.
Adjutant	-	Pat O'Shea.
Q.M.	-	Mick Spillane (also O.C. Bn.)
S.S.	-	{ John Keogh (boots at International Hotel) { Dick Carey (Post Office Staff).

I.O. - Paddy Walsh.
Communications - Tim O'Meara, Jerh. Donoghue
under the and later
Vice-O/C. Pat Carey)
Charlie Carey) brothers.

S.S. were Special Service Officers appointed by and known only to the Senior Officers of the Battalion. They attended no drills or parades owing to the secret nature of their duties and were invaluable in providing information as to enemy movements, obtained through the medium of their employment.

Cathal Brugha came to Killarney and met Mick Spillane by appointment at the International Hotel where he (Brugha) was stopping. He said to concentrate on the manufacture of bombs and Mick Spillane said the material for the explosive was not available in any great quantity and Cathal Brugha said to get in touch with Mick Staines in Dublin and to swop large calibre ammo. for gelignite.

A few nights after Mick Spillane met Seamus Doherty, Gill's traveller, and he arranged to take the stuff to Staines. Spillane chanced it after midnight for the first time in months to go home. He wasn't long in bed when the door was kicked. His father got up and asked who was there. "Police", was the answer. "I will not open", said the father. "We'll break it in if you don't". "If you do, you'll never break in another". He was very hot. He told Mick to give anything he had in his pockets to Matt Courtney who slept in the house. He had a note from Mick Collins which he passed over to hide. He told his father his coat

was hanging on the kitchen door and was full of bullets for Seamus Doherty. He put on Courtney's coat and his own overcoat over it. Only then did his father let the police in. There were D.I. Reardon, Head Constable Harrington, Sergeant Cronin and about ten Constables. The D.I. said, "Get up and dress yourself, we are going to arrest you". Mick Spillane said, "For what?" He said, "Having acted, about to act, and likely to act in a manner prejudicial to the defence of the realm". Mick said, "When, where or how?" He said, "I can't give you anything more definite". Mick said, "You can't give me anything more indefinite". He said, "Get up, there is no use in talking". So he got up and was taken to the R.I.C. Barracks. He stretched on the table there and about twenty minutes after Matt. Courtney arrived with his coat, now emptied of the bullets, and with some money in case he needed it.

In less than half an hour after Mick Spillane was put into a lorry and stretched along it with a heavy escort of police. They stopped at Farranfore and Sergeant French got out and put a couple of large envelopes into the letter box of the R.I.C. Barracks there. Spillane was taken into Ballymullen Military Barracks in Tralee and put into a cell. He complained to the soldiers about the filth there and they said how bloody particular he was. The next morning an Officer called and asked him had he breakfast and he said "No" and the Officer said he'd send him some. He allowed him to wash too. About ten o'clock he was taken out of the cell and found An Seabac and Mick Fleming were also there. They were taken to the train and to Dublin, to Arbour Hill

Barracks. They were some days there and then were taken in a covered wagon to the North Wall and across to Holyhead. They were in a Camp in Holyhead for four or five hours and they were entrained then. Along with An Seabac, Mick Fleming and Mick Spillane there were Trayers from Gort, Count Plunket, Seoirse Nicholls from Galway, Stephen Jordan of Athenry, Tom Ruane of Craughwell, Brian O'Higgins and a few others. They arrived some time early in the morning at Birmingham and Spillane pretended to faint and the prisoners protested at the way they were huddled into the Black Maria and all the crowd refused to go to their cells in the gaol and there was consternation among the prison staff. The military escort had left after handing them over. The prisoners looked for concessions there and then. The prison authorities agreed to give them, open cells and free access to each other.

A few days after, An Seabac, Mick Fleming, Trayers and Spillane were taken to Durham Prison. Some days after that Darrell Figgis arrived from Lincoln, also Eamonn Dwyer; Seamus O'Neill came from Dundalk, probably. Then Frank McGrath came from Belfast, Frank Bulfin and Eamonn Bulfin, uncle and nephew, and Eamonn Morcan arrived, and Dan McCarthy and Art O'Connor also.

