

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 896

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 896.....

Witness

Edward Moane,
Leastown,
Oldtown,
Co. Dublin.

Identity.

Member of I.R.B. Westport, 1911- ;
Adjutant Westport Battalion I.R.A. ;
Vice-Comd't. West-Mayo Brigade I.R.A.

Subject.

National and military activities, West-Mayo,
1911-1921.

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STATEMENT BY MR. EDWARD MOANE,

Leastown, Oldtown, Co. Dublin.

Vice Commandant West Mayo Brigade I.R.A.

I was born in Carrabun near Westport. I went to school there and lived there until recently when I moved to the above address. John McDonagh, who lived in Westport and who was a plasterer by trade, was in the habit of walking out by our home in the evenings and I became acquainted with him. I was a great reader of Irish history and literature, and we had many a discussion sitting on the roadside. Irish affairs were, of course, the high point of our discussions. He gave me a book which was written by P.J.P. Tynan entitled "The Invincibles and their time". This described the Phoenix Park killings and gave a history of the Invincible movement. I continued to meet and converse with McDonagh off and on for about two years. He then informed me of the I.R.B. organisation and asked me to join, which I did. He made me get down on my knees on the road and there he administered the I.R.B. oath to me. This was about 1911, and as I was still very young it made a profound impression on me. I now got to know other members. Joe MacBride, a brother of Major MacBride who was executed for his part in the Rebellion, was the head of our circle. Amongst other members I remember now were Tom Derrig, "Bruddy" Malone, Tom Nevin, John McDonagh, Hubert Tunney, Tom

O'Brien and _____⁹ O'Reilly who lived on the Fair Green. Some of those joined after I did. I remember Malone was very young when he joined - some time before the first Great War started. We had a meeting of the circle about every two months, and we paid sixpence a month towards the purchase of arms. MacBride gave us lectures on military subjects and historical items and we had discussions on various subjects. This sort of routine went on until the Rebellion of 1916.

In 1913, on the formation of the Irish Volunteers, we were instructed to join immediately and to get control of them, which we did. The I.R.B. in fact started them in Westport. MacBride was in charge of the Volunteers at this time, and we had a strength of approximately one hundred and twenty. We had no arms of course, except for a few small calibre rifles and a few old Fenian guns, and we could mobilise a small number of shot guns. We never received any arms from the then headquarters of the Volunteers. We did the usual training and route marching and so forth.

When John Redmond split the Volunteers by his famous Woodenbridge speech, in which he offered the Volunteers to the British government, Major MacBride came down to Westport and reviewed the Volunteers there and addressed them. The vast majority of our men remained loyal to the Irish Volunteer organisation and only the useless availed of this opportunity to get out. No branch of the Redmond or National Volunteers was ever formed in Westport. After the split our

strength was about eighty all told. We now had one service rifle in the Company, and some individuals had sporting rifles of different types. We paraded and marched and trained as usual every Sunday.

The O'Rahilly visited Westport in March 1916 and addressed the Volunteers on parade. There were at this time two branches of the Ancient Order of Hibernians in Westport, the Ancient Order of Hibernians Board of Erin and the Ancient Order of Hibernians American Alliance. The former were strict followers of the Redmond or National party, which controlled politics in Ireland at this time. During O'Rahilly's address to the meeting a band belonging to the former kept playing as it passed our meeting. The people at our meeting were annoyed and moved as if to attack the band. The O'Rahilly perceiving this stopped them by making what appeared to me afterwards as a prophetic statement. He said "Do not mind them, they will be alright when they know what has happened". These same people rallied to our support in later years.

By this time we had succeeded in stopping all recruiting for the British Army, which was one of our objectives. At the end of November 1915 Captain Balfe and Lord Sligo addressed a big recruiting meeting from the balcony of the Town Hall. The Chairman of this meeting was Myles Stanton and Fr. Canavan was also on the platform. It was a very big meeting, as such meetings usually were, and elaborate arrangements had been made to receive recruits. Not even one recruit did

they get. That night we paraded the Volunteers, about one hundred and fifty strong, and marched through the town. Those of us who had uniforms wore them, and strange to relate men who normally were only paper members turned up for this parade. Arising out of this parade, twelve of us were arrested by the R.I.C. and brought to Castlebar and tried before Judge Doyle at the Quarter Sessions. I do not remember what the charge was - it was for wearing illegal uniform and performing military exercises or something of that nature. Wyse Power defended us. We were put on bail. I walked out of the court without signing anything, and I believe others did the same. I was never asked to sign bail papers afterwards, strange as it may seem. This incident sent our stock soaring amongst the people of Westport, and we felt proud of ourselves and obtained a status we had not got before our arrest. It swung a lot of people in our favour.

Sinn Féin Clubs had now begun to spring into existence in the area. There was one in Westport. The Volunteers were mostly members of Sinn Féin also and exercised a strict control over their activities.

