ROINN COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 881

Witness

James Kilmartin,
Cutteen,
Monard,
Co. Tipperary.

Identity.

Member of Irish Volunteers, Solohead,
Co. Tipperary, 1917 - ;

Second in Command, No. 1 Flying Column
3rd Tipperary Brigade.

Subject.

Irish Volunteers, Co. Tipperary,
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Statement of James Kilmartin,

Cutteen, Monard, Co. Tipperary.

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STATEMENT BY JAMES KILMARTIN,

Cutteen, Monard, County Tipperary.

I was born at Barnaleen, near Solohead, in March, 1897, i.e. nearby where I am living at present. I was educated at the local National School of Newtown. Both my parents were farming folk and I was reared on the land near where I still continue to farm on my own account. I left school at about 16 years of age and I remember that what we knew as the National Volunteers started some time about then or soon afterwards.

When I left National School I went to attend the Agricultural School at Athenry where I spent about a year or so and it was during that time that I remember the Volunteers were formed for when I came back I joined the Volunteers which I afterwards knew as the Redmondite Volunteers. At the time I did not realise that there was any distinction. The Redmondite Volunteers were the only Volunteers existing in my native place and they continued to exist for a short time but gradually faded away. Consequently, at the time of the Rising and for some time before it there was no Volunteer Unit existing in Solohead, but following the Rising Seán Treacy, moving around amongst us, encouraged us to form a unit in Solohead which we did. This was some time in 1917, I think. At any rate, it was fairly soon after the Rising, and in the beginning we only had five or six men in the unit. I cannot remember exactly the date of this reorganisation but I remember well the first meeting that was called by Seán Treacy in an old fort at Solohead. I had met Treacy before this and so I knew who he was and the kind of man he was. The first time I had met him was at a sports meeting at Bohertrym[illegible] - that would be about 1913 or 1914. He was acting as a steward at this sports meeting and some young fellows were trying to break into the field and he called for assistance. I went to his aid. It was, however, in the week of the Rising, i.e. during Easter Week, 1916, that he came to me at Barnaleen where I lived to ask me if I would carry a message to Ryan of the hotel in Doon.

I was not a Volunteer at this time and I did not know exactly what the message was but I guessed it had to do with the Rising and that Treacy was placing some trust in me by asking me to carry it. He told me to deliver the message into Ryan's own hands, which I did.

At any rate, when the reorganisation took place some time in the beginning of 1917 - I can, of course, only speak for my own Company at Solohead - we did not do very much except a certain amount of drilling and, later on, marching along the roads. This public operating by Volunteers was prohibited by the British authorities at the time but gradually units became more and more daring in their defiance of this ban. It was probably round about the autumn of 1917 when Treacy was arrested and charged with drilling, having appeared in charge of a parade in Solohead. He received a sentence and was in Mountjoy Prison when the hunger strike took place on which Thomas Ashe died. This was September, 1917. After this, he was released as I think a lot of them were at that time under the Cat and Mouse Act, following Ashe's death on hunger strike but, later, he was re-arrested - sometime in the spring of 1918, I think - and again went on hunger strike which was carried on by himself and others in Dundalk Jail until they were released.

About this time, also, there was a general round-up of Volunteer officers. Seemingly, the R.I.C. had made note of those who were drilling and re-organising and of those who were chiefly responsible and, therefore, there were a large number of arrests made. In this way, all the officers of our Company were arrested and this was how I came to be appointed Captain of Solohead Company. I have the recollection that I was appointed Captain of Solohead Company by Treacy and that this was some time following Treacy's first arrest. I have a recollection of a certain amount of drilling, marching and administration being carried on following Ashe's death in Mountjoy on or about 25th September, 1917, but I do not think that I had been appointed Captain at this date. It must, therefore, have been some time after this when Treacy was released but, trying to think back, I am doubtful now whether it was Treacy who was present with Maurice Crowe at my appointment, or whether it was Dan Breen.

However, Maurice Crowe should be able to clear that up as he was the Brigade Adjutant and was present for the appointment. From whatever the date of my appointment as Captain of Solohead Company - it must have been somewhere about the end of 1917 or beginning of 1918 - I carried on in this appointment until the latter end of 1920 when I joined the Brigade Column which was then formed under Dinny Lacey. That would be about October, 1920.

During the time I was Captain of Solohead Company the Company was involved in the usual minor activities common to Volunteer Companies at this period. We raided the trains and the stores at Limerick Junction for military stores which we took possession of or destroyed when we found them. Things like supplies of petrol were secured for our own use as, for instance, during the 1918 elections, and evacuated R.I.C. Barracks, such as the one at Glenbane, were destroyed by fire. I also took part in local attacks on garrisoned R.I.C. Barracks at Cappawhite, Hollyford and Doon. These attacks were less attempts to capture the places than a general policy of harrassing the enemy by firing into the barracks every now and then in the hope of compelling the evacuation of these places. The procedure adopted was generally the same in each case. A few men were picked from each of the surrounding Companies to carry out the attack and the men, divided into suitable parties, were given instructions how to proceed in each particular case. For instance, Hollyford was, I think, the first of these three places to be attacked in January, 1920. In this case it was hoped to capture the barracks and part of the plan was to blow a hole in the wall with gelignite but this plan miscarried. Something went wrong with the explosive or the handling of it and it failed to go off - which left the attacking party unable to assault the barracks: so we fired a few shots into the doors and windows before we withdrew.

These barrack attacks were carried out by us on the orders of the Battalion Commander. He may or may not have had instructions from Brigade Headquarters - I would not know about this.

