ORIGINAL

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

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Witness

Thomas Kettrick,
Abbey St.,
Howth,
Co. Dublin.

Identity.

Quartermaster,

(i) West Mayo Brigade

(ii) Active Service Unit of the West Mayo Brigade.

Subject.

Nationa l and military activities,

West Mayo, 1915-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

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Statement by Mr. Thomas Kettrick,

Abbey Street, Howth.

About 1915 a branch of the Fianna was started in Westport. Tom Derrig, Liam Malone and I joined and I became Recruiting Agent for the Sluagh. Liam Mellowes visited the area on organisation work. We had no arms except for an old revolver which belonged to Major John MacBride, and which had been used in the Boer War and was given to us by his brother Dr. MacBride. We had a very fine Sluagh - about 50 lads, all fully togged out with uniform which we were very proud to parade in every Sunday to church.

We were not prepared for 1916 but there was a general mobilisation called. Easter Monday night we held a concert and it was then we got the news of the Rising in Dublin. The local barracks were all barricaded and we were getting all kinds of false rumours from Dublin about German landings, etc. We decided that we would have a general mobilisation on the Sunday following the Rising. At this time we did not know of the surrender in Dublin. We met in a place called Crow Hill. There was a very big crowd but only one man carried a Service rifle. The R.I.C. kept all of us under observation and marched along close to us. After a survey of the available arms, it was decided that nothing could be done. We had a general parade through the town and this ended our 1916 episode. On the following morning we heard of the executions.

After this, British troops began to visit Westport from Castlebar. We awoke one morning during the week of the Rising to find our town completely in the hands of British troops; cavalry sections were at all points and wholesale arrests had taken place. Later, we had a second visit from the troops and another batch was arrested, amongst them being a man named Charles Hughes who owned a large business in Westport. Mrs. Hughes had no other help and I took over general control of the business. She asked me if I would visit Castlebar Prison to deliver a message to her husband. I cycled to Castlebar and I remember knocking at the gate of the old Prison. I was allowed in to see Hughes to whom I gave a small parcel. The gloomy atmosphere of the place was sufficient to strike terror into any person.

We tried to keep things organised in the town, from which about 30 or 40 Volunteers had been taken to Frongoch.

The reorganisation of the Volunteers took place early in 1917. A by-election was held in Clare in 1917, and Edward Moane and I cycled 100 miles to assist in the election campaign in Ennis. Mr. de Valera was the candidate for Sinn Féin. During the elections we started open drilling again. We stayed there for the whole campaign and then I was sent to a little place called Quin where I met Davey Kent, the brother of the man executed in Cork after the Rebellion. This was the hometown of Mr. P. Lynch who was the Nationalist or Redmondite candidate. Posters showing de Valera in convict attire were on display bearing the slogan "Put

him in to get him out", while P. Lynch was put down as the Crown Prosecutor. There was a sweeping majority for de Valera who had been released during the campaign. He arrived in Clare before polling day.

We had now organised a Company of Volunteers in Westport. Joe Ring was Captain and Edward Moane was Vice-Captain. There were about 20 men in the Company. We drilled openly, watched by R.I.C. and detectives. We made a survey of the district for arms and we decided that, as there were several British soldiers home on furlough from the War, carrying rifles, we would relieve them of these before they returned. We raided all their homes with fairly good success. Tom Derrig and I were, unfortunately, sent into a house which was composed mostly of women - one of them a soldier's wife - who screamed and brought all the neighbourhood around; we had to clear out.

About 3 o'clock next morning our homes were visited and Derrig and I were arrested by the R.I.C. It was a Sunday morning. We were taken to the local R.I.C. barracks and shoved into a cell. We had been searched but they had missed the mask (which I had worn during the raid) in my pocket so, when I got down to the cell, I tore it into shreds and put it into a crack in the wall. The R.I.C. had difficulty in getting transport to convey us to Castlebar and eventually it was one of our own Fianna boy scouts who drove us there. About 3 p.m. we were removed and whole town turned out to see us off; their attitude towards the police and the owner of the car was very hostile. We eventually arrived in Castlebar

police barracks where we enjoyed their hospitality for a week. We slept in the day room and they were quite decent to us.

About a week later we were taken to Galway Jail. It was the fall of the year and the weather was getting cold. We were handed over to the military, who took us into custody. We spent about 14 days there undergoing the usual routine. It was my first experience of being in jail - Derrig had been in Frongoch before that. We were put into the underground cells where the light was very dim and we could hear the roar of the Corrib outside. British military officers visited us. After a fortnight it was decided that we would be released, much to our surprise. But we were sadly disillusioned when we arrived in the Governor's office to pick up our belongings for there we found our old friends the R.I.C. from Castlebar, who re-arrested us under civil law. They conveyed us back to Castlebar Prison. Next day we were released on bail to appear at the Winter Assizes, which ultimately were changed to Green Street, Dublin. This was about December, 1917. We were tried in Green St. Courthouse on charges of larceny of arms from His Britannic Majesty's Forces. The soldier's wife, previously referred to, excelled herself in perjury. It was all to no avail for the jury disagreed after about 10 hours' trial and we were allowed out on continuing bail.

We went back to Mayo where early in 1918 Edward Moane was arrested for the singing of a seditious song. His trial was about to take place and there was a great

display of force by the military and police. We marched to the station to meet Moane who was coming in for trial. Eamonn was taken to the Courthouse under heavy escort. Things began to get hot then; the R.I.C. and military were cordoned round the courthouse and a baton charge took place. The R.I.C. were very rough and there was a general melee in the streets. These street battles raged throughout the whole day and I, still on continuing bail, was very prominent in them. This was noted by the police. I was passing the barrack that evening during a lull when I was swooped on. The day room was packed with police lying bandaged on mattresses. I was put into a filthy cell where I spent the night. I could not sleep owing to the continual din. About 3 a.m. Liam Malone was catapulted into the cell and, later, Joe Ring and Charles Gavin arrived; now I was happy for I had company. Willie O'Malley, in full Volunteer uniform, arrived in after this. Hundreds of troops had been drafted into the town and the following day we were tried before a Resident Magistrate named Milling. We were charged with assaulting the police etc. etc., and were remanded to Sligo Prison. We were a week in Sligo Prison when we were taken back to Castlebar. We were tried again before a Removable Magistrate and a Resident Magistrate and sentenced to one year. We were kept in Castlebar cells during that night. There had been various demonstrations by the Castlebar people and the police were in a very bad mood. They visited us during the night, armed with sticks, but they did not beat us up. At 7 a.m. we were pulled out again and we started the long trek for Belfast, where we were met by a hostile crowd of Orangemen. En

route, we had picked up a lot of "cattle drivers" who were also going to jail for land troubles. We had the greatest contempt for this party as they sir'd and saluted the British Authorities who were taking them to prison. A regiment of soldiers were on the platform at Belfast and a fleet of taxis awaited us. We, of course, were all handcuffed to our escort - I, to a big, burly police sergeant, who never left me in doubt about "Ulster being right". We were kept in the train for some time, owing to the hostility of the crowd, and were then taken to the waiting taxis under a fusillade of bricks and stones. We were driven to Crumlin Road Prison and taken before the Governor who announced that we would be given special political treatment for which, incidentally, Thomas Ashe had previously died. The "cattle drivers" had to put up with the ordinary treatment.

We found Alec McCabe and several other friends in the prison. Ernest Blythe, Terence MacSwiney, Seán Treacy and others, all joined us there at one period or another. We were there for some weeks and the treatment was fair for we were allowed free association, letters, etc.

After this, we were transferred to Dundalk Prison where special facilities were arranged for prisoners following the Ashe strike. We spent the summer of 1918 there while, outside, the conscription crisis raged. Terence MacSwiney became a father while in prison, but, due to the fact that our privileges had gradually been taken away from us, our celebration party consisted of scallions (small onions) and a small percentage of

Guinness which had dribbled through from some mysterious source. It was here that an order was served on Dermot Lynch, who had been Food Controller for Sinn Féin and was serving a sentence for the commandeering of a lorryload of pigs due for export. He was an American citizen and the British authorities decided to deport him on the termination of his sentence. He requested the authorities to give him facilities to get married. They refused but a visit was arranged for his girlfriend, two friends and a priest, and the marriage took place during the visit under the nose of the unsuspecting warder. We celebrated the wedding with the usual fare! Next morning he was deported to America.