The Rebellion came upon us and still found us without any proper armament and, worse still, without any orders. The Volunteers were mobilised in Westport on Easter Sunday morning and held a route march through the town. I had met MacBride on the Easter Saturday evening and had remarked to him that I hoped we would have a good parade to-morrow - Sunday - and he replied that he

thought that there would be nothing doing. It was only afterwards I realised the significance of his reply. The Sunday papers contained McNeill's countermanding order. A meeting of the I.R.B. circle was held on Wednesday night. We then knew that the fighting was going on in Dublin. We discussed what we could do, and concluded that it would be hopeless to attempt anything as we had no arms. There were no plans and we had no information of what was happening even in adjacent areas. We knew there was about thirty rifles in the Castlebar area, but where they were located or what ammunition was available we had no information. Some of these rifles were surrendered to the British authorities after the Rebellion.

After the Rebellion had collapsed there was a round up of suspects by the R.I.C. and military in Westport and they arrested about twenty local men, some of whom were not Volunteers but were in sympathy with them. MacBride was arrested but I was not. A great wave of depression now seemed to overwhelm the people and an attitude of despair was evident everywhere. However, in a short time the National Aid organisation was started and this gave us a chance to revive our activities and a kind of get going again. At Christmas the interned men were released and we now started to organise seriously again.

We held a concert in the schools at Carrowkennedy to raise funds for the Volunteers. We did not, of course, say that the proceeds were for the Volunteers but for the Gaelic League. I sang a song that night which the powers

that he said was seditious, and I received a summons from the R.I.C. for doing so. I decided I would neither give bail nor pay a fine and my father said I was right, and although it was now approaching the spring time and work on the land was becoming urgent my father said he would carry on somehow without me. I asked a solicitor named Smith to appear for me, and although I told him I would not pay a fine, give bail or apologize he said that he would defend me and at the same time said I was a fool. My case was tried by Mr. Milling, a Resident Magistrate. I did not attend and I was fined and put under bail, or in default three months imprisonment. Smith appealed my case at the Quarter Sessions before Judge Doyle, who confirmed my sentence with the remarks "This man was before me before for disorderly behaviour".

I was now arrested by the R.I.C. and brought to Sligo jail where I did my three months. I did not get political treatment while in jail, but otherwise my treatment there was not too bad. I had to wear the prison garb. Some of the warders were quite good to me and the night watchman used to bring me in a packet of cigarettes and the newspaper. When I was released at the end of my sentence the local heads of the Volunteers in Sligo and members of the I.R.B. were there to meet me and gave me a great treat. On arrival in Westport I immediately resumed my Volunteer activities.

A Battalion was now organised in the Westport area. Joe MacBride was Battalion O/C. I was Adjutant. Joe Ring of Westport was O/C of the local Company. We had another Company in Aughagower and one in Carrowkennedy.

By December of that year our Battalion was about three hundred and fifty strong and organised in nine Companies - Westport, Derrygorman, Carrowkennedy, Aughagower, Dromin, Balclare, Murrisk, Killevally and Shraheen. "Bruddy" Malone, Seán Gibbons and I organised these Companies, travelling here and there, sometimes on cycles but more often across country on foot.

In December of 1917 a general order was issued by headquarters that all units would mobilise on a certain hour on a Sunday. This was a try out all over the country to show our strength. Uniforms, where available, were to be worn but no arms were to be carried. At this time we had two or three rifles and some bayonets. The parade was a big success and there was a great response to the mobilisation order.

We now started to make pikes in the area. We collected money and held concerts and suchlike to raise funds for the purchase of arms and had realised about forty pounds (£40). In February I was arrested again by the R.I.C. for having paraded in uniform at the mobilisation parade in December and brought to Sligo jail again. There I met Seán Corcoran and Tom Ruane of Kiltimagh. We were accorded political treatment now. I was brought to Westport and tried on a charge of illegally wearing uniform and drilling. The British authorities had drafted about 400 military and 300 R.I.C. into the town. Despite my heavy escort Michael Kilroy, "Bruddy" Malone and others succeeded in getting on to the station platform and shaking hands with me. A great

crowd assembled outside the courthouse and Cresserlough Band paraded the town also. There was great fun outside, and several times during the day baton charges were made by the R.I.C. The police had a car waiting outside the courthouse to take me away, but this was put out of action by my sympathisers and at the end of the proceedings I was marched to the local R.I.C. barracks in the centre of a strong escort of military police, who received a bad time from the crowd. I was lodged in the barracks and all the time the police were coming back to the barracks to have wounds treated. They were in a "bloody" condition. Despite the fact that I was the cause of all this they did not ill-treat me. About seven p.m. a car arrived from Castlebar and I was placed in this with a policeman named Brady on one side of me and another named McCormack on the other. Another policeman sat beside the driver of the car. As we went along I noticed a man standing as if he had something behind his back. I then saw him heave a stone and ducked my head and it caught Constable Brady on the side of the head and knocked him out. Had I not ducked I would have got the rap although I knew it was not meant for me. The car stopped at the Halfway House between Westport and Castlebar, where Brady had his wound attended to and the police brought me out a glass of whiskey. We now proceeded to Castlebar barracks and the following day I was again lodged in Sligo jail.