The next of these attacks was on Cappawhite, which was a very hot fight while it lasted and brought out a display of great heroism in the attackers. I suppose the men were becoming seasoned to some extent at this stage but at any rate ladders were used to climb on to the barrack roof and remove slates in order to set fire to it while, at the same time, other Volunteers kept firing at the doors and windows to keep the police in and the latter tried to fire at the men climbing the ladders. A couple of our men were wounded in this fight. It happened that this attack took place on the night before a fair in Tipperary so that in the small hours of the morning there were people with livestock travelling towards the fair. The attack proved a failure as, notwithstanding our efforts, we were unable to set fire to the place and the police held out. As we withdrew we ran into parties of military who were coming to the relief of the barracks and some further fighting and a lot of shooting took place in our efforts to evade this force. Two of the casualties we had at Cappawhite Barracks were a man from Oola who was shot in the heel and a man named Gorman from Cappawhite who was badly burned with petrol in the effort to set the barracks alight.

As I mentioned before, the chief purpose of these attacks was to harass the enemy. In the same way the barracks at Oola and Limerick Junction, which were convenient to us, were fired at regularly any time we felt like doing a bit of firing practice. In fact, it became a joke at one stage that when anyone felt a bit bored, it was always suggested as a relief that he should go out and have a few shots at the Junction barracks.

The other activities carried out while I was Captain of the Solohead Company were raids for arms and mails. In the case of arms, we were able to find out for ourselves where arms (shotguns and the like) were to be found - mostly in the bigger houses in the neighbourhood - and these were collected for use by the Volunteers as had been done in other areas. We had to maintain an intelligence

service also and keep our Battalion Headquarters supplied with any information that might be useful to the Battalion or Brigade Headquarters. Raids on mails were of great assistance in this way and we carried out five of this type of raid while I was in charge of the Company.

Another form of activity during this period was the enforcement of the Belfast Boycott, under which certain firms with headquarters in Belfast were put on a boycott list which was supplied to us by our Headquarters. We raided trains every now and then at Limerick Junction and along the line and where we found any of these goods, they were thrown off the train.

I should have mentioned before this my recollection of the ambush at Soloheadbeg which took place in January, 1919. I was not personally engaged in this action as I was away at a fair that day, but Timmie Crowe and Paddy Dwyer of Hollyford were two of the men engaged in it. They were not on the run at the time. There were, in fact, very few people on the run then and I advised them to stay at home and brazen matters out rather than to go on the run. The police carbines which were captured at Soloheadbeg were dumped near the scene of the ambush but I was given the job of getting these carbines away later on, despite the fact that at this time the whole place was picketed with police and every place was under observation. However, another chap named Jimmie Doherty, who was a neighbour, and myself managed to get the carbines away from where they were without being seen by any police patrol. We had, in fact, to take the carbines from the ditch under the very noses of a police picket which was on the other side of the same ditch. The carbines were only superficially hidden in the grass and undergrowth of the ditch. The fellows who had put them there described the place exactly to us and we went along and found them. We did not know how we were going to get them away because the whole place was 'pickled' with police and military but we managed to get them away to a safe place. I might say that the spot where the carbines were hidden was within 200 - 300 yards of the place where the ambush took place and that for days afterwards the military and police remained in the locality watching and searching. It was,therefor

a lot of luck that they did not find the rifles before we got them and their removal was a risk which I would have hesitated to take afterwards.

I think it was about October, 1920, when the column was formed. At this time I was Captain of the 4th Battalion, Solohead Company, and I received an order from the Battalion Headquarters, which I suppose had come from the Brigade, informing us that the column was being started and asking for the names of Volunteers from our Unit who were willing to become members of the column. Dinny Lacey was O/C. of the column when it began and Seán Fitzpatrick was the second-in-command. When I got this order I felt that I could hardly ask anyone else to volunteer for the dangerous mission of a column except I did so first myself, so I put my name down on the list. This, of course, necessitated the appointment of a new Company Captain in Solohead to take my place. From then on I remained with the column which began its activities almost right away and became increasingly active as time went on. Up to Christmas, 1920, as far as I can remember, there was the Thomastown ambush and the Glen of Aherlow fight.

An episode which I should have mentioned earlier was the Oola ambush which, in fact, took place before the starting of the column. This was the time when General Lucas had escaped and when we ambushed the military party which had picked him up on the road. This was a purely Company activity. It was the Solohead Company which organised and carried out this ambush. When I say that the Oola ambush was organised and carried out by the Solohead Company, I mean that it was chiefly the Solohead Company which was involved. There were a few men from Dunohill with us, as well as Breen, Treacy and the Battalion Commander, Ned Reilly. We had all discussed and arranged the matter beforehand and as far as I remember it was Treacy who had suggested that there was a despatch rider whom we should hold up and capture there. We hardly expected any large force to appear. When, therefore, a small lorry arrived on the scene of the ambush - it was, in fact, the lorry carrying General Lucas - we opened fire on it. We had arranged for a cart with a ladder mounted on it to be pulled across the road when this despatch

rider would be due to arrive and when, actually, this small lorry appeared, the cart was pulled across the road. I was in a position close to this barricade and when the lorry pulled up I stood up and called on them to surrender, which they did at once. Unfortunately, however, there was nobody else near me to take the surrender and some others of our men, who were further away and perhaps not in full view of what was happening, opened fire so that the soldiers in the lorries jumped down and fled for cover. I remember well that morning when Ned Reilly placed us in position he said very seriously to us that we should remain exactly where we were placed, and that he would shoot the first man who left his position. Consequently, when we called on the soldiers in the lorry to surrender and some few shots had been fired,they put their hands up and said they would surrender but the firing continued ffom our side from men in other positions and there was only one other man near me so we could do nothing before the soldiers had all cleared off to the side of the road. I did not know at this time where Ned Reilly, Treacy or Breen were but, as it transpired afterwards, they were at the other side of the road. These men were not in a position to see what was happening or whether the soldiers had indicated their willingness to surrender, so they opened fire on them and kept it up. The soldiers standing with their hands up had no alternative but to run for cover. The next thing was that two more lorries full of British military arrived on the scene and they began to take part in the action. I went to the gate of the field where we were looking for Ned Reilly but could see no sign of him or anyone else, but I could see a policeman from Oola - an R.I.C. man who was above us at a gate - firing down towards where we were. I could see no sign of any more of our men and I decided that they must have left us to shift for ourselves. I came back and told my men that we had better get out of this position as best we could and, in order to do this, we had to cross the road, in the course of which we were fired at all the time by the policemen above us. The two lorries of military which I mentioned as having arrived did not get into action until we were across the road but they then turned a very heavy fire from machine guns and rifles on the lower position held by our men

and made it very difficult for them to get away because the military fire raked all the ditches and cover around. However, our men all succeeded in making their escape from the position and we withdrew, considering ourselves lucky to have got away from a rather ugly position without casualties. I believe there were some casualties on the British side and it was only a good while afterwards that we learned that the first small lorry that we had held up had carried General Lucas.