The British authorities began to get nasty again and were, by degrees, taking from us the special concessions which had been so hardly won from them by the death of Thomas Ashe. We refused to conform and they decided to move us back to Belfast, where Austin Stack had just had a big fight over the status of a prisoner who was being treated as a criminal. A big strike had taken place which culminated in the roof of the prison being taken off. The stairs were destroyed and the tricolour displayed from the roof. Civilians fired on us from the Crumlin Road.

After some months spent here I received a request, one day, to attend the Governor's office where I was confronted by R.I.C. from Mayo. They informed me that my trial on the rifle charge had been changed from Mayo to Belfast - the old charge was still pending against me.

I attended the court there and met Derrig in the dock - he had surrendered to his bail. The trial lasted all day and of course we were found guilty. I got six months' hard labour and Derrig five months in the second division. One morning after this I barricaded my cell but they broke in. I was taken out to a local police barrack and from there was transferred to Derry Jail.

I was brought before the Governor there who informed me that I had been sentenced to hard labour and that I was no longer a political prisoner, so that all my concessions were withdrawn. I informed him I would do no hard labour and he said, "You had better; we tame lions here". I said, "If you are a specimen of the lion tamers, I have nothing to fear". I went to my cell. George Plunkett, son of Count Plunkett, had just been released and the Governor told me he had been a model prisoner, and that he was, after all, far more important than I was. Derrig, of course, as a second division prisoner was allowed to wear his own clothes. Two fellow prisoners were Seán Browne of Dublin and James Murray, a little barber from Ballyshannon. After a month here we went on hunger-stike, to coincide with the General Election of 1918. Eoin MacNeill was the Sinn Féin candidate for Derry City. Murray, who was a semi-invalid, was taken out after 5 days; Browne was taken out after 6 days, but I looked better than ever. On the sixth day I was quite strong so I decided to stop drinking water. On the eighth day I was visited by Dr. McCormack of the Prisons Board who promised me all kinds of concessions if I would submit and take food. My

idea now was to get out to my pals so I refused to give in. The doctor was finding it difficult to get in and out of the prison due to the threatening attitude of the crowds outside who were in sympathy with me. Therefore, I was in a strong position and felt strong too. A priest arrived after this and gave me the last Rites of the Church. I was carried out into an ambulance and taken to Derry Union Hospital. The other two persons were already there and were under guard. We were there for about a week. Plans had been made outside to rescue us through the bathroom window at a fixed time on a Thursday night, but somebody must have given the game away for the hospital was invaded that day. We had got the patients in the ward to kick up a row about the change of guard making noise and these guards had been removed outside the ward door which would have been to our advantage in getting away; but we never got the opportunity. They dragged us out of the beds, handcuffed us behind our backs and pulled us downstairs, our manacled hands hopping off the stone steps. I got a parting kick from the Master of the workhouse who had protested against our kicking up what he called an unseemly row there. We were driven to the station in military tenders, lying on our faces in the bottom of the car, and we were never taken out of the tender as it seems we missed the train. We were driven back again to the Eglinton Police Barracks where we appeared to be something like museum pieces for the police to come and gaze at. The prison doctor was brought in and protested strongly when he saw my condition. He had the handcuffs removed and we were driven back to the Prison

again and into the prison hospital, much to the disgust of the Governor. We went on hunger strike immediately and started to plan to set fire to the hospital, but decided against it.

At 6.30 a.m. we were taken out again, still striking, and were driven to the station where we were entrained for Mountjoy. It was near Christmas and people were reading their Christmas numbers and offering us food en route, but we refused it. On arrival at Amiens Street we were taken ~~to~~ IN a Black Maria which rumbled through the streets until we arrived at Mountjoy. Mr. Charles Monroe, the Governor, received us. We were taken to the prison hospital, still on strike, and were there for 6 days when Padhraig Fleming, the jail breaker from Maryboro Jail arrived. There were several prisoners in C. wing getting political treatment. Our hunger striking did not seem to be getting us anywhere so Fleming advised us to call it off. He issued an ultimatum to the Governor to have us taken over to the political prisoners' wing, failing which we would smash up the hospital. The Governor came to our cells and told us we could not do this:: that it was against all Red Cross and human laws but we continued to threaten and gave him 12 hours to clear out the hospital. Eventually we did smash up the hospital. We were taken over to the main body of the prison to the criminal section where we joined other prisoners and proceeded to smash up the jail. Dozens of warders now came on the scene and WE were placed in restraint either in handcuffs or with our hands tied by muff~~ens~~ or other means. The warders

had now to spoon feed us like babies and, of course, we availed of every means to annoy them by eating as slow as we possibly could - just nibbling at our food. They had also to wash us and bring us to the toilet etc. The whole thing was very laughable. This position lasted until March, 1919, when a big effort was made to release some of us. Fleming was in charge of B. wing and eventually we were told to ask the authorities to let us exercise for a certain day. The authorities were only too delighted as they thought it was a sign of returning sanity amongst us. On the appointed day we were exercising near A. wing and I felt very weak, having been now about 6 weeks under restraint. All this time we were, of course, handcuffed and had to be fed by the warders. When the signal came that the escape was off for that day I sank down and collapsed. I do not remember much more until I woke up in the prison hospital with pleurisy. Robert Barton was a prisoner there at the time. I was there some days getting worse and was then removed to Cork Street Fever Hospital where I spent 4 months. The American delegates who were here at the time took a statement from me.

After four months in Cork Street I went to Linden Convalescent Home. Meantime, in Mayo, things had been happening. Milling, the R.M. who had sentenced me, had been shot dead and martial law had been declared in Westport and within an area of a mile nobody was allowed in or out of the town. The killers were never found.

When I was discharged from Linden I returned home to Westport where I had some trouble getting through the British military cordon which was holding the town,

but eventually was allowed in. The town was a mass of troops; all Volunteer activities had ceased, or at least had gone underground.

The 1918 election was over, with Sinn Féin topping the poll and a Dáil had been returned with a big majority. The Dáil now floated a loan and Collins appointed me as organiser of the loan in Mayo. While I was recovering I organised the loan, which was very successful. I was, at this time, subject to occasional searching at the police barracks. British laws were now obsolete and the Sinn Féin courts began to function - at times I acted in the capacity of judge. Arrests continued all through 1919.

Derrig had been released and we started to re-organise the Volunteers. I was appointed Battalion Quartermaster of the 3rd (Westport) Battalion, Joe Ring was O/C, Moane was Vice O/C. The Companies comprising the Battalion were Westport, Aughagower, Owenwee, Murrisk, Killawalla, Derrygorman and Cushlough. The approximate strength was about 200 men. Raids for arms were very prevalent and we began to build up a store. On Easter Saturday, 1920, we burned the following barracks, which had been evacuated: Murrisk, Ayle, Carrowkennedy and Drummin.

Reorganisation of the Brigade staff took place and I endeavoured to get a good arms fund established. The usual procedure was that everyone should contribute 10/- per annum, but, as this would never have got us anywhere, I had a discussion with Charlie Gavin, Adjutant of the Battalion, and other officers in Westport and, as Quartermaster, I decided to levy the local shopkeepers.

Charlie Gavin and I collected in the town and gathered about £300 in one street alone. We levied sums of £50 and £60 in some cases.

Charlie Gavin went to Dublin next day to find out whether there was any possibility of procuring arms but he was unsuccessful and returned home after a few days. I, myself, then went to Dublin and arrived back in Westport with a substantial amount - mostly short-arms. This success stimulated the Brigade - it was the first time any arms had been bought. I was appointed Brigade Quartermaster. On the reorganisation Derrig was made Brigadier, Michael McHugh was Vice-Commandant and Moane was Adjutant. The Brigade consisted of the following Battalions: 1st - Castlebar; 2nd - Newport; 3rd - Westport and 4th - Louisburgh. The entire armament of the Brigade consisted of only a few rifles in the Newport Battalion and a small number of short-arms in Westport, so we organised Battalion collections throughout the Brigade area. These were so successful that I was enabled to go to Dublin to purchase more arms. All my arms came through Messrs. Thomas HENSHAW & Co. Ltd. of Christchurch Place, Dublin, who usually delived them to the Exchange Hotel in Parliament St. I procured sufficient arms to equip a Brigade column. On my trips to Dublin I posed as a commercial traveller and carried with me large wicker baskets, known as skips, in which travellers usually carried their samples. I used to wrap the arms in the samples, dismantling the rifles into parts to make them fit in and then load them on a car for the Broadstone Station. At this period the railway engine drivers were