I was about a fortnight in Sligo jail, and then Ruane, Corcoran and I were brought to Belfast jail. There were only two other political prisoners there at

LEDDEN

this time, Terence MacSwiney and Jim Lyden from Limerick. When we arrived we were taken to the reception room to have our particulars taken, and while waiting my own turn two wardresses passed by rather quickly. They returned shortly afterwards, and as they passed I felt something roll against my foot. On looking down I perceived it to be a small stone rolled up in paper. I stooped down and pretended to tie my shoe and put the rolled paper in my pocket. When I got posted to my cell I unfolded it and read it. It was a message which stated "Don't worry, you have friends here". Shortly afterwards a tray of sandwiches arrived for us, which were very welcome. Staunton who had been a warder in Sligo when I was there, was now a warder in Belfast. One of the wardresses was Miss Nora Derrig of James St., Westport, and the other was Miss Maud Hogan^B, now Mrs. Lang. These ladies were members of the Cumann na mBan although in the British prison service, so we were amongst some friends.

We were now accorded political treatment and free association while on exercise. In the course of a few days forty other prisoners arrived in the jail - this was on a Saturday or Sunday. On Monday night some of my pals from Westport arrived - Tom Kitterick, Charles Gavin, Joe Ring, Willie O'Malley, James King and some others. They had been arrested as a result of the incidents in the town on the day of my trial. We had made arrangements to meet such contingencies as this, and all officers had nominated deputies to take their places in case they were arrested.

We were about a month in Belfast jail when we were all transferred to Dundalk. Dermot Lynch was there at this time. Meetings of the I.R.B. were held in the different cells, and it was now I began to form an impression that the I.R.B. was no longer a necessity but, in fact, a danger. There were excellent men there who were not members of the I.R.B., including Joe Ring from Westport, an excellent fellow in every way. These men were excluded from the meetings of the I.R.B. which was still maintained as a highly secret organisation, and, as a result, suspicion and jealousy must have been created in their minds.

While we were in prison the conscription threat came to a head, and an order was issued by G.H.Q. that anyone who could obtain bail was to do so and get his release as all were required outside. Michael Brennan of Clare was the prisoners' O/C at this time and he approached me about getting bail. This was a detestable job for me, and I pointed out to him that it would be of little use owing to my previous jail record. However, he was insistent and I applied for bail and got out and proceeded to Westport. I was only a fortnight at home when I was arrested again for the "German Plot" and eventually found myself in Usk prison in Wales. Joe McGrath, J.K. O'Reilly, Barney Mellows, Frank Shouldice, Dick Coleman, Con Donovan, Tadhg Barry, Frank Lawless and Paudeen O'Keefe were amongst my comrades there. There were eighteen of us all told. We had political treatment which was good. We had free association and looked after our own cooking and feeding arrangements. Our cell doors were continually open.

The governor was a Mr. Young. The 'flu epidemic now raged and poor Dick Coleman died there.

We went or rather were brought to Usk in May and were there until the following March (1919). By this time the general election had been held and the first Dáil had met. On our release I returned to Westport. The organisation of Volunteers had been kept going. James Malone had kept things moving while we were away. I resumed my appointment as Battalion Adjutant. Tom Derrig was O/C. A Brigade had now been organised in the county and Derrig was now appointed Brigade Adjutant. MacBride was the O/C Brigade. There was only one Brigade to cover the county and this was an unwieldy organisation, particularly so as transport and communication were not then as advanced as they are now. McHugh was appointed Brigade Quartermaster Joe Ring was now appointed O/C of the Westport Battalion and Bruddy Malone Vice Commandant. There was still nine Companies in the Battalion, each of which was slowly growing in strength. Training went ahead as usual. We had a few rifles which were transferred from Company to Company for training purposes. There were a few rounds of ammunition for the rifles but none was fired ^{for} practice - it was too precious. We had firing practice with .22 rifles. We also picked up an odd revolver here and there. In the general raid for arms at the harvest time of 1919 we collected a number of shot guns and cartridges. We also raided the railway station and commandeered three hundred and fifty gallons of petrol.

From now on I was 'on the run' more or less and I did not sleep at home. I had now decided that I was not going back to prison again if I could help it, and had realised while there that with care it was possible to do so. The Sinn Féin courts had been set up in 1917 and were functioning satisfactorily. It was not easy to draw a demarcation line between the Sinn Féin courts and courtmartial held by the Volunteers, as the Volunteers more or less ran the Sinn Féin courts also. We courtmartialled people for refusing to hand over arms to us, and also people who said nasty things about the I.R.A.