The ambush at Oola took place, I believe, on the 30th July, 1920, and the newspapers gave the military casualties as two soldiers killed and three wounded.

About the first serious action after the formation of the column was the ambush at Thomastown in which, according to the papers at the time, three soldiers were killed and five wounded. One of our men, Micky Fitzpatrick, a brother of Seán, was wounded. As it happened, this ambush did not work out as well as we had expected but our failure to capture the entire enemy force was due to one officer. When firing had gone on for a short time and the remainder of the enemy force had indicated their willingness to surrender, one officer stood out on his own and refused to give in. He was being fired at by all our men but he seemed to have a charmed life and they said at the time he wore some sort of armour under his uniform. At any rate he carried a couple of automatic pistols and prevented any Volunteer coming near to take the surrender of the party. Our difficulty was that we could not wait for any great length of time there as further enemy reinforcements might be expected at any moment. This was a main road upon which enemy convoys might be expected every ten minutes or so and we had reluctantly to abandon the chance of capturing some arms there. As far as I could see there were about fifty soldiers in the convoy. They were carried in two lorries. There may have been another officer with them but I only remember seeing this one man who was certainly a brave man with plenty of fighting spirit and who, as I have said, stood off our whole force single-handed. It had been agreed before the fight began that we could only stay a certain time in that position, no matter what happened. At the time that this officer came out to hold us up, the

time had already expired when we should withdraw. He stood in the middle of the road blazing away with his pistols at any puff or flash that appeared from any of our shots and whether any of our shots hit him I do not know but he was being fired at from everywhere without apparent effect. We could not afford to stay long enough to make any kind of manoeuvre to get near him. At any rate, there was very little cover in that particular place and, in fact, our line of retreat was very bad from this point of view.

The next activity was the Glen of Aherlow ambush at Ballydavid. This involved a small black covered van which we called the Black Maria. On this occasion it contained four or five policemen. In this case, after being fired on for some time, the police force was captured. Four of them were shot; another one escaped and the van itself was burned. I forget whether it was five or six policemen were there altogether but I know only one escaped. This man ran for his life and got into some cottage. The people in the cottage did not want him there, it seems, and gave him a bad reception. I presume it was on this account that the cottage was burned some time later by Crown Forces when there were some other reprisals also carried out.

It was at the same time - a day or so after the Aherlow ambush - that the British forces wrecked and burned a number of houses in Tipperary town, as well as houses in Aherlow. The ambush in Aherlow took place on November 13th and I notice that the newspaper reports have the burning of Tipperary town for November 15th, but my recollection is that the burning took place on the same night. It may be, however, that these burnings were going on for a couple of days following the Aherlow ambush.

Sometime about the middle of December or shortly before Christmas - perhaps the 18th December - the column was disbanded temporarily to allow men to visit their homes and relax over the Christmas period.

Following this, i.e. sometime after Christmas, Dinny Lacey, Séamus Robinson, Séan O'Meara and others, representing the Brigade staff, met us at Doherty's house in Barnaleen, near my own place. This meeting was held

for the purpose of reorganising the column and getting it into the field again. I was sent along to collect the members of the column who were around Dunohill. A number of them were staying around there. While I was away on my mission, two lorryloads of military came along to raid Doherty's house. A few of the local Volunteers were on the watch, however, and gave the alarm, as well as taking steps to cover the retreat of those within the house. The Volunteer officers who were escaping from the house, however, were not aware that any Volunteers were assisting them and, they thought the firing they heard from the Volunteers was a further indication of the presence of British forces. Nevertheless, despite all the misunderstanding, they made good their escape but the military came along afterwards and burned Doherty's house, my own home and a couple of other houses in the locality that evening.

The next activity of the column is the attack made on Dundrum, Annacarty and Limerick Junction R.I.C. Barracks one night about the middle of January, 1921. The column was in Donaskeagh on that night and it was decided that attacks should be made on these three adjacent R.I.C. Barracks. Thus, the column divided itself up - one party going along to each of the three barracks. I went in charge of the party assigned to attack the barracks at Limerick Junction. It was not anticipated that we would be able to capture any of these barracks but we intended to do what damage we could and in this way harass the enemy within. We had arranged that the termination of our attack on Limerick Junction Barracks would correspond with the departure of the goods train for Donaskeagh. The train crew were either Volunteers themselves or were, at least, sympathetic: thus, having carried out a certain amount of sniping of the barracks, we then stepped aboard the train and went off, arriving back at Donaskeagh before any of the other parties who had had to cycle to and from their destination. One of the men who was with me on the attack was, in fact, a railway official named Jerry Fitzpatrick, so it was an easy matter to arrange for our passage to Donaskeagh by train. Our luxurious travelling to and fro gave rise to a lot of wisecracks and funny stories afterwards.

About a week later we attacked a number of other barracks in the same way at Holycross, Glenbower, Rosskeane and Lisaronan. There was no attempt made to capture any of these barracks. It was merely a matter of firing on them as we came to them to show the police inside that we were in control of the countryside and to prevent them coming out of their barracks any time they pleased.