refusing to transport British troops so that the train might only travel as far as Boyle or Ballaghaderreen or, on the Galway side, Maam Cross. On one trip back home we arrived about midnight at Boyle. The place was full of troops up at the station awaiting the arrival of supplies. We managed to have our stuff put into the lock-up in the station until morning, when we brought them down into the hotel yard. I then went looking for a mode of conveyance to Westport but unfortunately could find none - motor cars were very scarce at this time. Previous to this episode I had met two priests of the Nigerian Mission in Ballaghaderreen who had been kind enough to carry me in their car from Westport. I was at my wits' end now for I had a big load of arms and there seemed no way of getting out of Boyle. On going up the town I espied a notice of a lecture to be given on the Nigerian Mission, so I went quickly to the Town Hall where I found my two priest friends again. I told them my position and we decided that I would act as operator of the lantern slides for the lecture that night, which would provide a good alibi for my delay in the town. I became lantern operator for the night and, to the amusement of my audience, inadvertently turned many of the slides upside down! Next morning I managed to get a hackney car and the driver agreed to take me on condition I was not travelling too far. I asked him to leave the car in the back of the hotel and to return in a short time. In his absence we loaded the stuff into the back of the car and, on the driver"s return, we started off. I think he became suspicious for I had asked him to travel on the quiet bye-roads and when we

reached Ballyhaunis he refused to move any further - even under threat. We drove the car into the back entrance of a pub, the owner of which we knew, procured another car, changed the stuff from one car to the other in the absence of the drivers, and then proceeded to Westport by devious routes. We dumped our guns in Westport.

On my journeys to Dublin I usually dressed as a deacon. On one occasion T. Flanagan used his motor bicycle to convey me to Manulla to catch the train there. The night before this I had got word that my impending visit to Dublin was known to the R.I.C. but as only 2 or 3 of our own people were aware of it, I put it down as one of the usual rumours. I joined Flanagan in the morning and drove to Manulla without incident. I suggested the usual refreshment on arrival there, so Flanagan and I went into the local pub, but were scarcely inside when lorry after lorry passed the door, coming from the direction of the station - it seems there was truth in the rumour. When they had passed I decided to continue my journey and we arrived at the station where Flanagan introduced me to the station master. He advised me not to travel as the trains at Manulla had been searched for me. I went on the train, however, where I met a girl named Annie Rush - sister of a friend of mine - who was coming from her brother's funeral. I took her into a first-class carriage and even though the train was searched several times en route, the two of us, dressed in black, were not even questioned. On arrival at Broadstone I noticed the entrance crowded with troops -

obviously expecting me. Joe Delamere, who was a guard on the train, rushed after me and led me to a workmen's entrance, which was unguarded. I had already seen off Miss Rush, who was travelling by the boat train. I drove to the Exchange Hotel. I was again successful in obtaining a small consignment of arms.

On the return journey I had to go by Maam Cross, on the Galway line. We, of course, always travelled free, thanks to the goodwill of the railway workers. On arrival in Galway where I had to change, I discovered that there was no connection to Maam Cross. Galway, at this time, was seething due to the shooting of Father Griffin and Michael Walsh of the Old Malt House, whose body had been found at the mouth of the Corrib. It was a bad spot to be in with three heavy bags of arms. I was in a dilemma, for I could not allow anybody to touch the bags. I hired a Hack (horse and car), got a porter to help me and drove round to the front of the Railway Hotel. I asked the jarvey to wait. On entering through the revolving doors I was amazed to see the lounge packed with officers in khaki. Of course I beat a hasty retreat, told the jarvey that I considered it too highclass and asked whether he knew a more moderate place. He drove me to another hotel - which was really into the lion's mouth - as nobody ever darkened that door except Auxiliaries or Tans in uniform. The receptionist told me there was a room available so I took the three bags into the hall, having paid off the jarvey. I carried one of the bags upstairs where I was taken into the diningroom which was occupied by at least three

Auxiliaries in uniform. She took me into a small room leading off the diningroom but we hastily withdrew as the room had been given away already. I assured her that it was of no importance anyway but she suggested that I share a room with somebody. And that was how I came to share a room with one of His Majesty's forces for the night. I went to my room, put the bags under the bed and went back into the diningroom. The lady asked me what I wanted to eat and I ordered steak and onions, though not hungry. I had to stay in the hotel all evening, of course, so I got into chat with the Auxiliaries and actually had a drink with one of them later. I went to my room about 10 o'clock; the other bed was still empty. I did not sleep a wink for I thought my roommate might get inquisitive during the night. Several hours later he came in and went straight to bed. He was an Auxiliary, but was dressed in civilian clothes. I had been told that my train would leave in the morning at 11 a.m., but I was up far earlier than that for I was afraid he would see my field boots. He never even looked at me. I paid my bill and made for the station. There, in the parcel office, I met an old friend whom I knew as a child, named Jimmie Keegan. He was amazed to see me, and helped me carry in the bags, which was a great relief, for they were very heavy. I told him I would be travelling on the Maam Cross train. I then went down town and into the Old Malt House where I met Mrs. Walsh, widow of the man who had been killed. She did not give me a warm welcome and told me to get out quickly. I had a glass of wine there and went over to the Post Office where I wired Westport under the name of a very

"doggie" man at the time: "Sending on dog Maam Cross - meet train. Hotspur".

There was no car to meet me but the same Fianna boy scout who had driven Derrig and myself to jail was at the station with an ex-policeman"s wife, who was seeing her daughter off to America. His was the only conveyance there so I had to avail of it, much to the consternation of the driver and the lady. The driver told me that it was as much as my life was worth to go home as the Tans had visited my home looking for me. The lady was unable to speak from fright. He told me they had passed a patrol on bicycles, on their way to Maam Cross. By the time they arrived at Kilmilkin in Connemara the driver was in state of funk. I had given him orders to drive through regardless of any patrol. Coming near Pádraig Ó Máille"s house I said "Pull up" and gave a long whistle for Pádraig. It was not long before Pádraig - later Deputy Speaker of the Dáil - came floundering down the hillside. I told him the position and he told me to dump the arms there and collect them later so I handed him the bags which he hid in the furze. We proceeded towards home, passing the patrol as we entered Leenane, but they did not hold us up. I eventually arrived in my Brigade area and later we had the arms conveyed there.

The West Mayo Brigade were now moderately well armed but the other three Mayo Brigades had practically no arms. In the reorganisation Dick Walsh had been made Inspector General of the Forces in Mayo. It was decided, after general consultation, that we would endeavour to

import arms ourselves so Dick Walsh, Seamus Gibbons and I were chosen to travel to England. This was at about the time Terence MacSwiney died and there was a keen look-out for Volunteers going over. We were taken into the Customs hut in Birkenhead and searched for arms! Arrangements were being made at the time by the I.R.A. to burn the docks in Liverpool and all Irish halls and places frequented by the Irish living in Liverpool were under strict supervision. Our idea, apart from the actual procurement of arms, was to organise our Western men to find arms for us. Previous to leaving Ireland I had met the North Mayo Commandant, Eamonn Gannon, and had taken him along to the Quartermaster General who gave him a small amount of revolvers, ammunition, etc., together with a share for myself. They were to be delivered, as usual, to the Exchange Hotel through Henshaws.

We met several friends in Liverpool - Tom Reidy, Charlie Barrett and others who were old members of the Mayo Brigade. We journeyed to St. Helen"s and Widnes where we met Liam Malone and - Berry and we arranged for them to pick up arms or explosives from the various mines in which they were working. Dick Walsh remained in England, and after we had had meetings with these chaps was to go on to London. We returned home.

