ORIGINAL

ROINN COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 927

Witness

Sean Gibbons,
16 Dollymount Avenue,
Dublin.

Identity.

Member of I.R.B., Westport, 1917 - ;
Adjutant West Mayo Brigade, 1921 - .

Subject.

National and military activities,
West Mayo, 1912-1921.

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ORIGINAL

STATEMENT OF MR. SEÁN GIBBONS,

16 DOLLYMOUNT AVENUE, DOLLYMOUNT, DUBLIN.

In 1912 I came home to Westport from my grandfather's place, where I was reared, and I went to the Christian Brothers' School. The Brothers, of course, in those days were violently patriotic. Brother Toomey, I remember, said one time to a class of us, "God help poor Ireland if you are the sons she has to depend on when she is in danger!". In violent contrast to this, Brother Ward, who was afterwards the Principal of the Christian Brothers School at Westport, said in 1921 when we came home after the Truce on the 11th July that we were the best class he ever had in all the years. I should, of course, in justice say that Brother Ward, who was from Monaghan, and his family were all extremely national and republican.

In 1914 in July I must have been a good paper reader because I was taking a keen interest in the international situation as regards the possibility of an outbreak of war and what effect it would have on Ireland's destinies. I think at this time that the Volunteer movement was in full swing and I remember distinctly reading of the Bachelor's Walk killings and the landing of the guns at Howth by Erskine Childers. The newspaper captions, I remember, went like this on the 1st or 2nd August, 1914: "While Europe talks of war, men and women are being shot down in Dublin streets!". I was, of course, still at school and, needless to state, we were all in a furore about the landing of the guns.

"Now", we said, as youngsters will, "it is the time for Ireland!"

I should mention that I had joined the Fíanna Éireann, which was officered by Tom Derrig, and attended the route marches and parades. (Rather amusing at the time was the remark by some local person to the effect: "Does Tom Derrig and his Boy Scouts think they can beat the British Empire!")

England declared war on the 4th August, 1914, and Europe, of course, was ablaze. As schoolboys we were all familiar with the dictum, "England's difficulty is Ireland's opportunity". Joe McBride, afterwards a T.D. and brother of Major John McBride, was one of the Volunteer leaders. I do not remember rightly if he was in charge of the whole lot in the district. Joe McBride was intensely national and republican and, when I succeeded in getting into the Volunteers, I was the happiest boy in the world, even though I was still going to school.

The crisis came when the Redmondite and Volunteer Executive split and, of course, it had its repercussions in every part of the country, Westport included. Some of us paraded and, now that I look back upon it, the numbers appear to me to have been very small. Joe McBride addressed all those present. The question at issue was: on which side were we going to stand? - or, as Joe McBride put it, "Too long has England spat upon you, scorned you, reviled you! Now is your opportunity!", and went on to the effect that those who would stand for Ireland would stand with him over on his side, and those who stood for England and Redmond, on the other side. Neither then nor now could there be any answer to that

but the one answer. I think a few went to the side of Redmond but most of us went to the side of McBride whom we knew stood for Ireland.

From that until 1916 the life of the Volunteers in Westport was the usual one. Enemy activity concentrated mainly on the bigger figures in the movement, like McBride, Derrig and Ned Moane. Any pretext was good enough to throw them into jail, but the enthusiasm and the energy in the movement still carried on and, though driven underground most of the time, seemed to be able to burst forth at any time at all into daylight again. Mainly during those years it was a question of organising under difficult conditions and, while England floundered through her war, it was up to us at home to keep the spirit alive and to see that no recruits were found, at least in our locality, to join the fight which England stated was for the freedom of small nations.

I have a distinct recollection of this period - 1915 I think - of a very large recruiting meeting in Westport, the speakers at which delivered their orations from the balcony of the Town Hall. Lord Sligo was one of the principal speakers and, even now with the lapse of years, to this day I am somewhat surprised at some of the business people who attended on the platform. Time servers or business was the explanation and not anti-nationality in any sense. I should state here that Westport was noted for being pro-German according to the British, but what it actually was, was anti-British. Lord Sligo at this particular recruiting meeting excelled himself, though prior to this he had taken no interest, so far as I know, in local affairs. There was, of course, a large attendance at the meeting, as there will be at any meeting, and, though they had Michael O'Leary,

V.C., from Cork to ginger things up and a number of tables ready to take the names of recruits after the meeting was over, they did not get one recruit in Westport as a result of this meeting. As a matter of fact, there was only one person in the locality, so far as I know, who joined the army. The other people were the Reservists of the Connaught Rangers who were called up for service with the militia and most of them left their bones abroad in Mesopotamia and Flanders.

It appears to me, looking back now, that behind the national movement was a strong organised body of thought that knew particularly well what they wanted. I was to have confirmation of this, when I became somewhat older in 1917. The Royal Irish Constabulary were falling into disfavour and, of course, we regarded them as both enemies of the people and enemies of Ireland. I should in fairness state that we had at least one or two of their children in our own ranks, who proved themselves afterwards able and efficient officers.

In 1915 something of note happened, at least I considered it something of note. The Countess Markievicz brought her play and players - "In Memory Of The Dead" - to Westport Town Hall. One of the players came on the stage and, before the curtains were raised, sang "In Memory Of The Dead", with a drawn sword. I learned years afterwards that he was a young barrister, named Charlie Power, who later was one of the first Judges appointed by the Irish Government. He died some years ago.