The year 1919 was a year of great police work by the Volunteers. The R.I.C. now maintained only the merest semblance of a police force and the public no longer recognised them as such. The result was that all the police work was ~~or~~ had to be taken over by the Volunteers, and as they were only able to give what time they could spare to the work it developed into heavy duty. However, the people were with us and with their help it was carried out efficiently. The decisions of the courts were respected by the people, who testified to their fairness, and barristers and solicitors were pleased to practice before them. The first public court was held in Westport town, Conor Maguire presiding. I was on the bench that day, as also was Michael Kilroy. The Volunteers did duty in the court and the British authorities did not interfere. Not a single person patronised the British courts. Even the Unionist element in the area supported our courts.

A number of us were now living on the people so to speak as we moved from house to house and locality to locality. In this way, the people grew accustomed to looking after us and to take care of the Active Service Unit which came into being later on. Everywhere we went we were welcomed by the people in their houses and they did everything possible to make us feel comfortable and secure.

When the general raid for arms was ordered in September of 1919 we had very little to do in that respect as we had already taken up all the shotguns in the area and that was the only type of weapon that was available in that part of the country. The shotguns were a motley lot and, for the most part, old and not too serviceable. A fair supply of cartridges was also picked up. We made "buckshot" and loaded into the cartridges, but this proved afterwards to be a disappointing piece of armament. It was hard to store cartridges in dumps and when they got damp the paper of the case became swollen and hard to load into the guns and nearly impossible to extract. I am afraid the packing of the cartridges was also faulty as their effect was disappointing.

By the spring of 1920 the R. I. C. had evacuated their barracks at Murrisk and at the Quay in Westport and at Easter time of that year, in conformity with the rest of the country, these premises were destroyed by our men, being burned down and rendered uninhabitable. These were the only two places evacuated in the Westport area. There was no Excise Office in Westport, so we had not the opportunity of raiding one of them. The newspapers reported the burning of the evacuated barracks and the raiding of the Excise offices

throughout the country, and it was very pleasant to realise the extent of the Volunteer organisation and how it could act as one Unit throughout the land.

A consignment of one hundred and fifty gallons of petrol arrived at Westport Station for Anthony O'Malley of the Sound. The R.I.C. took it from the station to the Barracks for safety and then reloaded it on the train for Newport. Tom Ketterick, Bruddy Malone, Charles Gavin, and some others held up the train outside the town and took the petrol off. This was dumped in the Carrowkenedy area. I don't know what our heads had in view or how they thought they would use it. Cars at this time were very few and their use was very restricted by the police. The petrol remained in that area until the Truce, when it turned out very useful.

The whole worry now was arms, arms - how were we going to get arms. We thought that if we had money we could procure arms from G.H.Q. We realised afterwards that it was not as easy as all that. We now decided that we would approach the business men in the town and all individuals in the area who appeared to have good means and put up to them to suscribe an amount of money for the purchase of arms. While this could not be described as a levy, each individual was told the amount that was expected of him and, in most cases, this amount was put up by the person in question. We received sums of £50 and £20 in some cases. In all, we collected something more than £400. We had the man to negotiate the purchase of the weapons - Tom Ketterick - and, supplied with sums of money from this fund, he travelled from time to time to Dublin. He did not get all the arms or the types we required, but he always brought back something and had many an extraordinary adventure in eluding the police and British Forces in doing so.

Sometimes he would return with a rifle or two; other times, with only a few revolvers and, others, with some hand grenades. This went on throughout the year. In the meantime, we looked after training, recruiting and organising, which had to be all done in secret now.

In September of 1920 or around that period the county was divided into four Brigade areas - West, North, South and East. Our Brigade was the West Mayo Brigade. Tom Derrig was now appointed O/C of the Brigade: I was appointed Brigade Adjutant and Michael McHugh was appointed Brigade Quartermaster. The Battalions comprising the Brigade were 1st Castlebar area; 2nd Newport area; 3rd Westport area and the 4th Louisburgh area. The O/C of the 1st Battalion was James Chambers; the 2nd Battalion O/C was Michael Kilroy; the 3rd Battalion, Joe King and the 4th Battalion, Pat Kelly. The Brigade armament consisted of about twelve Service Rifles and a few single shot Martini Rifles and five or six revolvers of service pattern, and a fair supply of shot guns. Ammunition for all weapons was very limited except the shot guns, for which there was a good supply of cartridges. We also had a small amount of gelignite and a small number of bombs - GHQ pattern which were heavy articles and were hard to carry.

We now started to organise a small Active Service Unit in each Battalion at this time. This would be late in the harvest time of 1920. Each Battalion Unit was solely under the command of the respective Battalion Commander who was entitled to use it for such operations as he liked, without reference to the Brigade H.Q. The Brigade O/C, Kilroy, and I and other Staff Officers were in continual visitation to

each Battalion Unit and assisting them in training and so forth. Each Unit occupied ambush positions in its own area but, at this time, police patrols were never regular and contact with them was never established. The police would patrol different roads on different days and at different hours so that without direct information of their intentions it was purely a hit-and-miss affair, with the luck all against our men. Sometimes we would only have left a position a short while when a patrol would arrive.