When I reached Dublin the arms, already ordered for both the North and West Mayo Brigades, were delivered to me at the Exchange Hotel. I also found a letter from Gannon, saying that Dublin had got too "hot" for him and

that he had cleared out. He asked me to take down the arms. I duly took the arms to the West, arriving at Maam Cross by late train, in my usual guise of traveller. Maam Cross was at least three miles from the police station and the police rarely came near the station, but that night there was a patrol there, which quite upset all our plans. I arranged quickly with Gibbons to make for the guards' van where the skips were and endeavour to get them into the lock-up for the night while I would engage the attention of the police. I left the carriage just as the patrol reached that point and confronted the sergeant. It was necessary at this time to get a permit to hire a car so I spun him the tale that my brother was dying in Louisburgh and that it was absolutely essential that I get there that night. He said "Wait, boy, until I get the meat" - they were expecting supplies off the train. There were, also, about 12 Tans looking on and I tried to delay the sergeant as long as I possibly could. By this time I had heard the skips being taken out of the train and, as I could not detain the sergeant any longer, we all made for the guards' van. Gibbons had managed to get the skips pulled aside but not into the lock-up. However, the police seemed to be more interested in getting their parcels, which were handed out to them. Then we all adjourned to the local hotel - Peacock's - where we had rounds of drinks. The sergeant became more friendly and whispered to me "Terrible blackguards; held up the people coming from Mass last Sunday", indicating that the men (the Black and Tans) he had with him had done this. We all had rounds of rum and then the

sergeant went to look for a car for me. He eventually found a car and driver for us. He warned us that the driver could not speak English and that in passing the barracks we would want to tell him to pull up when, and if, challenged there. I implored the sergeant to come with us to the barracks as I thought it would be a good idea - for our own sakes - but he could not leave the patrol. Wishing us the best of luck, he went off and we started towards Leenane, passing the barracks unchallenged. The Sergeant had told me before leaving that he could only give us safe conduct as far as Leenane and advised us to stay there for the night as he could not be responsible for anything that might happen on the rest of the route. When we reached Leenane we paid the driver, telling him that we were going to spend the night there. We then went into the Leenane Hotel, knocked up Jack Conneely, the driver of the hotel car who was one of our own men, and then drove back to Maam Cross again, via Recess. We managed to load our arms safely and then returned to Leenane. We dumped the guns in a public house on Killary Bay until such time as we could come from Westport to collect them. We eventually brought them to Pete Tunney of Coshlough.

My next journey was in conjunction with our agent, Dick Walsh, whom I had left in England. He had written for funds and on one Saturday night I risked going into Westport to visit Jim Rush, who used collect despatches and funds for us at Messrs. Shanleys of Westport. When I arrived in the town there was a lot of police about. I was carrying an American '45 automatic at full cock with

the safety catch on, in my pocket. I had a chat with Rush at the counter in Shanleys and at one point had to take my hands out of my pockets to take some papers from him. The '45 toppled over in my pocket. I put my hand into my pocket, pulled over the gun, at the same time putting my finger on the trigger. The safety catch must have got caught in the lining and was released and the gun went off, the bullet splitting my knee cap. I limped out and went through an old place called "the shambles". It was dark. I fell there but managed to drag myself along until I heard somebody approaching. Instinctively I seemed to recognise the footsteps and it turned out to be Chappie Burke. He recognised me then and helped me along to James Street where I went into Conways, adjacent to the local R.I.C. Barracks. They fetched a doctor for me and he bandaged my knee: the patella had been smashed. Later, I was dumped into the midnight mail car coming from the 3 a.m. train and taken to the local Union Hospital - I spent the night there in the Fever wing. Dr. Gill came in the morning, dressed the wound and I stayed there all Sunday. There was a Volunteer named Thomas Gill from Lecanvey in another ward and it seems ammunition of some description was found on his land. The result was that the hospital was surrounded. Bruddy Malone happened to be with me at the time and when the troops fired a shot he put me on his back, carried me out of the hospital and down to the boundary wall which ran close to a railroad leading to Westport Quay. I fell down the far side of the wall. Bruddy encouraged me now and again to keep going by saying "Ellis (the hangman) is waiting for you". I

crawled and was carried most of the way for about a mile down the track and spent a miserable night in a cottage owned by a Mrs. O'Grady. Next day I was removed to Rosbeg, to the care of two English ladies named Jackson who had come from India and settled down there. I was very well treated there and a nurse used come to dress my wound. I spent a week there and on the following Monday heard through Connolly, a chemist, that Derrig, the Brigadier, had been arrested in his own home. This upset me and I asked Connolly to pick me up on his way in to Westport, which he did, despite all the protests of my hostesses. I called in at the Workhouse again to tell the nurse not to come out to me that evening.

The Monday after Bloody Sunday Gibbons and I set off for Liverpool again. We arrived there on Tuesday morning and got in touch with the various men we had met previously and received good reports of their search for arms. Later we went to London to meet Dick Walsh. We arrived in Euston and found the place in mourning for the British officers killed in Dublin. I had lost Walsh's address but had an idea he lodged in Hackney Road. We walked up and down Hackney Road; I was trying to remember the number of the house. We returned to the hotel but after lunch returned to the district again. On enquiring at a house a woman said she thought some Irish people lived in No. 18. On looking down the area-way of No. 18, we saw our quarry! We gave him some money which he needed badly and got a report from him. He had procured plenty of arms and I told him I would make arrangements for their transport to Ireland. We returned

to the hotel with one of the Carr family and then left from Euston. Lord French was travelling on the boat that night so we could have taken any amount of material with us for all attention was, naturally, focused on the Lord Lieutenant and on his safety.

In Dublin I began to make arrangements for the transport of the arms collected in England. Collins was enraged at our going independently to England without permission from Headquarters as he maintained this would upset the market and our channels of supplies. However, he promised that I should get some of the stuff, but I never did.

We returned home to the West where I spent Christmas. The columns were now being organised - Kilroy had been appointed Brigadier; Moane was Vice Brigadier; Seán Gibbons was Adjutant and I was Quartermaster of the Brigade. The four Battalion columns were Castlebar, Westport, Newport and Louisburgh, with Westport being the best-equipped of the four. Although maintaining their separate identity the four sub columns combined to form a Brigade Column when necessary. I had taken down arms for the North Mayo Brigade and was in favour of distributing these to them, but some of the officers did not agree with this idea for they maintained that it was I who had to go to all the trouble in procuring them. Eventually I gave 6 Service rifles to the North Mayo Brigade.

All this time my wounded leg was deteriorating and when I went to Dublin again in the Spring of 1921 in

connection with the transport of the arms from England, Collins wanted to know why I was so lame. He looked at my leg and ordered me into the Mater Hospital. I went there next day under the alias of James Campbell of Charlestown, Co. Mayo. I was examined next morning and I was given to understand that my leg would have to be amputated. I begged them not to do this. During this period British Army doctors visited the hospital to ascertain if any wounded I.R.A. men were being treated as patients there. They had not the co-operation of the hospital authorities who concealed us successfully. I was operated on and woke up to find two tubes attached to my leg, draining the knee. They had discovered it was sinovitis. It was while I was in hospital that I read in the "Herald" one evening of the first ambush in Carrowkennedy, Co. Mayo, which took place on 22nd March, 1921. Next day I read that my own home in Westport, and several others, had been destroyed by way of reprisal. This ambush, I believe, was a chance engagement - a Sergeant of the R.I.C. named Coughlan was killed and the three constables accompanying him were wounded. None of our men were harmed. Whilst in hospital, also, mass hangings were taking place in Mountjoy across the road. Reading about the ambush made me very uneasy so I left hospital after a few days and immediately headed for Mayo, though I was still very lame. I picked up the Westport column at Islandeady. Before leaving Dublin I had been given instructions to keep things moving in the West in order to relieve the pressure in the South. Having joined the column, I immediately started planning ambushes. I got in touch with the Castlebar column and

arranged that the two would amalgamate. The two columns joined forces on the 18th May, 1921. We were all billeted in a village close to Islandeady. We arranged to lay an ambush at a spot known as the Big Wall, which was a boundary wall between the main Castlebar/ Westport road and the railroad, and situated about half-way between Castlebar and Westport. On the night of the 18th May I sent a despatch to the local Volunteer Captain to the effect that when military vehicles passed through the district in the direction of Westport on the following day, a culvert, or trench should immediately be cut in the roadway in order to delay reinforcements after the vehicles had passed.