They were all there from May, 1918 to April, 1919 and were released then.

The first job Mick Spillane did after his release was to return the Anti-Conscription money to the subscribers. There were only three who took it back. The remainder

asked that it be given to G.H.Q. There must have been about £1,000 in all, and it was accordingly done.

Reorganisation continued and Mick Spillane and Mick O'Sullivan visited all the Companies of the Battalion. There were test mobilisations and tests in communications - carrying despatches through the area from one Company to another. There was also target practice carried out in the Deer Park. .22 rifles were used for this. Every Company had two of these and plenty of ammunition for them.

The Aeridheachts were continued throughout the entire Summer of 1919. The band left every Sunday morning by waggonette. This was called the band car and it carried about sixteen to wherever the Aeridheacht was being held that particular day. Seán Ó Casaide and Padraig Devane, two Irish teachers, gave considerable help with the Aeridheachts. These Aeridheachts, held in turn in each Company area, were comparatively cheap to run and were a tremendous success. The spirit was raised and kept going among the youth of the various districts and the national movement gained by it, the Volunteers in turn gaining recruits, not to mention additions to Company funds.

About this time Frank Fahy gave two letters to Father Charlie Brennan of Millstreet, one for Mick Spillane and the other for Seán Nolan, who was travelling with a theatrical Company then. Spillane's letter asked him to get in touch with Nolan, who was a wanted man, and tell him not to sleep in Killarney as the police were on his track. He said he couldn't let the company down and would have to play with them that night but that after the show he would meet

Spillane and O'Sullivan and put himself in their hands.

In the meantime, they had arranged for a pony and trap to be available and in due course proceeded on the road to Barraduff with Seán Nolan as passenger. They turned off the main road and got a place for Nolan to stay at - John Free O'Sullivan's - out of the way of any possible police interference.

It came about that the Urban District and the Rural District Elections were coming off and it was decided to put up Republican candidates, for, as Austin Stack said, what use was it having a Dail unless there was also representation by the growing Irish-Ireland movement on the local government boards. So the Elections were fought on the Republican issue and naturally the Volunteers worked as hard in these as they did in the General Election at the end of 1918.

But the 1918 Election was a straight political issue. In the Local Elections, the elements that had represented jobbery and graft for years had to be fought. One of the candidates of these thimble rigging parties conceded that in the Republican movement he saw a well-organised machine and was in fear for his own fate in the Elections. The Volunteers won the day, the Republican candidates securing nine seats out of twelve in the Urban Council and 100% of the seats in the Rural Council and the County Council.

Concerts and dances were organised by the Volunteers and Cumann na mBan and were a great success. Prices of admission to the dances were small and so these functions were decidedly popular and proved a great source of revenue

for the Volunteers. In fact, so popular were they that admission had to be restricted to cope with the crowds who patronised them.

In 1920 friction with the Crown Forces was increasing. The Volunteers of the Killarney Battalion cut and blocked roads to impede their movements and to facilitate the attacks on Gortalea R.I.C. Barracks in March, in April on Scartaglen R.I.C. Barracks and in May the attack on Brosna R.I.C. Barracks. Ammunition and bombs were given by the Killarney Battalion for these attacks, which were carried out in other Battalion areas. In June an attack was made on the R.I.C. Barracks at Rathmore, also in another area, but the same assistance was given. In addition, the Units in the outlying areas were kept notified of enemy movements in force out of Killarney. This was, of course, a garrison town during these years, there being 500 military as well as R.I.C. About the end of 1920, this garrison was augmented by a Company of Auxiliaries. There were by the end of the year, also, a number of Black and Tans in Killarney.