The Brigade O/C Tom Derrig and the Brigade Quartermaster were arrested by the British towards the end of the year 1920 and Michael Kilroy, who was O/C of the Newport Battalion, now became O/C and Tom Ketterick replaced McHugh as Quartermaster. GHQ had issued orders sometime previously that all officers should have deputies to replace them in case of arrest, and Derrig had nominated Kilroy which was, I think, a very wise choice. I now became vice-O/C of the Brigade: Seán Gibbons was Adjutant and Ketterick Quartermaster. Bruddy Malone now became Vice-Commandant of the Westport Battalion.

The Battalions had tried to operate the Battalion columns on their own up to now, but without much success. The Brigade O/C now decided to amalgamate all the Units into one Brigade Active Service Unit, of which he himself took charge personally. All of the Brigade staff were on the Active Service Unit and we carried the Brigade Headquarters Office around on our backs. Communications from GHQ were very rare - in fact I only remember our having got one during the period from this to the Truce. The O/C Westport had applied for permission to kidnap the Marquis of Sligo and hold him as a hostage. GHQ, in their communication, forbade any interference with him or his property. There was plenty of communication between

the Battalions and Brigade HQ which was carried by local despatch carriers who were always able to find us despite the fact that we never indicated to anyone to what area we were moving next. It is a great tribute to these men and to the people that we were never once, that we know, given away by them.

The Column, when at full strength, would muster from sixty to sixty-five men, but it was seldom all together as sections would be sent to different areas for different duties. Training in aiming and minor tactics went on continuously even though we were moving regularly. Snapshooting with revolvers with .22 ammunition while on the move in the cowboy fashion was practised and gave good results, as was shown shortly at Carrowkennedy. The Column had arrived at the village of Clady on the 20th or 21st March, 1921. The O/C, Joe King, and Bruddy Malone left the column and went west to the Leenane road to select an ambush position on that road. It was late in the evening and was dusk at the time - that is, almost dark. They ran into a patrol of three R.I.C. on the road and a meeting engagement took place, the outcome depending on who was the quickest on the "draw". Kilroy and his pals got there first. Constable Coughlan was killed; Constable Love wounded and the other man surrendered, and their arms comprising a shotgun and two revolvers and some ammunition were captured. We had heard the firing and were about to move in that direction when the O/C and the two others returned carrying the policeman's guns and belts.

We now packed up again and travelled east to the village of Ardragh. The Castlebar and Louisburgh men were not with us at this time as they had been sent back

to their Battalion O/Cs for duty in their own areas. We stayed in Ardragh the next day and saw about two hundred police raid a village about a mile away. We got into a position to fight them but they did not come our way. A few days after this the O/C and I went to the Newport area to visit the Battalion there and, with them, we occupied ambush positions at Brushhool and Bridge and the Yellow River north of Newport, but had no luck as the enemy did not oblige by showing himself. We returned to the Brigade column, bringing with us a few men from the Newport area who were anxious to serve on the Brigade column. They had collected a few rifles in that area by now. D.I. Fuge of the R. I. C. had been very active in that area, beating people up and generally acting the bully and terrorising the people, and these men had been continually trying to get him, but without success. They had a German Mauser rifle and a short Mauser.

We contacted the Brigade column at Owenee. Dr. Madden now joined us here. He had been practising in England but now had succeeded in getting an appointment in the Infirmary in Castlebar. On arrival in Castlebar, instead of going to take up his appointment, he left his bags in the station and came straight out and joined us. During the months of April and March it was a case of occupying ambush position after ambush position, in the hope of the enemy coming along, but without any luck. In the end of April, Kilroy, Gibbons and I of the Brigade staff were below Newport down in Shramore when we got word of the fight at Tourmakeady in South Mayo. We came up to Newport and occupied the town with the Newport section of the column who were in that area and collected an amount of stuff that we needed in the nature of clothing - boots, etc. That

night we marched to Creeragh Hill where we met the Westport section of the column. We all now made our way towards Tourmakeady and on reaching a point a few miles from there we learned that all the men of the South Mayo Brigade who were engaged in the fight there, had got away. Our information was that the enemy had them surrounded and it was to their relief we were going.

After this the column remained together as one unit. A few evenings prior to the 19th May we occupied the town of Westport. We thought we might get a patrol in the town but not a sign of the enemy was to be seen anywhere. We were there from about 10 p.m. until 2 a.m. the following morning. We pulled out of there and travelled east of Westport and then turned north. Very seldom did we do any travelling on the roads - always going across country. Only the Brigade staff knew our direction, or our destination. While on the move we did our own protection duties, but usually at night the local units provided protection when we were resting in billets. We also found our own protection while on billets during day time.