Next morning I proceeded with the two columns to the Big Wall, placing the Castlebar column on one side of the road and the Westport column on the other. I took charge of the two columns - we had about 40 men in all and about 20 Service rifles; a good supply of short-arms and shotguns, and an abundance of hand grenades. I took a squad of bombers inside the Big Wall. Eventually, a lorry did travel in our direction and the alert was given to our men but, to our great chagrin, the lorry turned on the street of the local public house and proceeded back towards Castlebar again. It seems they came across our men cutting the trench in the road - obviously our people had failed to do as ordered - place scouts on the route - and had opened fire on them, killing two and wounding two. This labour squad or working party of Volunteers were, of course, unarmed. After the lorry had turned back we immediately held a council of war and decided to cross over to the Ballinrobe/

Westport road which ran somewhat parallel at that point, where we hoped to be able to pick up a stray lorry or two. We waited there in ambush until evening without any success and were, of course, very depressed, having lost our men and no enemy casualties or captures to our credit. We abandoned the position, the columns dissolved and we returned to Westport. The R.I.C. and Tans were in Westport and I thought we ought to go in and get them. Some of the column officers were not in favour of this idea as they thought it flavoured too much of Dublin tactics so I asked for a couple of volunteers. Almost the whole column stepped forward but I picked only two - Captain Malone and Lieutenant Joe Baker. We arranged with some local scouts to let us know the position of the patrols in the town on the Saturday night. We lay in a forge on Mill Street, armed with short-arms and a good supply of bombs - G.H.Q. type. There was an open gate in the forge which we intended to rush through on to the street as soon as the patrol would appear. We waited until 10 p.m. when our scouts returned to say that the patrol had gone into the barrack - we were very disappointed but decided to wait until Sunday night for the next attack. In the meantime we spent a very happy day with some friends about a half mile outside Westport. On Sunday night we invaded Westport again. We got on to the Quay railroad where we had an appointment to meet our scouts. We sent them through the town with instructions to come back immediately and tell us where the patrols were. It was not long before one of them returned to tell us that the patrol, consisting of 14 men, were on their way to

Westport Station, about a mile from where we were. We dashed along the railroad for about a mile - it was hard going for we were heavily loaded, and Baker, who had been ill, found it difficult to keep pace with us. We dashed on to a bridge known as the Red Bridge, which spanned Altamount Street. Looking down on the street I was amazed to see the police all in a group at McGreal's publichouse on the Westport side of the bridge. I must have made some noise for they looked up. I called to Bruddy Malone and made a joke about how easy the job was. However, the police immediately dispersed in pairs and went under the bridge towards the station. I went to the other side of the bridge, where they would emerge, let the first pair go on about 20 yards and then dropped the first bomb. It seemed an eternity before it went off but it did. The explosion was soon drowned in the sound of the other bombs going off. The night was made hideous by the shouting of wounded police and windows being broken in the houses. Verey lights were sent up from the police barracks immediately. Due to the fact that Baker was not well, we had to get away quickly, but at least we had achieved our object. There were at least seven casualties out of the fourteen men in the patrol. All during our journey back the Verey lights kept troubling us and, at one point, I actually walked into a lake. We found our column at Liscarney, just outside Westport.

Next morning we heard that a lorry, laden with British troops, had broken down at Leenane. We expected that aid would be rushed to them so we took up a position

immediately at Brackloon Wood on the main Westport/Leenane road. We waited there for several hours without result. While waiting, a despatch was brought to me to make for the Partry Mountains to relieve Commandant Tom Maguire and the men of the South Mayo Brigade column who were fighting a running battle in Tourmakeady. We immediately set out for Partry (the Castlebar column had rejoined us), arriving there in the evening. We called at a house owned by people named Tunney at the foot of the mountain, where we were told that our men had got away successfully and that there was no use in our proceeding. Still hoping that the lorry would turn up, we marched back to the Erriff Valley on the Westport/Leenane road and took up position there next day, but nothing came of it.

We next billeted in a village named Cloonskill in the Aughgower area. We were joined here by the rest of the Brigade staff - Kilroy, Gibbons, Moane and some of the Newport column. The Louisburgh column came along later. It was now decided to form the Brigade column, consisting of the four Battalion columns and numbering about 55 men. Kilroy took charge of the column and I was Quartermaster.

Our next plan was to stage an ambush at Kilmeena on the 19th May. The Westport column was sent to Ardagommon Wood to billet and to await orders. A couple of the Newport column men were sent to Newport town to snipe the barracks. During the sniping a Sergeant Butler of the Newport Garrison was seen to enter the barrack and, though our sniper was not a long distance sniper, he managed to kill the Sergeant. The idea of this sniping was to

entice reinforcements of troops to Newport. The whole Brigade column, with the exception of the Westport men, were now concentrated in one place. The Westport section were really the best armed of the lot. They were to hold up a train at Ardagommon, which they did, taking off all the mails.

The rest of the Brigade column laid an ambush on the Westport/Newport main road at Kilmeena. Stations were being held in the local chapel, near to our point of ambush, and the motor traffic on the road was very heavy. The morning passed and at noon there was still no sign of any troops, despite the death of the policeman at Newport. Our ambush party consisted of right and left flanking parties - the main body taking up position in a field in between. Our cover was a big sod ditch. We expected the enemy to approach from Westport. We were in a bad position for on our left and right flanks there were two by-roads, which intervened between the main party and the flanking parties. About 2 p.m. the men began to get hungry and I, as Quartermaster, decided I had better forage for some food. I had heard cackling in an outhouse nearby so, calling one of the lads named Jim Kelly, we both went to investigate and were lucky enough to find a cluster of White Wyandotte chickens. We decapitated enough to feed the column. Kelly and I took the chickens to our left flank position where there was a house we knew. We plucked and cleaned them there and before long an appetising aroma pervaded the air! We never had the pleasure of consuming them, however, for just as the meal was ready we heard shots ring out

at the ambush point - the enemy had arrived. We grabbed our belts: Kelly had a long Mauser and I had a Peter-the-Painter. Our left flank was rested on the Westport side. One lorry had managed to dash through this flank without being fired on. Our men had been so long in ambush point that most of them had fallen asleep - the noise of the lorries did not disturb them much for they had been listening all day to cars going up and down, carrying people to the local church. A sentry on the right or Newport flank seems to have been the only one to have fired a shot at the lorry. The second lorry stopped at our position, on the Westport flank, and machine guns were soon in action on both flanks. Kelly and I had come right/out under the nose of the rear lorry and we immediately came under fire as we were in an open field. It seems our own flanks did not last long as we could hear no shooting at all from them. The main party received the brunt of the firing from two machine guns. Several of our men had fallen already with the first blast; sod ditches were cut in pieces and retreat from the first fences to fences in the rear began. After a hectic time on the road, Kelly and I managed to get back to the ambush point where our wounded men were being taken away. Several were lying on the field, apparently dead, but we were unable to get any of them away, due to the heavy crossfire. What was left of our main body endeavoured to prevent the enemy from advancing up the two by-roads on our left and right flanks and thereby getting on our rear. With our wounded men we began to retreat, whilst others fought

a rearguard action. We fell back on Kelly's of the half-parish at my father's old home. The enemy, if they had had any initiative, could have wiped us all out that day, but the rearguard kept them at bay. They lost contact with us and eventually withdrew from the ambush position. We regrouped at Kelly's where a local nurse named Lottie Joyce dressed our wounded. We could still hear the enemy firing back at Kilmeena. Five of our men were killed, four wounded and captured and one unwounded, captured. Three or four others were wounded but they escaped, and, of course, we lost some rifles and shotguns. We waited until nightfall, trying to pick up our scattered men, while rumours of enemy reinforcements arriving etc., kept reaching us. We commandeered any available horses, strapped our wounded on them and started the long trek across country through very rough terrain to Nephin mountain, below Newport. As my leg was very bad and I was still suffering from the effects of pleurisy, I, too, was carried on horseback. We were very depressed after our defeat and the stories we heard en route did nothing to help for we heard that the Tans had pitched our dead and wounded into the lorries; covered them with tarpaulin and danced on them through the streets of Westport.

We finally arrived in a village called Skirdagh at the foot of Nephin and billeted our wounded in Upper Skirdagh, nearer to the mountain, whilst the main body stayed in the village of Lower Skirdagh. Next day - Saturday - we took stock of our position, counting our losses of men and guns. Dr. Madden, who was with the column, tended to the wounded, having in some cases to amputate toes, etc. The Westport column, which had

raided a train commandeered mails and money which latter came in very useful later on. If this section had been with us at Kilmeena it would have helped considerably for they were very well armed. What affected us at Kilmeena was our lack of serviceable weapons and the fact that the men were so fatigued from waiting around so long. A Volunteer named James Browne was caught on the road by the police and he fired point blank from a shotgun at the Head Constable without any effect - the cartridge was a dud - he beat a hasty retreat over the hedge.