A man who subsequently was proved to be a spy for the enemy and was tried and executed in the Newcastle West area, first came under suspicion in the Killarney district. He was endeavouring to pass himself off as Peadar Clancy, and Mick Spillane got suspicious when he heard this. The suspect, whose real name proved to be Crowley and whose origin was obscure owing to the variety of places he claimed to belong to, was trying hard to inveigle the Volunteers into carrying out attacks on enemy posts. This was a

clumsy procedure and didn't succeed, due to the vigilance of Tom McEllistrim of Ballymacelligott. A watch was kept on Crowley's movements at Breahig, outside Castleisland. Mick Spillane, once his suspicions were aroused, had sent word to the Brigade O/C., who was then Dan O'Mahony, and the McCarthys of Breahig confirmed those suspicions. Crowley found himself a prisoner and was transported into West Limerick where he met his deserts; as already mentioned.

There were raids on mail trains and holds up of postmen throughout the Battalion area who were delivering final notices to farmers who had held back their annuities. Both types of action by the Volunteers helped to disrupt British administration.

There were, of course, raids for arms carried out in every Company area with good results. Friendly farmers yielded up their shotguns and ammunition without protest. Loyalists were compelled to surrender their privately owned arms and were generally too scared to protest.

An Aeridheacht was to be held on Whit Sunday in 1920 and was proclaimed by the British. It was announced for the Cricket Field to the South of Killarney and hundreds of military and police held the exits from the town in that direction. As it happened, three funerals were going to Aghadoe to the North West of the town that day and it was surprising the number of mourners who accompanied those funerals, part of the way anyway.

Mick Spillane and Padraig Devane stayed in the town and had a narrow escape when D.I. Reardon organised a quick

baton charge in front of the International Hotel for the purpose of getting them. They were too quick for him and the police with drawn batons stormed the hotel and dragged out and assaulted harmless visitors there, including a number of English people.

When the crowds returned that evening from the Aeridheacht, held at Allen's field, on the way to Aghadoe, the disgust of the British authorities was complete. As a matter of interest, the principal speaker at the Aeridheacht was Father Finucane, a curate in Killarney (now P.P. Killorglin). He was a great friend of Father Michael O'Flanagan, who spoke that day also.

It was in 1920 that the Parish and District Courts were started. Mick Spillane sat on a District Court along with Father Pat Brennan (now Canon Brennan of Listowel) as Chairman. Other members were Dan Mahony of Castleisland, the Brigade O/C., Tom McEllistrim of Ballymacelligott, O/C. 2nd Battalion and Fred Crowley, T.D., of Rathmore.

Sittings of these Courts were very protracted, so many cases had to be heard. Naturally, they were heard in secret. Even Lord Kenmare had several cases listed and was pleased with the results. Another of the litigants was an ex-R.I.C. Sergeant, while yet another was an ex-British Army Officer, who was a barrister also. Irrespective of their political affiliations or their loyalties, they all got justice. And it was administered in a commonsense way.

Following the famous speech of Smyth, the newly-appointed Police Commissioner, to the R.I.C. at Listowel and which provoked the 'mutiny', a copy of this speech was secured by Charlie Daly, and Mick Spillane got him to get a number of copies made in the County Council offices in Tralee. These were distributed, Mick Spillane giving one each to Seán MacCurtain, a brother of Tomás, the Lord Mayor of Cork, and another to Liam Cronin of Cork. As a matter of interest, Smyth was shot in the County Club in Cork a week later.

Every telegram for the military in Killarney found its way to Mick Spillane first. Tommy Carey in the Post Office, one of the S.S. men, got young Summers, a telegram messenger and, incidentally, an ex-R.I.C. man's son, to bring them unopened to the Spillane house in Bohercaul where copies were made of them; they were then closed and brought on to their intended destination. They were in code and the copies were forwarded by Mick Spillane to Michael Collins in Dublin. So many were being sent through that Collins sent down the code to Mick Spillane and the telegrams were deciphered in Killarney. Much useful information was got in this way, including intended or likely movements of military in the Killarney area.