We were up on Slievenamon, which overlooks Mullinahone one day when Ned Aylward, the local Battalion Commandant, came along to see me. This was a Kilkenny Battalion as Mullinahone is on the border of Tipperary and Kilkenny. I happened to be in charge of the column at the time, Lacey having gone away on business, and Aylward asked me if we would assist him in attacking a patrol in Mullinahone. We agreed to do so and carried out the attack but it was rather badly planned. When we attacked them as they came up the street they ran into an alley which was beside them and got away. The reason Aylward wanted us to go in and attack this patrol was that, a few days before, a couple of men from the local Kilkenny column had come in to Mullinahone to investigate the movements of this patrol but someone had given them away and they were shot dead by the patrol. One of these men was Tommie Clancy - I forget the other man's name. It was on account of this that Aylward wanted us to come in and carry out the attack on the patrol but there was apparently not much thought given to the planning of the attack. We did not know the lay-out of the place and depended on local information.

After this we went on to a village named Cloneen which is near Slievenamon and it was there that one of the men of our column - Dinny Sadlier - was accidentally shot dead. This occurred through what we called "caffling", i.e. pranks and joking. Somebody in the course of these pranks presented a loaded rifle at Sadlier, believing that it was unloaded. What brought this about was that we were engaged that day in training. Lacey was very keen on using up any spare time we had to carry out tactical training - putting men into assumed ambush positions; having others act as enemy parties coming on them, and that kind of thing. We did something like this every day as a matter of course

unless we were actually engaged in a serious operation. Thus, it was in the carrying out of one of these mock attacks ,that this man,pretending to fire on Sadlier as a joke, actually did so and killed him. We carried Sadlier's body that night up to the top of Slievenamon where there is a graveyard and we buried him there. The burial service was read by a priest from Ninemilehouse. The priest came up at 2 in the morning to officiate at the burial, which took place at that time. I can remember well the occasion because it was a hard frosty night and we had at the time about 52 men on the column. The men were also tired out but as they awaited the arrival of the priest they lay down just where they were among the graves and fell asleep. I think that when the priest arrived there was no one awake but myself and Sadlier's brother who had come up for the burial. I remember the priest remarked when he looked around at the sleeping men with the frosty grass all round - "There is no doubt you are suffering for your country".

Following this we went into Carrick-on-Suir to attack a patrol there but the attack did not come off. I forget what happened: whether it was that the patrol failed to show up. At any rate, the attack was abandoned.

Subsequent to this - I think it must have been about March, 1921 - the column moved in towards Dungarvan, where we were engaged in digging dumps in the Comeragh Mountains. This was in connection with a landing of arms which was supposed to take place about that time in Waterford or Dungarvan or somewhere near there. I do not remember much about this landing of arms except that we had orders from the Brigade to dig these dumps to put the arms in and to line and cover them with galvanised iron and heather. I understood at the time that some ship was supposed to bring the arms but I never heard anymore about it. Nothing had happened up to the time we left there and I cannot say what happened about the arms landing except that I do not believe it took place: at least, not as arranged anyhow.

About the middle of April we got some information from Brigade Headquarters about an enemy party that might be ambushed passing on the road between Clogheen and Cahir. I forget now how the arrangements were made but we got into touch with the No. 2. Column, i.e. Sean Hogan's column,

to join us for this attack and the place we picked was Garrymore Crossroads, near Ballylubey. I appointed the date, which was the 23rd April, 1921. We got into position, each column occupying positions on one side of the road, i.e. the No. 1 Column were on one side of the road with their backs to their own territory in the Knockmealdown Mountains, while the No. 2. Column, who operated generally in the Galtee Mountain area, were on that side of the road. We waited in position for some hours but there was no sign of the enemy turning up and, some members of the Brigade staff who were there with us up to that left us, as it was agreed that there was little likelihood of anybody turning up at that time. No. 2 Column had pulled out and begun to move back towards the Galtees, and No. 1. Column was getting ready to pull out also when a scout brought in a report that the enemy party were coming. The members of our Column, therefore, jumped back into our position just in time to open fire on the enemy party as it arrived. When we opened fire on the enemy party our No. 2. Column, hearing the fire, doubled back to join in the attack but, not waiting until they got to close range, opened fire from where they were on the hill overlooking the road. This endangered our men as much as it did the enemy, as their fire at this long range struck off the road and ricochetted into our positions. After a short time the enemy forces, who were all soldiers, surrendered and we came out and took possession of their arms, ammunition and other equipment and set fire to the lorries in which they were travelling. We were already overlong in the vicinity but we had only gone some few hundred yards when we ran into enemy reinforcements of military coming out from Clogheen. They apparently had got word of the ambush and tried to intercept us. This military party was in extended formation across the fields, coming towards us in skirmishing order, but our training and our movement was such that the moment the head of the column hit anything like this, the rear part where I was in charge would immediately take up firing positions to cover the withdrawal of the head of the column. We carried out these tactics on this occasion and I was able, with the help of the men in the rear, to prevent the advance of the enemy and to pin them down while Lacey and the others got back to us. The military lorry leading

the convoy had almost hit into the car with Potter in it when the attack began, and there was nothing to do in this case but to take Potter out and abandon the car where it was.

The first place we took Potter was into an empty house nearby and as the front of the Column had become rather bunched together at this point and the enemy fire was concentrated upon this empty house, Lacey ordered them, as soon as our covering fire was opened, to make their way back to where I was with the covering party while he, himself, guided the prisoner, Potter, back at the point of his gun. We were very fortunate, as it happened, to have a line of retreat accidentally available. Around that part of County Waterford there are numbers of roads cut into the hillside. These are just narrow tracks with the earth thrown up to form banks so that the roads themselves are sunk below the surface of the hillside. Where we found ourselves was near one of these roads which ran across the hill from where we were and getting into this we were able to make our escape in perfect safety, leaving the enemy to wonder where we had got to.

We travelled on a few miles then towards the Blackstair Mountains but we were very tired, having been on foot since 6 o'clock the previous morning, and this night it fell to my duty to take charge of the posting of scouts in the location where we had decided to halt for the night. It was late in the evening and although we had been more or less rested all day while waiting in the ambush position, we still looked forward to a meal and a night's sleep. We were settling down to it when some of the scouts rushed in with the news that the enemy were surrounding the place where we were. WALSHES We cleared out hurriedly and up by an old by-road to a place called Newcastle on the way to Clonmel. This was near the Comeragh Mountains. It was about 2 a.m. when we reached Newcastle. We again posted scouts and were getting ready to settle down for the remainder of the night when military lorries were seen arriving in Newcastle village: troops began to dismount and advanced in extended order towards our position. The men were called up again and,

weary though we were, we moved across a bit of a rise into another valley which leads into the Comeragh Mountains. We travelled on all during the night and arrived at our destination about 12 o'clock the following day. We rested there for the day.