We spent the Saturday and Sunday billeted in Skirdagh - I was staying in a house called Lavelles. We had approximately 26 men in good fighting condition and on the Sunday night some of them went to a wake in the village. Just before dawn on Monday morning as they were returning, I awoke to hear Eamonn Moane say that the police had surrounded us. I happened to be sleeping in a room beside the street. I was dubious about this report as we had already had several false alarms. Anne Lavelle told me to get out of bed quickly as she had seen a lot of black garbed men approaching. I told her they were probably cattle and went back to bed again. The next thing I knew was that the blankets were being pulled off me so I had to get out of bed. My shirt was being washed and I had to go without it. I put on all available garments, grabbed my gun and went out the backway. I saw a dark group which I took to be a turf stack for it was still very dark and misty and I walked towards it. The next thing I saw was the group dispersing

and in a few minutes they were shooting towards the houses - they were Black and Tans, and were now operating between Upper and Lower Skirdagh. There was a little river between us and Upper Skirdagh, which ran at the back of the houses and as Jim Browne, who had been staying in a house to my right, tried to cross it by the stepping stones which were, of course, wet and slippery, he was shot in the stomach and had to turn back, severely wounded. Kilroy and Connolly on the previous evening had gone to meet their relatives at a place called Tiernaur. Fortunately for us, they returned about dawn and, on hearing the firing, they advanced cautiously until they saw what the position was. They were now at the rear of the Tans and opened fire on them. This was a surprise to the Tans for they then assumed they were themselves surrounded. This gave us the chance to dash towards the left flank of the Tans and endeavour to get to the wounded men who were in Upper Skirdagh for it was essential that we get them away safely - most of them were staying in a house called McDonnells. We eventually managed to get there and held a hasty council of war. Horses were procured and the wounded were again strapped on to them. The firing was still going on for some of our men were still on their way up, holding off the Tans. Moane and the rest of the men, with the exception of Kilroy, Paddy Cannon, Jack McDonagh, Dr. Madden, Connolly and myself, were sent off in charge of the wounded in the direction of Glenlaura Valley, which would lead them out towards Mallaranney. The six of us who remained behind began to take up positions

under cover of small heather-covered hillocks, known locally as Turtógs. It was between 5 and 6 a.m. when we started to fight and what was originally intended as a rearguard action now became an offensive as we advanced from cover to cover. Our strategy was to fire when we espied an enemy and then, leaving the cover, to dash for another. As the morning had now become brighter, it was easy to discern the black outline of the Tans' uniform as they crawled along the ground. Our trouble now was shortage of ammunition but we discovered that we had about 300 rounds of .303 which the Newport column had previously captured from a British officer and, as we also discovered, it was explosive ammunition. We had to make use of this in our extremity and the British later on made great propaganda out of this - calling us Huns, etc. - but actually it was part of their own ammunition. The morning passed slowly, with desultory firing going on. Kilroy suggested that Paddy Cannon and I, who were close together, should try a capture. He asked me to approach the enemy left flank and Cannon the right, thinking that the enemy might surrender. We started to advance upon the enemy, crawling along the ground, our guns strapped to our stomachs - it was about noon. We were about half way between the enemy and our own men when, on looking towards the Newport/Castlebar road which lay on our right some distance away, we saw lorry after lorry-load of troops approaching. We had to get back quickly to our comrades, who had already become aware of what was happening. Our only hope nowwas a hasty retreat through Glenlaura but looking towards the skyline at the end of the valley we discovered to our

horror that our only line of retreat was cut off - dozens of troops were advancing on us from that point. There was nothing to do now but to sell our lives as dearly as possible or else face capture, torture and death. Kilroy decided we should climb the side of the mountain through various small ravines which would give us some cover and, as well, the colour of our coats was a good camouflage. About half way up we decided to lie there for it would have been impossible to go any further without giving ourselves away. The enemy was closing in, raking the valley with machine gun and rifle fire. The sun was shining and we had to cover our rifles in case they would be seen glistening. The troops had now come close to us and I saw a policeman pass within a few yards on his way to meet the other party. Most of them, however, stayed in the valley and we thought it astonishing that they had not come across any of our wounded men. Luckily Moane had gone in a different direction from that intended or he would have met the British reinforcements arriving. He and his party got safely away. From our position we could now see that the two enemy parties had met at Upper Skirdagh and we heard shooting at the houses. We crawled to the top of the hill, which actually was one of the foothills of Nephin, and found perfect cover there in the natural breast works formed through the ages by the action of nature. We had a large telescope, also captured from the British officer from whom the explosive had been taken, and we trained this on the enemy who now began to move down towards Lower Skirdagh. We could see them carrying burdens - probably wounded or dead and, later on, when

the ambulances arrived, these men were loaded into them. All that day most of the activity took place between Upper and Lower Skirdagh and, though there were troops in abundance, they seemed to be more concerned with taking statements from the people in the houses than in endeavouring to capture us. We were suffering from hunger and thirst and anxiously awaited nightfall. More troops kept coming in by lorry and we knew that it was the preliminary to an intensive search. Our chances of escape were very slight for we were completely hemmed in. The troops, of course, had got the idea that there were very many more of us than there were. Night fell at last and under cover of darkness we approached Upper Skirdagh again for we knew that there was fresh salmon to eat in McDonnells' house. The house was riddled so we decided to enter it in pairs, the other four standing guard outside. The first pair fell over two dead pigs which had been shot by the raiders that morning. The McDonnells, who were more concerned with our safety than their own preservation, gave us a meal and told us of the events of the day. It seems the troops had taken the doors off the barns to use as stretchers and had threatened the people not to divulge anything of what they had seen that morning. There had been several casualties. Jim Browne, who had been wounded while crossing the little river that morning, was dropped off a stretcher while being carried to an ambulance and died shortly afterwards. Their report of how the troops were situated left us little hope of getting through for we were completely ringed in but we decided to take a chance. Having finished our meal we

packed bread and salmon, which we put in jars, into our haversacks. We also hung an uncooked salmon on the end of one of the rifles. We crawled towards Lower Skirdagh; this all took time for our progress had to be very slow. We could hear the troops talking and did not know from second to second when we would be discovered, but we had to try to get out some way. At about 3 a.m. we passed through the cordon at a point which we considered to be their weakest, and continued on in the direction of the Westport/Castlebar road, across a very long field known as the Horse Field. Just as we reached the road about dawn, we saw arcs of light in the sky advancing towards us - more lorries were approaching. Needless to say we all took flying leaps across the large dykes which bordered the road but Dr. Madden, who was last, did not clear the dyke and so had to lie there quietly up to his neck in mud and water. There was only the dyke between us and the troops. Reinforcements kept arriving and some mules and big guns came up later. After a while they all moved on towards Skirdagh and we continued across very swampy ground towards the village of Glenisland - we were very fatigued, having had no sleep for two nights. After having a meal of our salmon in one of the houses there, we went to bed and awoke to the sound of big guns. Somebody had procured a newspaper and we read with great gusto that "over 1,000 rebels had been surrounded on Nephin Mountain", and that it was only a matter of time until they were annihilated. We found it most amusing to read of this 'famous battle' which had actually been fought by six Irish soldiers! We never heard the true version of the number of casualties

but there were large and rumour had it that the bodies were despatched to England in bacon boxes. We had only one casualty - poor Jim Browne.

We were now subject to constant military activity and had to keep continually on the move and had to make the best use we could of the few hours of darkness, for the days were now very long. The six of us were isolated, of course, for we had no idea where the rest of the column was and we were also short of ammunition as we had had no serious capture and wondered how we could replenish our supplies. After days of travelling we eventually picked up the column at Cloonskill, where the Westport men also rejoined us - this, of course, had a very heartening effect. We rested for a few days and on the night of the 31st May we made for Drummon. The police barracks there had been evacuated after the first Carrowkennedy ambush and we burned this, successfully. We billeted that night in the village of Oughty. Next day, June 1st, we travelled to a village called Claddagh, near Carrowkennedy, and were having something to eat at about 4 p.m. about a quarter of a mile in from the road when word came that two enemy lorries and a Ford car had stopped opposite the village on the main Westport/ Leenane road. There happened to be a trench in the road at Carrowkennedy and the enemy commandeered local labour to fill this in. This gave us plenty of time to be alerted. The lorries then moved off towards Leenane. It seems they were going to serve a summons on an old man living in Letterass for non-attendance at court. They gave him a rough time, firing over his head and terrorising him but, as they left, he shouted, "Do not