One fine day a touring car drew up in front of the International Hotel. The hood was up, a rather unusual thing in the Summer. The party of men in it went in for a drink and John Keogh, the boots and one of the Battalion S.S. men, overheard one asking the other had he brought the bag of golf clubs. Keogh hung around and spotted that the bag really contained guns, actually rifles. He contacted Mick

Spillane and the latter got Tom Daly, a brother of Charlie's, to follow the car on his motor bike out along the Tralee road. Unfortunately, the motor bike broke down at Farranfore but he saw that the car turned off there in the direction of Castleisland. He reported this back to Mick Spillane and the car was traced through Castleisland to Abbeyfeale. The number was got and the owner was found to be Vickery of Bantry. Also, the words 'Up Sinn Féin' were painted on the side and covered over with cowdung. Word was sent to Michael Collins about this mysterious car and he said he had been provided with a link that he had been searching all Ireland for. The party with the 'golf sticks' was a murder gang who had shot Crowley, the cripple boy, in Bantry and carried out other shootings at Glengarriff.

Battalion Headquarters in Killarney got the following R.I.C. men to resign: Tom Leary, a native of Barraduff; Michael Sullivan of Ballyha; Pat Sullivan of Lissivigeen; Nolan, Sullivan and Kerins of Listry; Peter O'Toole, a native of Sligo, stationed in Milltown; James Loughnane of Loughrea and one time stationed in Killarney; Connell of Tralee, and a clerk in the D.I.'s office in Killarney; and Dwyer, a native of Galway, stationed in Killarney. Most of these men resigned through conviction, a few as a result of pleas to them by their relatives living in the Battalion area.

The Blackvalley Company destroyed Mulgrave R.I.C. Barracks and the Listry Company destroyed Beaufort R.I.C. Barracks. The Listry Company had to put up with some abuse from the publican's daughters at the Cross, no doubt anticipating more custom should the Barracks be re-occupied.

The thorough destruction of it by burning obviously prevented anything like a return of trade.

On the 16th of August, 1920, the Listry Company went into position to ambush a lorry of R.I.C. men leaving Killarney for Killorglin. Before arriving at the scene of the ambush, the R.I.C. noticed a Volunteer signaller on top of a wynd of hay and they took the first turn to their left instead of keeping straight on. They thus avoided being ambushed.

During September and early October the Auxiliaries took up positions at all the entrances to Killarney and detained all men and youths entering or leaving the town, collected them at the Market Cross and other points, and searched them. They were held by the Auxiliaries for several hours and then released. This was done on four or five occasions during this period, but no one was ever held over. It seemed a senseless procedure and was probably done just to make a nuisance of themselves.

At the end of October an order came from G.H.Q. that the Tans and Auxiliaries were to be shot at sight. Mick Spillane gave the orders to the nine Companies under his command, but it so happened that there were none of these particular forces in the area just then.

Major R.S. Pison, D.S.O., M.C., Officer Commanding the Royal Fusiliers, the 500 military in Killarney, did his best to bring the Auxiliaries and Tans under military discipline, but without success. He had even written to England about this but without result, for the Tans and Auxiliaries had

not been brought over to Ireland with that object. Actually, the military were generally well-behaved, in marked contrast to the other crowd who were just lawless.

The O/C. Listry Company and five of his men lay in wait for two Tans who used move between Killorglin and Milltown and shot them both. This job was referred first to the O/C. Battalion who gave permission for it to be carried out. The revolvers and ammunition of the Tans were got. This was sometime in November 1920.

Two other Tans, named Turner and Cook, travelling by train back from Killarney to Farranfore had been spotted on their journey in and were attacked at Ballybrack Station and both shot dead, their revolvers and ammunition being taken. This was on the 9th of November.