We now took the column to Kilmaclasser, the half parish of Kilmeena. Jim Moran and Jim Brown left us and went into Newport in the hope of getting a shot at something in the town. From a position over Carraghbawn beside Michael Kilroy's house they shot Constable Butler while he was passing through the gate entrance to the barracks. That night we all moved towards Kilmeena in the hope of bringing off an ambush there. Ten or twelve of the Westport men who were members of the column were left in that area in the hope of getting a patrol there and, incidentally, these

men were some of the best armed in the column, all having Service rifles.

We arrived at Kilmeena just before daylight and took up a position on the east side of the road. Michael Stanton and I were out on the Newport flank of the position about three hundred yards or more from the main body on a piece of elevated ground. This position gave us a good clear view towards Newport for a considerable distance. Seán Gibbons was in a similar position on the Westport flank. I was to give warning of an approach of enemy from the Newport side and likewise Gibbons on the other flank was to do the same. Gibbons was armed with a revolver: I was armed with a rifle. We were to fire a shot as a warning signal. The main ambush party consisted of about twenty-five or twenty-six men, mostly armed with shotguns and a few rifles which were not very accurate. We were in position all day. We had not got any sleep the previous night and with the exception of, I think, some tea in the morning, got no food - at least I got none, and I don't think any of the others got any either. With the want of sleep and food it was a great strain to keep alert. The Brigade O/C Michael Kilroy was in charge.

At about 3 p.m. in the afternoon three lorries of police and Black and Tans approached from the Westport direction and drove into the position. They halted when fired on and quickly had a machine gun in action from a position at the bridge on the Westport side of the ambush area. This gun position was visible to me and I fired at it. I had a single shot Martini rifle but the range was about eight hundred yards from me and I did not succeed in putting it out

of action. The fighting went on furiously until about nine p.m. and it was now beginning to get dark. I perceived that our men were withdrawing from the position and I left ours and succeeded in joining our main body who had retreated about three miles in the direction of Castlebar. The enemy had not followed us up. I now learned that five of our men had been killed - Jordan, Stanton, O'Donnell, Collins and M. Kelly. John Cannon, P. O'Malley and Tom _____ were wounded and captured by the enemy. John Chambers, Hughes and Swift were also wounded but were able to retire with our survivors. We got the wounded men attended to at Clogher village by Nurse Lottie Joyce and, strapping them on horseback, we made our way towards the village of Skerdagh. We had got a bad licking and we were a very dejected party as we toiled along. We remained in Skerdagh on Friday night, Saturday and Sunday night, making the wounded men as comfortable as possible, and we were very fortunate in having Dr. Madden with us.

I was billeted in a house with a man named Lambert and in the morning, about 6.30 or 7 a.m. or earlier, one of our men rushed in and shouted that the enemy was coming. Lambert and I immediately moved up towards where Kilroy and some of the others were staying in some houses north of us. On the way I met Jim Moran. He was looking for me with a message from the O/C to the effect that I was to collect the wounded and have them conveyed safely out of the area and that they would cover our retreat. We got the wounded men and by carrying them and helping them we got up to a valley near the top of the hill where we got a horse and put two of the men up on him. Swift was able to walk.

When we got over the crest of the hill I decided to travel east instead of turning west for Shramore. I anticipated that enemy reinforcements from Newport might come out that road. There were no roads in the direction we took, only mountain paths. On looking back towards Shramore I could see hundreds of enemy in a long convoy heading towards Skerdagh, so my decision was a lucky one as, had we made for Shramore, we would have walked right into them. We eventually got to the village of Lenagh and there I met two grand young fellows who volunteered to take the wounded men from us and look after them. We handed them over to them and right well did they look after them. They brought them to Lahadrone and put them up there.

By now, the fighting at Skerdagh was over and it would not be of any use returning there. We stayed in a cave in the hillside that night and next evening we arrived in Pat McNulty's of Glandahork. We remained there for a couple of days and while there we learned that an auction sale was being held in Orans of Newport. We had learned by now that none of our fellows had been captured or wounded at Skerdagh with the exception of Jim Brown, who had been killed before we retired, but we thought that Kilroy and the rest had retreated ~~north~~ ^{SOUTH & M} and were still being hard pressed by the enemy. We thought that by making a demonstration at the auction, we would lead the enemy to believe that the column was in the Westport area and so draw attention to that part. We held up the people at the auction but nothing happened as a result - as a matter of fact, our men of the column had evaded the enemy successfully.