waste your ammunition; you may need it before you get home". And that is how we met the enemy at Carrowkennedy for, in the meantime, we had had time to take up positions along the road, knowing they would probably return that way. It was on the site of an old barrack hut which had previously been destroyed. Half of our men were placed on a hill overlooking the Leenane side of the road and their instructions were to allow the first lorry and Ford car through and to engage the second lorry. On the other side snipers had been placed with instructions to snipe the drivers. This they did very successfully for the first lorry ran in against the ditch and some of the police fell out. The second lorry was engaged according to plan and had stopped about 50 yards in the rear of the first - the Ford car was behind this lorry. Firing was rapid and then we discovered that the first lorry had a machine gun. It gave a few short bursts and then was silent - the gunner had been killed. We heard another burst, but it remained silent after that. Firing continued from the lorry. Rifle grenades then began to fall near us and after two hours hard fighting John Duffy and I received an order from Kilroy to outflank the first lorry. We made our way under cover to the road on the Westport side but had barely reached the road when we heard an explosion in the lorry and then saw a rifle, to which was attached a white handkerchief, being put over the top of the lorry. Duffy and I advanced warily up the road towards the lorry - desultory firing was going on at the position of the second lorry. Firing had ceased at the first lorry and we closed in, to find all the men either wounded or dead, with the

exception of one policeman. I let down the tailboard of the lorry and a dreadful sight met my eyes. It seemed that in the course of firing a grenade one of the occupants was struck by a bullet, thus dropping his rifle and releasing the grenade in the lorry. Half his head was blown off, another man's hands were gone and the complete woodwork of a Lee Enfield rifle had been blown into the legs and stomach of another man, whom I recognised as a policeman named Cregan - a man who had done me a good turn previous to this during a raid on Westport Workhouse. At least two men were lying at the base of the machine gun stand. They had apparently been shot in trying to get the machine gun into action. While removing the wounded men and the dead, the police in the second lorry, who had taken up position in the house of a widow adjacent to the road, started firing on us from a gable window. I turned towards them and shouted "If that happens again, I shall shoot all these wounded men", a remark out of which the British made great propaganda later on. Volunteers were sent down to the house, escorting the only sound policeman left from the first lorry who was carrying a white flag and had instructions to call on the other policemen in the house to surrender or we would not be responsible for what would happen. They did not surrender immediately but endeavoured to get the children of the house to go out and bring in ammunition from their lorry for them. We picked up all the guns and ammunition from the first lorry and Jimmie Flaherty, an ex-soldier, began to prepare the machine gun for action on the house. Eventually the police marched out with their hands up and surrendered

their arms to us. We left the first lorry and while going towards the second I noticed a notorious Tan named French lying in the dyke on the side of the road. He was dying, so I lifted him out and made him as comfortable as possible. There was another Sergeant named Hanlon whom Bruddy Malone and I were anxious to interview for he had beaten up our people at home. Kilroy seemed to guess what we had in mind for he came up behind us and told us "to have no tricks now". We discovered later that Kilroy had released this man, who had made off for Westport for assistance. We proceeded to search the Tans, collecting all their arms and putting them together, and then got ready to burn the lorries. We allowed all the prisoners to go free and several of the Tans, taking off their coats, threw them into the burning lorries saying, "We are finished with this game". At least three of them left Westport next day.

We now only numbered about 22 men for the section who had been on the Leenane side of the road had retreated towards Louisburgh, understanding that they had been given a signal to do so. Our spoils consisted of about 28 rifles, 1 machine gun, dozens of hand grenades and pans of ammunition, enough arms and ammunition, in fact, to equip a column. All this we distributed among our men. As regards the policeman - Cregan - despite the fact that delay at the ambush point was dangerous, I carried him to a house which lay between our position and that of the enemy. I knocked at the door and who came out but a woman known as the Widow Sammon, who had spent a few periods in jail in the Land League days, and who had been

evicted from her farm. She had been reinstated but when I asked her to take Cregan in and give him a drink she said "No: that coat will never enter this house". I had to leave him there, however, for I got word from Kilroy to come away quickly.

We tried a bit of strategy then and started off east towards Ballinrobe in direct view of the Tans. After some distance, however, we turned to our right and moved parallel with the Leenane road again, recrossing the road at a point about 2 miles south from the ambush point. We moved on towards Drummon. The lorries were still burning brightly but as we were all heavily laden with the spoils of battle and had to disperse as quickly as possible, we did not stop to enjoy this sight. We crossed a mountain to a village called Durless just on the Louisburgh side of that range - just under Croagh Patrick. Moane, myself and a few others billeted here in two houses owned by brothers named Joyce and we always, afterwards, called this place "No Woman"s Land" for the reason that there was no female in either houses. We had had no casualties at Carrowkennedy. We spent the day resting in Durless but could actually see the ambush point from the top of the hill behind the house. It was amazing that, though the ambush was over about 10 p.m. the night before, British troops and police did not arrive at the scene until about 4 or 5 a.m. next morning, when it was too late to save at least some of the wounded. Incidentally, an amusing incident occurred in this ambush. It seems a man from the second lorry had managed to shelter under a culvert on the road and though he spent an agonising time dodging the bullets of our men who had

seen him, he escaped unscathed ~~and fired into the culvert~~. It was only sometime afterwards that we discovered he was a little driver named Delahunty - a civilian - who had been commandeered to drive the second lorry.

Leaving Durless, we moved on towards Louisburgh where we picked up the rest of the column who had retired at Carrowkennedy. Summer was well in and we daren't stay long in any one place for the round-up was continuous and the troops knew we were somewhere in the area.

By July we had moved on towards Nephin Mountain. We went back to Skirdagh where a famous photograph of the column was taken by Jack Leonard of Crossmolina - this became known as The Men of the West. On Sunday, 3rd July, the whole column moved to a place called Owenwee but had scarcely arrived there when our dispatch riders from Westport arrived to tell us that huge concentrations of enemy troops had arrived in the town. Something big was on foot and our later despatches said there was going to be a big round-up. Castlebar, Ballinrobe and other towns were also full of troops. We immediately held a Brigade Council meeting and decided that our column was too big a target and that we should split up, dumping all arms except shortarms. A number of our officers were due to go to Connemara to courtmartial a man named Joyce who, it transpired later, had been forced to go for reinforcements during an ambush in West Connemara.

Dr. Madden, Moane, Kilroy, Jim Rushe and I set off for the Sheffry Mountains late on the night of July 3rd -

we could hear the violent barking of sheep dogs and knew that something was afoot. We marched until about 4 a.m. and climbed a road known as the Rock Road of Sheffry, which looks down on the Drummon/Westport road. Moane and Madden had gone on in front, whilst Kilroy, Rushe and I remained behind. We sat down on the top of Sheffry Rock Road and, while resting, discussed mineral ore for this happened to be the site of an old lead and silver mines. We were about to continue our march - Moane and Madden had gone on - when Kilroy suddenly exclaimed, "Do my eyes decieve me"?, and there, round the bend under our feet, came lorry after lorry of British troops. It seemed we were keeping a rendezvous with our friends fifteen miles from where we had started! It was now dawn. The lorries stopped at the end of the Rock Road where the troops struck camp. We took to our heels and ran on for about a mile to a house called Gibbons of Glendamough where we thought we would find Moane and Madden. I was wearing a pair of new boots and the run to this house did not improve the condition of my heels! We knocked up the people of the house, inquiring whether the two men had arrived, but they hadn't. Kilroy then suggested that I go back about a mile to a house owned by people named Hoban of Tawneyard to see whether Moane and Madden were there but I was, once again, disappointed. I was leaving Hobans on my way back when, on looking between the gap of the road where we had first seen the enemy, I saw the first of the troops coming towards me. I left the roadway and ran along a deep dyke towards Gibbons - the troops were now on the hills - what seemed to be hundreds of them. We went up the glen at the back of the

house, keeping to the river bed in order not to leave any tracks. When we arrived at the end of the glen we took up our position under some overhanging rocks which must have fallen from the cliffs above, centuries before. We had decided that there would be no danger from our rear for anyone approaching would have to come down the cliff face. We could see Gibbons' house being raided and noticed the troops searching the valley and the river bank for tracks. Rush and I were on one side with our arms resting on the rocks whilst Kilroy was at the end of the rock. We lay in that position all day, while planes swooped and dived overhead and lorries kept passing by. Evening came and suddenly, to our dismay, we heard English accents behind our position. I immediately pulled my gun and on looking out and up from my cover, I saw a man whom I took to be an Auxiliary standing right beside where my hands were resting! He was making some remarks about "caves" to another pal whom we could not see. I said to Rush "Ask Michael if I should shoot" but Rush responded by putting his finger to his mouth. The Auxiliary turned on his heel and we could hear them going up the hill. We were at a loss to know how they were able to get up there. This was the closest shave we ever had and afterwards we always called this spot "The Narrow-Shave Rock". We could see more lorries along the foothills and afterwards heard that some of our men in the Drummon area had a terrible time. One man named Paddy Duffy posed as an old, stooped man and, taking a stick to make the role more realistic, walked across a field under the noses of the raiding party!