As a reprisal for the two shootings, the houses of the two O'Mearas and that of Dan Donovan were burnt in the Ballybrack area. The Listry and some members of the Ballybrack Companies went into position in the vicinity of Ballybrack in case the reprisal party (Tans and Auxiliaries) should return to the locality, but they didn't.

The following Sunday John Keogh of the International Hotel and Mick Spillane were going up towards the Park and a lorry full of Tans passed and then stopped, one of the occupants opening fire on the two Volunteers. They continued to walk on, the lorry started with a jerk and the Tan who had been firing lost his balance and fell back. Later, this lorry and two others returned from Tralee and carried out indiscriminate firing through Killarney. This prevented

Spillane and Keogh going to their usual nightly hide-out. They got beds in the Fever Hospital instead. This was lucky for them as the house they normally slept in was raided that night. Five Volunteers were taken that night also in their own houses in a series of raids carried out in the town.

A day or two after this, a friendly R.I.C. Sergeant sent word to Mick Spillane that the murder gang was in town so he went on the run and established Battalion H.Q. in the Black-valley Company area, a central position as regards the other eight Companies.

In the last week of December, 1920, all the shop windows were broken in Killarney and the enemy forces helped themselves to anything they took a fancy to. The usual way they ordered drink in the publichouses was to put a bomb on the counter and then call for what they wanted, needless to say without paying, the bomb being apparently intended as a threat if they weren't served.

Early in 1921, Michael O'Sullivan, the V/O/C. Battalion, who was charge of the Arms Fund collection, got £900 subscribed throughout the area, more than the other four Battalions of the Kerry 11 Brigade. He was also responsible for the raids on the trains and captures of military stores at Ballybrack. Cigarettes, tinned meat, boots and shirts were among the items captured. He was responsible, too, for sending to the Kilcummin, Ballyha, Listry and Beaufort Companies the numbers of the railway wagons that the stuff was coming in.

On the 3rd of March there were men from the Cork and Kerry Columns at the Bower between Killarney and Rathmore, some three miles to the East of Barraduff. Michael O'Sullivan heard people talking rather freely in Killarney about the men in position. He went off on his bike to the Lissivigeen Company and despatched Lieut. John Sullivan to the Bower to get the Columns there to change their position as the military were aware of their presence there on account of the loose talk.

The military raided the position the next morning. They went into a farmer's house and said "We are looking for the I.R.A." He said, "They were here last night, mad looking for ye". The Officer enquired how many were there. The farmer said, "Three fields full".

The two Columns had by that time taken up position at Clonbanin and ambushed Brigadier Cummins and his staff, killing him and a number of others.

Within two hours of Cummins' party leaving Killarney, a telegram came through to the military of the ambush and of Cummins' death. This was tapped by Carey in the Post Office, word sent to Michael O'Sullivan, who passed on the information to Battalion H.Q.

Kerry II Brigade Active Service Unit was started on the 5th of March, 1921. It was to consist of twenty-six men, five from each Battalion. Mick Spillane volunteered and was refused on the grounds of being an indispensable senior officer. He said it was hard to ask a man to go where you couldn't go yourself. He was informed that an

A.S.U. formed in Galway mostly of officers met with a reverse and that the organisation there was disorganised for a long time, and that it was more essential that the organisation should be kept going everywhere than that ten of the enemy should be shot.

The Brigade A.S.U. took up quarters in the Gap of Dunloe on the 5th of March. The twenty-eight men of the Blackvalley Company had to act as armed sentries during day and night while the A.S.U. were being trained. They had also to provide food and carry despatches - these had to be brought on foot for eighteen miles between Brigade H.Q. in the Gap and Kilgarvan, where they were conveyed further by others to reach Division H.Q.