Two days after this we located the column at Owenwee and joined them there. We found the column or

what was left of it assembled there, but nearly all the Castlereah men were absent and had been since Kilmeena. Some of these men had gone home and others were arrested. Mr. Cannon from Castlebar was still with us. After a night at Owenwee we moved to Oughty and spent a night or two there. We burned the police barracks at Dromin which had been evacuated after the shooting affair in Carrowkennedy in March. We now moved to the village of Claddagh in the Carrowkennedy district and spent a couple of nights there. Our strength was now about twenty-five men which included the Westport men who had not been with us at Kilmeena. We had eighteen Service rifles and some single shot rifles - about twenty all told. The remainder were armed with revolvers, including myself. We had about fifty rounds per rifle and some hand grenades.

While resting at Claddagh we saw two lorries and a private car filled with police and Tans going out the road towards Leenane. We knew that there was a bridge down on that road about six miles further on, and that they would therefore have to come back by the same route. We immediately rushed to an ambush position about a mile further down the road and occupied it in a hurry. We were in a position about fifty yards back from the road on a height overlooking the road. We were all on one side of the road except for Joe Ring who was behind a small hillock on the west side. His job was to prevent or pick off any of the police who tried to get to cover on that side. We had good control of the road underneath us.

We could see the convoy returning: two tenders or lorries with the last one towing the private car which had broken down, apparently. When the first tender

came into our position, fire was opened on it and the driver, Inspector Stephenson, who had taken the wheel some distance back the road, was shot right between the eyes. The lorry or tender stopped dead on the centre of the road. The police had a Lewis gun on this and it came into action immediately. The gunner was shot almost immediately - he had fired only one or two short bursts. A second man or the number two on the gun now tried to get it into action and he met with a similar fate, and the gun was silent thereafter.

The second tender following the first, and with the private car in tow, halted a short distance from the first. The crew of this had three or four men knocked out immediately. The remainder jumped from the tender and took cover underneath a small bridge which carried the road at this place. Availing of the cover of a dike which ran along the stream, they made their way into a small house nearby. We kept up a strong fire on this house. Meanwhile, the enemy in the first tender were firing rifle grenades at our position, but they were all falling short. It would appear that the man who was firing these grenades was in the act of drawing the pin from one when he was shot through the wrist, letting the rifle fall in the lorry. The grenade slipped out of the cup and exploded in the body of the tender, and that was the end of the fight as far as the first tender was concerned. Someone in that lot now put up a white flag indicating surrender. Some of our men went down to the tender and collected the Lewis gun from it. The policeman with the white flag was now ordered to proceed to the house where the remainder of his comrades were and order them to surrender. In the meantime our men had got the Lewis gun into action and fired a couple of bursts at the house to ~~thicken~~ thicken up

the demand.

After a short parley with our policeman emissary, they came out and surrendered - Indeed, I understand from the occupants of the house that there was no fight left in them at this stage and they were cowering in any place they could conceal themselves - even under the beds. About seven or eight of the enemy had been killed and six or seven wounded. We allowed one policeman to proceed to Westport for help, as there was very little we could do for them and we could not afford to delay in the place. We captured 1 Lewis gun with three thousand rounds of ammunition and fifteen magazines filled with ammunition; twenty-five rifles or thereabouts with an amount of rifle ammunition; some boxes of "egg bombs" and Mills hand grenades and about eight or nine revolvers - short service pattern. We had not even a man scratched. We set fire to the tenders and, heavily laden with our booty, we proceeded back to Claddagh and got a meal there. It was getting on for nightfall by now.

We now proceeded in a southerly direction for about half a mile or more and then crossed the Leenane road, turning West towards Dromin and then on to the village of Durlas. This change of direction was to throw the enemy off the scent. We got food and refreshments in Durlas and stayed there for three nights. In the meantime we had made a re-distribution of our armament and helped ourselves to the good equipment we had captured, dumping the surplus equipment securely - to be picked up later. From now on we were in the real sense a flying column as the enemy were continually probing, trying to locate us. They were sending out parties of about fifty military after us in an attempt to force us into a corner. From Durlas we crossed to

Cregganbawn and spent a night there. From there to Glenbought—a couple of nights there—and then on to Eriff and from there to Tonlaguee. From Tonlaguee we proceeded to Ballinacorigga and thence to the north of Newport. Next we proceeded north-east to Coolabun. Usually the enemy visited the places we had left within the next few days of our departure. All this slogging was done at night time and nearly all across country, and it was hard going and, in addition, the nights were very short at this time of year. We now proceeded to the Nephin area and through the Windy Gap into the country that General Humbert had traversed. Next, on to Park which lies north-east of Castlebar and while there we were invited by Father O'Hara of Bohola to go there where he entertained us to a right good repast and a dance. We spent three days there and then came across into Ballyhale through Kiltimagh and Balla. The day after we arrived there the enemy were coming in on the Balcarra road. We left Ballyhale and went to Tonlaguee and then on to Owenwee where we arrived on a Saturday night and then discovered that British military were moving in that direction from Ballinrobe.