We waited under the rocks until we heard the whistles recalling the troops from the hills at dusk and, when darkness fell, we made our way back to Gibbons' house. We were still worried about Moane and Madden. In Gibbons we were told that the troops were camped at the foot of Sheffry and that the round-up was to be continuous - we had been hoping that it would be over in one day. We were ravenous and almost unconscious from lack of sleep so, having been given some food, we asked if we could sleep there for a few hours. We hid our guns and, in order not to leave the people of the house open to the terrorism of the enemy, we slept in an old bed in the barn. In the event of a raid while we slept, we had told the Gibbons to say we had broken into the house. It seemed as if we had hardly closed our eyes when we were pulled out of bed by Austin Gibbons - lorries were already moving on the road and another day of terror had begun for us. We strapped on our guns and went into the little garden and lay down under some gooseberry bushes, while we tried to decide what was best to do in our extremity. We could hear the hum of an aeroplane. We decided to make tracks for a mountain over Towneyard Lake and as we moved along the side of the mountain we had to keep dodging the plane which kept swooping down in search of us. We eventually found a little hole in the rocks into which the three of us could just fit. It was about half way up the mountain and the Lake was directly under us. We had a perfect view of the Sheffry/Doolough road and could see the troop movements. This spot we christened the Eagle's Nest. At about 7 a.m.

dozens of troops came along to the lake and had a swim. At midday Austin Gibbons came along. He was shouting at a sheep dog "Go wide", under the pretence of collecting an imaginary herd. He managed to give us some cake to eat. At nightfall we made an attempt to reach the peak of the mountain but when we arrived there we saw the search lights from the destroyers in Killary sweeping the mountains. Troops were searching the foothills along the Leenane/Westport road and the night was weird with the cries of soldiers lost in the inaccessible ravines. We decided to return to our nest and stayed there again the following day. Next night we took a chance and went down to a cottage at Ashlea on the Westport side of Leenane. We were given bacon and eggs to eat. We were ravenous and gulped down the food, but got violently ill afterwards. The Erriff River ran between Ashlea and Leenane, which, of course, was packed with troops. The hills were being combed each night and we were told that it was as much as our lives were worth to cross the river and road. Despite this, we picked up a local guide and proceeded on our way along the river towards Westport. The guide led us along the bank until we came to a water bailiff's house. Kilroy, in order not to alarm the woman of the house, asked our guide to go in and tell her it was the I.R.A., and not the Auxiliaries, who wished to get in. But, as the guide happened to be a poacher, he refused to do this. Kilroy then entered the house and, though the woman at first objected strongly, he was eventually able to arrange for our staying the night there. We were just entering the house when Kilroy called the guide to thank him but as the latter

turned away, Kilroy administered three swift kicks for he was very angry at the guide's refusal to do as he was bid. We waited in the house next day, watching the troops travel to and fro between Westport and Leenane. That night we picked up another guide who led us into the hills across the Westport-Leenane road, on the Galway side - we were now outside the cordon and felt safer. We continued on to Kilmeelickin in Connemara where we promised ourselves a long rest. We were told here that Leenane was packed with Auxiliaries from Galway but they were not raiding on the Connemara side. This was Friday night and we had been on the run since the previous Monday: a week without rest. We went to bed there and slept until Sunday morning. At about noon on Sunday word was brought to us that there was a stranger in the village inquiring for us but, being very wary, we did not divulge anything. After various interchanges, we discovered that it was Domhnall O'Donoghue, a courier from G.H.Q., who astonished us by saying that the Cease Fire was to take place at 11 o'clock next day, 11th July. This was such a surprise, we could hardly credit it!

When we were dispersing at Owenwee the previous week, we had made arrangements with our men that we would all converge on Cloonskill again when the round-up was over. Having had dinner that Sunday, we started back again on foot and crossed the mountain to the Leenane road. We spotted a sidecar on the roadside and somebody suggested that we should make use of it. We went into the barn, tackled the horse and were just putting it under the shafts when a lorry came into view,

travelling from Westport in the direction of Leenane. We fled into the barn but the owner, who had come on the scene, continued to tackle the horse. The lorry passed but it had scarcely gone any distance when it turned back towards us again. It seems a rug had been dropped on the road and they came back looking for it. It turned again and went on. We then drove the horse and car on towards Westport and turned in off the road at Coshlough, which leads across to Cloonskill where all our men had been dribbling in during the previous night. It was here that we learned what had happened to Moane and Madden. It seems they had turned off the old road which ran along the lake (Towneyard?) and which led them to a village called Erriff. They had actually been staying in the house of another water bailiff, not far from the one in which we harboured! We all rejoiced that none of our men had been captured, despite all the hazards, for we heard that the cavalry, too, had been patrolling the roads.

General Macready, British Commander-in-Chief, remarked afterwards that just as the Truce was called, he had practically cornered the "biggest murder gang" in the west of Ireland. In actual fact his only victory was the capture of one man named Andy Harney. Thus ended the biggest round up in the whole country.

We spent the night swopping our experiences and the next day we all assembled, seeing each other off with a few parting volleys. Each man took home his small arms with him, all other arms being dumped for the time being.

Our morale was one hundred per cent. We had just come out of one of the biggest rounds up without any loss. We were much better equipped than at the start as a result of our capture at Carrowkennedy. We could have armed a second column now. We had gained considerable experience in guerilla warfare and learned some good tactical lessons the hard way.

Man for man we believed we could match and beat any force the British might send against us and outwit them at their own game.

The general procedure was whenever the column moved into a battalion area, that battalion was responsible for the security of the column, but we took no chances in this respect and usually supplied our own guards and sentries in addition to what measures the battalion took.

Intelligence service in the area was not well organised - particularly on the higher level. All units had their own Intelligence groups and they were very useful in warning us of enemy concentrations which prevented rounds up, arrests and so forth. Information regarding the enemy's plans or intentions were, however, not available and what actions we had were purely hit or miss affairs or as the result of a situation created by us to draw the enemy out. We were not concerned about enemy strengths as we never could hope to match them in that respect and of necessity had to pick our ground to fight them on.

As regards supplies of clothes, boots, etc. for the

men on the column we generally sent orders to the local shopkeepers who rarely failed to rally to our aid. For food we lived on the countryside and usually killed sheep to provide us with meat. The ordinary people of the countryside were very good and never failed to help us out. Often we were able to provide foodstuffs for some of the poorer people.

Early in the campaign we used to make bombs out of the boxes from cartwheels and actually threw one of them into a barracks where it exploded with a terrific bang. We did not go in for mining the roads or making land mines. Our strategy was a hit and run affair. We did make a lot of buckshot in the area which was filled into cartridges.

Communications internally in the brigade was by dispatch riders on cycles mostly, and in this respect we were helped out considerably by the ladies of Cumann na mBan. From brigade to G.H.Q. in Dublin all dispatches were carried by the railway officials or with their co-operation and a right efficient job they made of it.

The Truce to us was bewildering and we did not know what to make of it. None of us took it that the war was over for long and assumed that the peace would be only temporary.

However, we were glad for the respite - glad to get home to see our people and to get proper rest and regular meals once again and to fall asleep without a "gun" in our hand.

I became a member of the local circle of the I.R.B. in 1917. Joe McBride was the Centre or head of the circle. Amongst the members of the circle that I remember were Tom Nevin, John McDonagh, Thomas O'Brien, Bruddy O'Reilly, Tom Connor, Eddie Mayock, Tom Derrig, Charlie Gavan, Ned Sammon, Eamon Sammon and myself. There were others that I cannot remember now. We usually held meetings once a month and paid a small subscription towards the funds of the ~~Centre~~ CIRCLE I.R. The members were mostly the men who were arrested after the Rebellion in 1916, and later on when conditions became dangerous the organisation died out and did not become active again until after the Truce. At no time did it yield any influence over the Volunteers or I.R.A. and it did not seem to serve any useful purpose.

There were no individuals executed in the Brigade area for espionage or informing, although there were some very suspicious cases which looked as if the enemy had been given prior information of our intentions. But we never got a chance to get down to investigate such cases.

Signed Thomas Ketterick
(Thomas Ketterick)

Date: June 27th 1913

Witness: Matthew Barry Comd't.
(Matthew Barry) Comd't.