It is hard to imagine the work involved for this small Company in affording security, rations and means of communication for three important Units, i.e., Brigade Headquarters, Battalion Headquarters and the Brigade A.S.U. Admittedly, they were mountainy men and were born to toughness and endurance, but the long hours of duty, arduous travelling and responsibility for the safety of those entrusted to them must have told on them. Theirs is a story not known to many and they have never received the recognition and credit due to them for duty well done. Forgotten, too, are the families of those men, their parents who gave shelter and rest, their sisters who cooked for the men whom they guarded, and even the children, born scouts, who were quick to tell of any suspicious signs they observed in the locality. And all of them, if questioned, knew nothing and saw nothing.

Later in March the A.S.U. left the Gap of Dunloe and took up a position at Laune Bridge. While there, they were observed by a retired British Army doctor named Digby. He saw the Column in position from his own house and set off along the high road to warn the military in Killarney. However, he himself was observed by a friendly watcher who notified the A.S.U. which moved off before a big contingent of British arrived to try and take them by surprise.

It was on the 24th of March that the A.S.U. moved to Headford Junction and there took part in the celebrated attack on the troop train, where British casualties were 25 killed and 4 wounded. Irish casualties were 2 killed, Dan Allman, i/c of the Column, and Jimmy Bailey. On Allman's death in action, Tom Ellistrim took over command while the fight continued and was O/C. Column thereafter.

The A.S.U. returned direct to the Gap after the Headford Junction fight. Ammunition was short now. Mick Spillane got 26 dozen of ball cartridges filled with an extra charge of powder and the ball instead of small shot. The ball shot was locally made and used for shooting deer. He also provided a couple of hundred rounds of .303 ammunition.

Mick Spillane, Padraig Devane, Eugene Tangney and Dick Fitzgerald had a narrow escape one day on their way from the Gap of Dunloe to Coolick School across the lake where a Brigade meeting was to be held. Getting behind a hedge to satisfy a natural need they were just hidden

in time from three lorries of military passing by. As they continued on their way across the fields Mick Spillane looked back and saw a man stretched across the ditch and looking after them with a scowl on his face. Shortly after Dick Carey, the Battalion S.S. man in the Post Office in Killarney, produced for them a letter posted locally and going through to 'The British Officer i/c Railway Hotel, Killarney'. The letter ran, 'I.R.A. Officers Spillane, Devane, Tangney and Fitzgerald are in this district for days past. X X X.' The writing, which was very good, was closely scrutinised to see if the writer could be identified, but without success. Another letter in the same handwriting and addressed in the same way was also intercepted by Dick Carey. This letter said: 'There is a hard lot in the Gap of Dunloe. They are billeted at John O'Sullivan's, Derrycama, entrance to the Blackvalley. They have armed sentries day and night. They left for the Headford ambush and returned after it. Cremin, of Dunloe, is their commissariat officer. X X X.' This was obviously written by a man familiar with military terms, as the word "commissariat" was not one in general use. Furthermore, the phrase 'a hard lot' was not a Kerry expression. Nevertheless, the writer was never tracked down. Mick Spillane had his suspicions of the observer on the day he and his comrades were bound for the Brigade meeting but there were no definite grounds upon which to proceed against him, and it would just not do to carry out any hasty action where there was a doubt.

Michael O'Sullivan, the V/O/C. Battalion, wanted to join the Brigade A.S.U. but Mick Spillane forbade this, as O'Sullivan held a highly important position in the town of Killarney. He was the medium by which communications passed between Battalion H.Q. and the two S.S. men, Dick Carey in the Post Office and John Keogh in the International Hotel. Furthermore, he often, on receiving information of an urgent nature from either of these, had to take instant action on his own. An example of this was when John Keogh one morning came to him from the railway station to tell him that a driver and fireman had just dismounted from their engine on discovering that a party of military had boarded their train. The military were accompanied by Sergeant Cronin, the political R.I.C. Sergeant in Killarney, and who on this occasion was dressed in khaki. This was suspicious enough and Michael O'Sullivan, on getting the news from John Keogh, instantly thought of the 5th Battalion Column from Rathmore which was in the vicinity of the Headford Hills and the train would be proceeding towards Headford Junction. Normally, the British travelled on their rounds-up in lorries and would never be suspected of proceeding on any such activity by train. This time it was pretty obvious what was on and the delay caused by the driver and fireman refusing to do duty until the military left the train was enough for Michael O'Sullivan to get in touch with Tim O'Shea of the Muckcross Company and send him off to the men in the Headford Hills with a timely warning. Sure enough, the British proceeded to this locality by road but realised nothing in the course of their round-up. They did pull up Tim O'Shea, known to

Sergeant Cronin, whom they encountered on his return journey, but he gave a plausible story and was let go.