We had been closely pursued by the enemy since the ambush at Garrymore Cross and had only at this point succeeded in shaking them off but we needed time to recuperate as the men were suffering from lack of sleep and lack of food. Consequently, we remained in that area for a few days and at that time there were some negotiations going on between the Brigade Headquarters and the British authorities regarding the exchange of our prisoner, Potter, for a Volunteer named Traynor who lay in Mountjoy Jail in Dublin under sentence of death. Potter was held prisoner and moved about with the column for some time while these negotiations were going on and when Traynor was executed, despite our offer to release Potter if Traynor's life was spared, we knew that Potter's execution must follow. At this time - when we actually got the order from Brigade Headquarters to carry out the execution, Potter was held at a place called Kilclooney in County Waterford. While he was with us as a prisoner we had grown to like him. He was a very gentlemanly, nice kind of man and though he seemed fanatically attached to doing what he considered to be his duty, he also admired our adherence to duty and the service of our country as we saw it. It was not that he seemed inclined to take our point of view, but in his mind this strict adherence to duty covered everything and, to show how he looked upon such matters, I would like to relate, that when it eventually became apparent that the British authorities would not agree to our proposals and that, consequently, his execution must follow, we put it to him unofficially that we would allow him to escape provided he gave us his word of honour, in which we trusted, that he would take no further action against us. He appreciated our reliance upon his honour in this matter and, also the fact that he must die if Traynor were executed, yet he would not give his word as required by us, but said he must do his duty as he saw it. During the time we held him he

did, in fact, make a couple of attempts to escape but was prevented from doing so. So, when we finally got the order from Brigade Headquarters to carry out his execution, we did this duty regretfully. As Adjutant of the column I had to make the necessary arrangements, but Lacey took charge of the actual execution and for this purpose he picked out two men - Bill Allen and another man named Crowe - who each had a special reason for wishing to be avenged upon an enemy who had been responsible for the deaths of their brothers. A grave had been dug on the mountain beforehand and, on this dark night Potter was marched off to his execution up to where the newly opened grave was on the hillside. There Lacey gave the necessary orders to the two men, but whether from nervousness or some other reason, their aim was not good because, although they stood only a few yards away, neither shot had struck him in a vital place and, when he fell he called out to Lacey, "I am not dead", whereupon Lacey stepped over to him and administered a final shot. Potter's remains were afterwards exhumed and handed over to his widow for proper burial. All his personal belongings were returned to her and I remember seeing her letter of acknowledgment at the time, in which she stated something to the effect that, she appreciated the fact that we had to carry out this execution when the British Government had refused to accede to our proposal regarding Traynor and that, while she deplored her husband's death, she could not blame us for it.

The next action of any consequence which I remember our column being involved in was at a place near Clonmel on the Tipperary/Clonmel road. There is a schoolhouse there and I believe the name of the place is Barn. A large patrol of Black & Tans were reported to travel out regularly in that direction and it was intended to ambush them at this point. Both Lacey's column and Hogan's column, i.e. the No. 1 and No. 2 columns, were mobilised for this job. We had a Hotchkiss gun in our column,which had been around with us for a long time. I do not remember where we got this gun. It was not captured on any of our raids so far as I know,but this was our main armament although we had much too little ammunition to make it very effective. Our machine gunner was Jack Kennedy, who always manned this gun. On this occasion, the Hotchkiss was placed

behind a barricade, or rather behind a wall in rear of the barricade, which gave it a field of fire for some hundreds of yards along the road; the remainder of the columns being disposed in suitable places covering the road on either side. I, myself, was placed by Lacey in a cottage in a small bend of the road, there being nobody else but myself in this position. I often looked at this since when I was passing that way and thought how lucky I was that the ambush did not take place, for, if it had and anything had gone wrong with the plan, I could never have got out of this position. That was part of Lacey's trouble - he was a great fighter and courageous to the last, but he had very little of what might be called "military genius". He could never visualise what might happen, say, two jumps ahead, and if things did not always work out exactly to plan, we just had to do the best we could in extricating ourselves.

It might be of some interest to give my impressions of Dinny Lacey as one who lived in close touch with him during these months of strenuous fighting, and as one in whom Lacey reposed considerable confidence, as I did in him. Lacey was a man who set himself a high national ideal, and meant to give everything he had towards its attainment. He was extremely honest, simple and straightforward. There was no complexity in Dinny's make-up; he simply saw a problem which he approached in a simple straightforward manner and decided on it by his simple standards of right and wrong. Having once made up his mind as to what was right and what was wrong, it was difficult, if indeed possible, to swerve him from it. He was at all times willing to lay down his life for what he considered to be his principles and had no ulterior motive in life. He had no idea of pushing himself into any position of power or importance; he merely wished to serve the ideal which he considered right and just. His beliefs were so intense that they might be described as fanatical and, consequently, he had little tolerance for anyone - at least any Irishman - who would try to adopt a different standpoint or who would try to prove him wrong in any of his beliefs. As I have said, he was no military genius, but had a certain amount of sound common sense, and he had no more military training than

any of us had, which was what we had taught ourselves since we came into the Volunteers. To put my opinion of Lacey in a nutshell, I might say that I looked upon him as the essence of an honourable, upright man; a loyal companion and a brave soldier. On looking back now with the wisdom of after years, I would not rate his military genius very highly: no greater, I would say, than any of us there who were all just amateur soldiers. He was not, for instance, in the same class as a man like Treacy. He had not got the military education for one thing but, apart from that, I doubt if he had the brain power to be anything out of the ordinary in this way. He was fearless without doubt and did his best to carry out his duty as he saw it but, looking back, I would say that he had little if any natural military genius. Lacey's ability to plan any action was limited by his own deficiency in the real art of strategy and tactics. As we since have learned, the real core of the matter in strategy or tactics lies in being able to deceive the enemy, but to Lacey's simple mind, any kind of deceipt seemed wrong: thus, he was more inclined to be straightforward, even with the enemy, to a point of being rash. Lacey's method of attack was usually to go straight into it and one could almost imagine him sending word to the enemy beforehand to say "I am coming to attack". Not that he ever went this far with it, but that gives an idea of his mentality.