It was only a matter of time when the enemy would corner us and we could not hope to go on evading them, and we were now apparently inside a round-up area. After a conference, we decided to disband the column and to dump our arms for the time being. The men were instructed to break into small parties and to scatter, but to avoid arrest by all means possible. The O/C, Jim Rush, Ketterick, Seán Gibbons and I and Dr. Madden went south towards Leenanâ. As we walked out the road in that direction we could see the lights of a convoy coming out from Westport.

We had got to the lead mines at Shaffrey and the O/C, who was always interested in mining and minerals, went to examine the mines. Dr. Madden, Gibbons and I waited on the road for them. We had a local ^{lad,} Austin Judge, as guide with us. On looking back we could see the lights of a lorry still coming in our direction. I ran back and shouted to Kilroy. He apparently had seen the lights also and had turned and proceeded in a westerly direction. We went east down a valley and got near a house where a Mr. ~~O'Donnell~~ ^{M'DONALD} lived, and hid in a big drain there. ~~O'Donnell~~ ^{M'DONALD} was proceeding at the time to herd sheep. He passed quite close to where we were lying and, as he did so, I reached out and touched his leg. He just glanced down at us and I asked him if he could get us some tea and bread. He said he would do so when he returned, as it would be dangerous for him to turn back now. Shortly afterwards, he returned and brought us the tea as requested, having made sure now that none of the enemy were in the immediate surroundings. An aeroplane was scouting around overhead.

We remained in that drain for some considerable time. We noticed that the enemy had no patrol on the road, a fact which was taken into account by us. The Lancers were collecting every one of the local inhabitants as they moved forward and we realised we were just on the verge of a big round-up operation. There was a Land Commission gang working a short distance from us and they knew we were hiding in our drain. A soldier came down to them and ordered them to proceed for identification. Normally, I expect they would not have moved, but now realising that they would only draw attention to us, they decided to go, and carrying their spades on their shoulders, they went off with the soldier. We now crossed the road and into a small wood on the

other side. We remained there for a short while and then got out on the eastern side and crept along through the tall "ferns" which were growing abundantly there. Most of the time we were crawling on our stomachs as the aeroplane was continually circling around overhead. We got to a house a short distance away and got a cup of tea there. We now proceeded down a ravine to a river bed and sat in the water there until night came down.

That night we made our way to the village of Ardagh. The enemy had taken all the men out of the village and they, the enemy, were not likely to come back there, so we were outside the enemy encirclement ring now. They did not succeed in catching even one of our lads. There was now great rumour of a Truce floating around amongst the people and also in the daily newspapers, so we made our way back towards Westport and I was very near my own home when the Truce took effect.

It is hard to describe our feelings towards the Truce. We were dazed and could not realise that the trouble was over, at least for a time. At the same time, it was like a new world to be able to move about again freely and not like a hunted animal, and to be able to sleep throughout the night in peace and to sit down to regular meals again. All the while, none of us believed that it was going to last long, and for some time it felt just like passing from a nightmare to a lovely dream.

There is no doubt about it, regarding our area at least, that we were in a strong position to carry on the fight when the Truce came. Our morale was at a

high standard, particularly so since our success at Carrowkennedy, and we were in a far better position as regards armament. We had sufficient now to equip another column of equal strength. We had learned many lessons the hard way and felt that we were a match for any corresponding party of enemy of our strength and could outwit him no matter what game he played. We knew that the enemy, unless they had distinct advantages, were not as good fighters as our men which, of course, is explained by the fact that we were Volunteers fighting for an ideal, without any thought of monetary reward, whereas they fought for their pay.

The summer days with their long hours of daylight and short nights were all in the enemy's favour - whereas the long nights suited us and, for this reason, the column was disbanded until the nights would favour us again. Most of the column were officers from the Units in the Brigade who were on the run, and nearly all of them were capable of taking charge of a column themselves.

While Intelligence Service in the Brigade had not reached the standard that one would wish - if such service ever does, it certainly did good work. The ordinary people kept us posted continually with all bits of information that came into their possession, such as enemy movements and so forth. We had contacts inside the police force and, in this respect, such men as Constable Lynch in Louisburgh; Constable O'Brien and D. I. Maguire in Westport rendered very valuable service to the cause. Unfortunately D. I. Maguire was moved out of Westport at an early date. Another man named O'Driscoll in the Congested Districts Board also was able to assist us with useful bits of information. We also had contacts in the P.O. and were able to get copies of the code

messages which passed through to the police. We could not decipher these and sent them on to H. Q. and that was all we heard of them.

There was very little attempt made to make munitions in the area prior to the Truce, with the exception of buckshot, and this was not a great success either.

There was no one executed for espionage in the area and I don't know if there was anyone engaged in such work, although of course we had our suspicions about certain individuals. The enemy would, of course, pick some information about us from time to time through people engaging in loose talk, and such like, but I doubt if any paid enemy agents existed.

Signed

Edward Moane

(Edward Moane)

Date

30 Sept 1953

30 Sept. 1953.

Witness

Matthew Barry Comd't.

(Matthew Barry) Comd't.

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