This is just one instance of the necessity for a link such as Michael O'Sullivan provided in the town and the necessity, too, for having someone such as he with authority to act when the occasion demanded. Hence, he had to stay there and fulfil his highly important duties and console himself, if he did think of it in that way, that he was more of an asset to the organisation while staying in Killarney town than if he was out with the Column.

John Keogh was undoubtedly an asset, too, and his position as boots at the International gave him plenty of opportunities as S.S. man to the Battalion to acquire all sorts of useful information. For instance, there was the case of the officer's servant.

This simple soldier, with whom Keogh became friendly, was very grateful when John told him he could have the loan of his bicycle any time he liked. It was an easy matter then pumping the batman. He innocently told John Keogh that he was getting several days leave (and would love to have the use of the bike for that period) because his officer was going off to some place called Waterville. Yes, he would be away for some days. Oh no, he wasn't going alone. He was going with troops in a lorry. Well, as a matter of fact, there were three lorries of troops going there.

John Keogh immediately brought this information to

his V/O/C. Michael J. O'Sullivan. The latter conveyed it to Mick Spillane at Battalion H.Q. On the 7th of June, the day before the three lorries were to travel, as retailed to John Keogh, Mick Spillane mobilised 33 of his men, drawn from the Blackvalley, Listry, Beaufort and Killarney Companies. On the 8th a position was taken up on the Killarney-Kenmare road - the route to Waterville - and near the tunnel, about seven miles from Killarney.

The batman had erred somewhat when he told John Keogh there would be three lorries of troops going to Killarney. No doubt, it was ignorance on his part. Anyway, in due course a Volunteer deputed for the purpose signalled the approach of the enemy but he signalled that there were ten lorries, not three as expected. Mick Spillane decided there and then it would be only a lowering of morale to take no action, so he ordered fire to be opened on the leading lorry. Fire was taken up as each lorry came opposite the ambush position. The whole convoy halted and machine gun as well as heavy rifle fire was brought to bear on the Volunteer position.

It was estimated that the enemy must have numbered about 200, for each of the ten lorries seemed to be packed with soldiers. First blood was to the Volunteers. Eight British were killed. This was ascertained afterwards from the Volunteers in Kenmare.

A duel ensued but Mick Spillane decided he must withdraw on account of the infinite superiority in numbers, armament and fire power of the enemy. He had only one

casualty among his thirty-three - a Volunteer slightly wounded. The whole party disengaged and withdrew under covering fire, and without the enemy following up. Spillane put the Listry men in front to set the pace, as the big Blackvalley mountaineers would surely have out-distanced the remainder had they been leading. The ambushers made for the Gap of Dunloe and got there safely.

In the same month - June, 1921 - ordinary communications between Killarney and Kenmare were cut off owing to the constant raiding of mails by the Volunteers and the seizure of all enemy correspondence, official and private. Michael J. O'Sullivan notified Mick Spillane that a British officer had been seen going into a Solicitor's office in Killarney. In normal times there should be nothing suspicious about that, but every move of enemy personnel was noted and its implications thought out.

The day after, a motor car conveying the Solicitor's clerk to Kenmare was held up by Mick Spillane and some of the Blackvalley Company on the Kenmare road. The clerk was asked what he had in his brief case. Legal documents only, he said. The case was opened and here was mail for the military in Kenmare. The clerk confessed he didn't know what was in the brief case, and that he was only carrying out his employer's instructions to deliver the case to the military of the Kenmare garrison. He was warned of the seriousness of the task he had undertaken and threatened if the like happened again he would be shot. The despatches were removed by the Volunteers. They were coded messages.