To return, however, to the dispositions for the ambush at Barn. Lacey placed everyone in position and went round himself to see that everything was ready. We waited there for some hours but no enemy appeared. In the meantime, however, numerous creamery carts and other traffic had come along the road and we stopped all these and turned them down a by-road to prevent the alarm being given to the enemy and to keep these people out of the way while the action took place. Time wore on, however; nothing was happening and we began to get a bit anxious. I heard some talk at the time that word had been sent to the police in Clonmel, informing them that we were there and inviting them to come out, but I do not know whether that was so or not, or

whether it was that somebody did inform the police that we had been seen around. All I know is that the police patrol did not turn up. We heard afterwards that they had come out but had gone back again, one story being that one of their lorries had met with a mishap.

Soon after this, Lacey left us to go to Purcell's of Glenagat to attend the wedding of Dan Breen. The wedding festivities went on for a couple of days there and Lacey was away from the column for about three days, leaving me in command. The column was at that time outside Clonmel at a place called Ballypatrick. When Lacey left us he told us to stay around there on the side of the hill at Kilcash, above Ballypatrick, and I remember remonstrating with him at the time, pointing out that this was a highly dangerous place to stay, and that if an enemy party came to round us up we had no line of retreat except up along the bare hillside. These places, though we called them villages, were only groups of houses on the hillside, with no ditches or any possible concealed way of approach or retreat. Therefore, if a military raiding party were seen approaching us, it would already be too late for us to retreat because we would have to come out into the open. I was so uneasy while we were there that I sent messages into the Despatch Centre, asking Lacey, for God's sake, to allow us to move from that place. I had some kind of intuitive feeling that we would be surrounded if we remained there and I remained awake night and day for a couple of days, watching and waiting. On the third evening we got a reply, giving us permission to move, which we did forthwith. On the following morning the whole place where we had been was surrounded by cavalry, as well as infantry parties. There must have been at least three or four hundred troops in the raiding party and we had only got clear away.

We found out long afterwards - probably after the Truce, when the information was obtained from some of the police in Clonmel Barracks - that on that occasion information of our presence had been sent into

Clonmel by an ex-policeman who lived in Kilcash. Even though it was during the Truce, we felt entitled to take some action against this man who was, nominally at any rate, a non-combatant. So two of our men were sent up to arrest him and bring him in for questioning. As soon as he saw them coming he opened fire on them and, replying to his fire by firing on the house, they shot the man's sister through a window. I think this fellow was an ex-R.I.C. man's son who gave the information to the police.

Looking at a list of dates here taken from the local papers I notice under March, 18th, the death of Paddy Hogan at Knockgraffen. My memory may have got confused but I thought it was in Drangan that Hogan and a man named Keane were surrounded in a house. They fired upon the enemy forces which surrounded the house and kept on fighting as long as their ammunition lasted. Paddy Hogan was shot within the house by the enemy fire directed at it, and Ned Keane, when his last round was spent, threw out his revolver or rifle, or whatever he had, and indicated that he would surrender. He was taken prisoner and lodged in Cahir Jail and, a little later, escaped from the Jail. These two men were not with the column. Hogan, at the time, was Officer Commanding the 2nd Battalion - I think it was - and Keane was one of his officers.

After the Barn ambush attempt, I do not remember any other serious operation until the break-up of the columns. I do not remember exactly when that took place but I think it may have been about the end of May or early in June. The idea was that instead of having these two Brigade columns, the columns would break up into sections; the men with the columns from each battalion forming the nucleus of a battalion column or active service unit to operate in their own battalion areas. I came back to my own area here around Solohead with my section and I think we were hardly more than a week back when we carried out an ambush at Boherdota. But before this, we attacked the police at Oola.

The police stationed at Oola were proving to be rather a nuisance and preventing our free communication with one side of our area near Lattin, so we decided to teach them a lesson and keep them from bothering us. This was our first action after the break-up of the

Brigade column and we went down towards Oola where there had been a fair that day. We had to lie up in a concealed position outside the village until the place had cleared of the people attending the fair. Towards nightfall, we came on to the village where we expected to find the police outside the barracks. It had been noted by our Intelligence that the police usually came out to the crossroads outside the barracks to play pitch and toss. There were only five or six of us in the attacking party and our plan was to go down and open fire on the police as they were playing pitch and toss. We did this and I think four or five of them were wounded in consequence. I believe there were about eight or nine police in the barracks at the time. It was dusk at this time and I think most of the police who were in the barracks were in this group. We came out from a yard behind one of the houses on to the road where we were within fifty yards of the police group and every man then fired into the group without giving them any warning. The police scattered and ran for the barracks and we then left, satisfied that we had achieved our object.

The ambush at Boherdota took place on 2nd July, 1921. We were at a loose end at the time, just wondering what to do next. We thought it would be a good idea to hold up a train and contribute something to the enforcement of the Belfast boycott by throwing any Belfast goods we found off the train and destroying them. This procedure had been carried out on a few occasions and always the Oola police had rushed up to intercept the raiders. Our plan in this case was to carry out the train raid for the main purpose of attracting the Oola police with the idea of ambushing them on the way.