On two occasions positions were taken up near the Torc Waterfall to ambush enemy forces but none turned up. The Volunteers for these jobs were mostly drawn from the Blackvalley Company.

Frank Morgan worked in Hill's cycle shop in Killarney; it was a shoneen establishment, much patronised by the R.I.C. Morgan wanted to be in the Volunteers and to do something. Michael O'Sullivan wasn't quite sure if he wasn't trying to do this with a purpose. Anyway, he told him he would be more useful outside. Actually, Frank Morgan turned out to be a most excellent man. He got his chance when he volunteered to bring a mine to the Gap of Dunloe. It was intended for use in an ambush.

Morgan met some Volunteers when on his way and went in to stop for the night with them in O'Connors of Grenagh. The others were Eamon Horan of Tralee, Tim Donoghue, belonging to the Lissivigeen Company, Alec O'Shea of Bonane and Seán McGlynn of Ballymacelligott. While they were all in the house that night it was surrounded and raided by the military. These four Volunteers got out through a trapdoor on to the roof, but Frank Morgan was caught. The two O'Connors, the residents in the house, were taken too, and, though Frank Morgan accepted responsibility for the mine, they were, the three of them, brought into Killarney, bound with ropes in a trap. They were eventually courtmartialled and sentenced to death. The date of their capture, however, was the 29th of June and the Truce coming so soon after, their lives were saved.

A short while before this incident Frank Morgan had informed Michael J. O'Sullivan of a Major Coombes whom he suspected of being a British I.O. O'Sullivan decided to take Coombes, as Morgan was so persistent in the matter. Actually, Coombes stopped in the same digs in Killarney as Frank Morgan.

In due course, Coombes was taken off the train at Ballybrack Station and conveyed to an unknown destination. While a prisoner, his one desire was for plenty of whiskey. He was still a prisoner at the time of the Truce and immediately that took place the British negotiated for an exchange. There was a badly wounded Volunteer named Jack Shanahan in the hands of the enemy. He had been shot through the stomach trying to escape from Charlie Daly's house, and were it not for his medical skill in rendering first aid to himself - he was a chemist by profession - he would have died of his wounds before a doctor might have been brought to him by his captors. He was exchanged for Coombes, an indication of the latter's importance to the British. Jack Shanahan, it might be added, is alive and healthy and is the owner of a thriving chemist's business in Castleisland.

Twice before the Truce came off the Battalion Column came into Killarney to ambush a R.I.C. patrol which, numbering about twelve, used move in extended formation carrying rifles. On the two expected nights, however, the patrol never showed up.

A British Sergeant who had permission to live out of Barracks and who used drink with one of the Killarney Volunteers, unknowingly in his cups used give away information. He told this Volunteer of a parade of the British Intelligence Branch in Killarney by its C.O. who declared to his men that there was a leakage of information in the Barrack and that the man who was doing it, if found out, well, there would be no trial, he would be just shot out of hand. The Sergeant who told this was not in the Intelligence Branch himself but it was he who was the culprit.

During the Truce there was a Battalion Training Camp established at Aghadoe and Volunteers attended it in relays. Field training was carried out and included rifle range and bombing practice, field engineering, signalling, tactics, physical training, etc. Night operations were carried out also.

The Cumann na mBan had First Aid classes which were held under Dr. Ivo O'Sullivan. Dr. Edward Carey was Battalion M.O. for the treatment of casualties.

SIGNED: Michael Spillane
(Michael Spillane)

SIGNED: Michael J. O'Sullivan
(Michael J. O'Sullivan)

WITNESSED: C. Saurin LT.-COL.
(C. Saurin)

DATE: 8th June 1953