We had arranged the ambush position in such a way that we would allow the police force to come to the near side of the railway bridge and have a section of our men on the bridge to hold them there but, as it happened, the section detailed to be on the bridge did not turn up there with the result that that line of retreat was left open to the police. When the police came up to our position I came out and, firing a shot over their heads, called on them to surrender. Our positions

dominated them from the heights of the railway embankment and it should have been clear to them that they had no chance of escape. Instead of surrendering, however, they took to their heels and, being fired on, several of them were wounded. They were close to the bridge and we thought we had them entirely surrounded at this time so that they could not escape. I had meant to capture the whole lot without the necessity of having to fire on them at all, and would have done so if our other section had been in position on the bridge, but it was only then we discovered that the section detailed for the bridge had failed to take up position there, so that the police were able to make their escape that way. When I saw this I rushed round to get the section on to the bridge but I could only find one man and he and I went on to the bridge. The police sergeant was standing up, calling on the rest of the Tans to stand and fight and he was shot down. The remainder of them, however, taking up firing positions, opened a hot fire on the bridge so that we could not show our noses, and stones and mortar from the bullets striking the bridge were flying round us. It began to look as if they were getting the better of us so I thought of another plan. Pretending to the police that we had a huge force at hand, I shouted to imaginary sections to surround the police and, when they heard that, those who were causing us most trouble left their positions and ran. There were a number of police wounded but the rest succeeded in making their escape, though five or six rifles, some ammunition, revolvers and hand grenades were left behind. These we collected afterwards. Consequently, although the ambush had not worked out exactly according to plan, we could congratulate ourselves that it was at least partly successful. This was the last action that took place with our Active Service Unit before the Truce.

It may be of some interest to show how things went on in South Tipperary during the Truce. Immediately after the Truce Dinny Lacey began a review of the Company and Battalion organisation in the Brigade area. I know that he spoke to me about this and sent me to reorganise a couple of Companies. Lacey was anxious that what we looked upon as

a breathing space should be utilised to the full reorganising, recruiting, re-arming where possible and putting our armament in good condition. So, for the first month or two following the Truce, there was considerable activity getting things going in this way. Then the Divisional Training Camp was set up at Galtee Castle and a number of us went to this Camp to undergo a course of training. On the completion of this course I was sent to Carrick-on-Suir to take command there, and get things working as Carrick had, up to this, been rather backward. The organisation was never very strong there and, consequently, there was little activity. It was hoped that I would be able to get some active units organised and trained to some extent before any break-down in the Truce would occur.

It was while I was at Carrick-on-Suir - I forget the date but it would be about two months or more after the Truce had begun - that the raid on Clonmel Barracks took place. Somebody had got into touch with a couple of police inside the barracks and found out from them that it would be an easy matter to capture the entire barracks by a ruse. They had a sort of secret password - a certain kind of knock, first on the window and then on the door, and these two police gave this out to our men. Clonmel police barracks was an important one because it was the headquarters of the Tipperary South Riding and the depot through which passed all arms coming from and going to the various police barracks in the area. Consequently, there was always a good store of arms and ammunition held there. Lacey was convinced that the peace negotiations in progress would fail and he felt that anything was justifiable in order to gain some much needed armaments. He came along to me one day and told me to come up and to bring five men with me. I knew that any action of this type would be considered by the British as a breach of the Truce agreement but Lacey said it was all right: that all arrangements had been made and that no difficulty would arise. It was Lacey himself who went up to the barracks and knocked and when he was admitted, grabbed the sentry's rifle. I was with Lacey at the time. There were others following closely or, at any rate, ready to rush in when they saw that we had

overpowered the sentry. The police were all on the right-hand side at roll call and were unarmed. When Lacey had succeeded in overpowering the sentry I, followed by the others who had then rushed in, ordered the police to put up their hands, which they did: all surrendered without any trouble. There were about fifty or sixty of our men engaged in the raid because arrangements had to be made to have cars and lorries available to take the stuff away and drive off. The police in the room were just held there but there were odd ones sleeping around as a means, I suppose, of safeguarding these stores. These were also overpowered without resistance and their services were utilised to load the stuff on lorries. Some of these police in the stores were known to some of our men who had no reason to like them and, consequently, they acted roughly with them and made them work hard in loading the vehicles that night. The stuff we got there was all arms and ammunition - a lot of it being surrendered arms like shotguns left in for safe-keeping. Actually, there was a lot of stuff in Clonmel Barracks at that time because most of the material from the outlying barracks had, presumably for safety, been gathered in to the headquarters which was Clonmel Barracks. We had commandeered a number of lorries and cars to take the stuff away but, as well as that, we took some cars from the barracks itself, including a large Crosley touring car which was supposed to belong to Lord French, the Lord Lieutenant. At the time this raid took place, the British military had evacuated the Clonmel Military Barracks and this barracks had already been taken over and occupied by the Volunteers. The stuff which was taken from Clonmel Barracks was immediately distributed to the various battalions of the Third Tipperary Brigade.

Concerning my personal feelings about this raid and similar activities which took place during the Truce, I did not have time to think, much less discuss the matter with Lacey when he asked me to come up to Clonmel. When I arrived there and learned what was on, the time for action had arrived and I took part in the raid without really

appreciating its significance. When I had time to think about such things, however, I realised that our action was entirely wrong and I said so to Lacey. I told him that if I had known about this sufficiently far ahead to consider the matter, I would have done all in my power to prevent the raid being carried out. As it was, I felt that we were very lucky that the police had not resisted us as this might have led to a breakdown of the Truce and a renewal of hostilities by the enemy who would have had the legitimate excuse that we had taken the initiative. In my opinion, it was this raid and similar actions which paved the way for the Civil War condition in Tipperary. Before this, our arms were scarce and our ammunition was scarcer still and this raid, as well as providing what seemed to be at the time a plentiful supply of arms and ammunition, generated a certain truculence in the Tipperary Volunteer Units and a tendency to disregard higher authority. In other words, this was an undisciplined act which tended to break down the discipline we had managed to drill into the Volunteers up to that stage.

An example of the state of mind which existed in the South Tipperary Volunteers at this time is shown, I think, by a Brigade Council meeting which took place in or about the time of the Clonmel raid. I do not know now whether it was before or after it - probably afterwards. At this meeting a proposal was made to declare Tipperary an independent republic. I dissented from this proposal and after a lot of discussion the matter was dropped, but it shows the temper or mental attitude of the Volunteers in South Tipperary at the time.

A copy of a printed proclamation which I am handing in to the Bureau shows the name "Thomas Fahy" as the authority. The proclamation reads as follows:-

POBLACHT NA HÉIREANN

PROCLAMATION

Whereas, the peace of the district is imperiled

by Labour Troubles, and

Whereas, certain insidentary acts have been done,
I, the Commanding Officer, by the powers invested
in me in the interests of
The Republic
Warn Secretaries of Unions that I must take the
necessary steps to ensure the peace of
the district
Signed,
Thomas Fahy.

Printed by
Butler Brothers.

This fellow - Fahy - was appointed to command the Carrick-on-Suir Battalion after I left there. I left Carrick some time following the raid on Clonmel and Fahy was appointed to take over when I left. When I was in Carrick he caused me some trouble keeping him in order. He used to go out at night around the town and take drink and staying out late at night was a bad example as well as being dangerous, so I warned him that if he went out and took drink he should not come back to barracks but stay out until the next day. I told him that any night he was out of barracks after a certain hour he would not be allowed in and this arrangement carried on until I left. When I left to come up to Clonmel he was out with another fellow in a public house "caffling" with revolvers. I do not know what they were doing exactly, but one of them shot the other accidentally.

It might be interesting, as a matter of historical record, to set down the fact that a day or so before the date of the signing of the Treaty an order was received by us from the Third Tipperary Brigade Headquarters for the columns to take up positions ready for action - the indications then being that the Truce was about to terminate abruptly. We took the field that night and remained out until we got a message which was sent to us by telephone next day. It was I who received the message from the Brigade that everything was all right and I went out to give the word to the columns. Never was news more welcome. Every man was

thanking God that the fight was not to begin again.

It is not easy now to recollect all the details but I have a remembrance of several of the factors which contributed to the situation which brought about the Civil War. There was the business which began in Limerick when an effort was made by both sides to come to terms and some kind of pact was made between the forces of the Free State and those under Liam Lynch to set themselves up as the Republican authorities in the South. I remember that crowds of us were brought to Limerick in cars and lorries and quartered in Cruise's Hotel and in the Asylum. The general idea seemed to be to muster as big a show of force as possible, but I don't really know what it was all about. None of us knew at the time what we were supposed to be doing or why we were there. It was all part of the game of politics which was going on at the time. We stayed there for two or three days and then came home. The more I have thought about these things since, the more do I think it a great pity that they happened, culminating in the Civil War. In South Tipperary there was a definite effort by Lacey and some of the others - but Lacey was the chief influence - to dragoon public opinion as well as the opinions of individual Volunteers and Volunteer Units. The proposal to declare a republic in Tipperary (which I have already mentioned in connection with a Brigade Council meeting) was an example of the way their minds ran at the time. Then, following the signing of the Treaty, Volunteers here and there began to join the Free State Forces and Lacey felt he must do something to stop this. There were some men from around here who had got into the Free State Army and had taken over Annacarty Barracks. Tom Carew, who was an officer on the Brigade staff and a cousin of Dinny Lacey, was one of those who took over Annacarty Barracks for the Free State. I was in Carrick at that time when Lacey sent for me to tell me that Carew - or "Carey" as he called him - and a few other men had taken over this Barracks, and he wanted me to take some men down there and clear them out of it. I asked him who was in charge of that area and he said

"Tadhg Dwyer is the Commandant there", so I said "Tell Tadhg Dwyer to clear them out of it. I am responsible only for my own area and I am not going to do every dirty job that you think of handing over to me".

Brian Shanaghan was the O/C. in Tipperary and he and Artie Barlow and some others had a row with Lacey. They apparently would not carry out Lacey's orders and there were a lot of complaints against them, so Lacey fired them and sent me up to take charge instead. (The Red Flag was there at the time?). This attack on Annacarty was going on for two or three days and apparently it was Mick Sheehan, the Brigade Quartermaster, who was in charge of this attack. They had demanded the surrender of the barracks from Carew and on his refusing to comply, they surrounded the place and there the matter rested, more or less, for a few days. When I arrived to take charge in Tipperary the first thing that happened was that the barracks in Annacarty was surrounded and the prisoners, Carew and the others, were brought into Tipperary. Carew had been wounded in the firing on the barracks. He was brought into Dr. Dowling's hospital. I got an order from Lacey to send up a guard to place over him in the hospital. I sent up Sparkey Breen and soon afterwards I saw Carew's father, sister and a priest, who was a brother of his, coming towards me on the street so I avoided them by turning up a sideway, and going to the hospital I found Dr. Dowling highly indignant at the idea of a guard being placed on his patient. I told him it was not my doing and that I was merely carrying out orders, but that if Carew would give his word not to escape or not to leave the hospital without letting me know I would, on my own responsibility, withdraw the guard. I went in to Carew then and asked him to give his word on this, which he did, and the guard was then withdrawn. But Carew made his escape just the same - not indeed that I cared much one way or the other, but it annoyed Lacey very much.

It was after that that the Red Flag was hoisted in South Tipperary. I blamed the Brigade Commander, Séamus Robinson, for having allowed this situation to develop. He actually encouraged them and this crowd came along and took over the creamery. I cleared them out of the creamery in Tipperary when they took that over. This Labour upheaval was a piece

of opportunism which was not taken too seriously by most of the Volunteers but it was this business which was referred to in the Proclamation by Fahy and some of us who thought about it realised that it could be a dangerous situation.

Regarding the other Proclamation, i.e. the proclaiming of Tipperary as a separate republic, I have already mentioned that I objected to this at a meeting which was held, and the matter rested there, but at a subsequent meeting, when I was not present, the Proclamation was passed and my name, amongst others, was signed to it. That is how I was made to appear as one of those who were declaring the Republic in Tipperary against the Provisional Government of Ireland.

Signed: James Kilmartin
(James Kilmartin)

Date: 22nd. July 1953

Witness: J. V. Lawless Col.
(J. V. Lawless) Col.