I remember at school one day in 1915 all the boys of about fourteen or fifteen years of age were brought into one school and were addressed by two or three people, one of whom I think was Liam Mellows. While I cannot say

even now who the others were, I believe one of them might be Heuston. Mellows enunciated what I would consider the clarion call of the Fianna and at this stage I can hear him - if it were he - saying, "Your motto must be: strength in your arms, truth on your lips and purity in your hearts!".

My activity during the 1916 Rising was not very violent nor very active as I was still a schoolboy. There was a play to be held in the Town Hall on Easter Sunday or Easter Monday and apparently it was to be a national play. I can't remember now, but the Volunteers had paraded, had gone on a route march to a place outside Westport and had come back, and there was a considerable amount of talk among the people about an attack on the barracks which did not, needless to say, come to anything for the very reason that there was very little to attack with. Then word came through on Monday evening, I think, about the Rising and Westport, like every other place in Ireland, I expect, was full of rumours. In the week following the Rising I was awakened pretty early, got up and found the town invested by at least a company of Dragoons who had come in earlier. The R.I.C., of course, as usual, had put them wise to all the leaders, with the result that Tom Derrig, Charlie Hughes, Joseph Ruddy and a number of others were arrested. You can imagine the feelings of everyone in the town when they discovered what was afoot and they did not know whether these would be shot or not because, believe it or not, the R.I.C., though drawn from Ireland itself, put the worst complexion on things as a rule though there were many and honourable exceptions even in Westport to whom it is right to pay tribute, but these were things we did

not know until later.

1916, after the Rising, seemed to be a year of despair to a great extent, and I suppose all the localities participated in the general hopelessness, but gradually a surge upwards began again and, when the releases came at the end of 1916, Westport, or at least national Westport, began to smile again and activities in republican circles went rapidly ahead.

I do not think that I am committing any indiscretion, or that I am breaking rules of any kind, when I state that I was sworn into the Irish Republican Brotherhood in 1917, after apparently having been under close and constant observation for a considerable time. I was still at school and I remember well the only two questions I asked of my sponsor - were two particular people in it. If they were, I said, I would not join. He answered me in the negative. Joe McBride, as well as I remember, was the Head of the Irish Republican Brotherhood in the Westport area, and Joseph Ruddy, who was afterwards killed in the National Army, was the Volunteer or Brother that swore me in.

The part played by the Irish Republican Brotherhood from this time until 1919 was a very important part, at least in Westport. Sinn Féin had become very active and I became Secretary, Joe McBride, President, and Myles Hawkshaw, Vice-President. The Irish Republican Brotherhood were responsible for the control of the Sinn Féin organisation there, and also stepped in to see that the Volunteer organisation was kept in control by people who were preparing and intended to fight at the first opportunity. The mere fact of a man not being in the I.R.B. did not preclude him from

being an officer in the Volunteers and indeed there were several outstanding officers who were not in the I.R.B., but mainly the controlling officers were I.R.B. men. There is no doubt in my mind after the years that the I.R.B. did a good job of work and there was no danger of things falling asunder while they stood behind the scenes in one organisation and participated in, ruled and controlled the other national organisations. Their activity was often directed at seemingly unimportant things and people, but in ninety-nine per cent. of cases they hit those who definitely stood against the interests of the country. I speak, of course, of my own locality.

1918 in Westport the pot had commenced to boil again. The Volunteers were active but the organisation in Mayo - nominally one organisation for the County - would appear to have become somewhat cumbersome. There was not sufficient activity to keep the younger people employed on Sundays and in the evenings. The question of arms had begun to be a very important question with the force which had taken upon itself to organise itself completely on an army basis. Joe McBride, as well as I remember, at this time gave us lectures in the formation of officers' training corps and we laid our hands on any military manual that we could get to prepare ourselves for the struggle we knew full well lay ahead. Politics, with the exception of Sinn Féin, we knew very little about, but the Irish Parliamentary Party, which under John Redmond had been in control for almost a generation, was on its way out. Still the people had not got an opportunity for over eight or ten years to register an expression of opinion. In 1918 also the

British revived the conscription threat and, in conjunction with the clergy and all shades of opinion, some of whom had been lukewarm enough until this time, we, that is, the Irish Republican Brotherhood, the Volunteers and Sinn Féin, organised the people to secure the signatures demanded in accordance with the instructions issued from anti-conscription headquarters in Dublin. A large amount of money was also subscribed in furtherance of the fight and the Volunteers, up to this not of strong numerical strength, began to increase in numbers. There were plenty of recruits, and the eternal cry was for guns. We did what we could to ease this position by raiding the people of Unionist convictions and taking up any arms they had in their possession.

It should be borne in mind that the world war at this stage, that is, in the Spring of 1918, was in the balance. The Germans had put on what proved to be their last big push and they nearly wrested victory from defeat. Hence the alacrity of English politicians to get, if possible, two hundred thousand men, even of conscripts, out of Ireland. Most Irishmen at the time had made up their minds quite simply that they would die at home rather than be conscripted into the British Army, even though they had practically no arms. The British, of course, again stepped in with the usual thing at a time like this - a German Plot. I do not know if there was anything in it. Possibly there was, because, as always, the energetic people in the movement looked to the farthest ends of the earth, if need be, to procure assistance to help in overthrowing those who ruled us by gun and bayonet and threat.

To get a proper view of this time, it should always be borne in mind that side by side with the Irish Republican Brotherhood behind the scenes in Ireland worked the Clan na Gael headed by Devoy in America. It had become the custom to decry secret organisations and perhaps rightly so, but, as one old Fenian said to myself in Westport, "All we could give you, was to hand you on the flag. We did not do much". I felt proud and, of course, like everyone else knew that it was the mission of our generation to be, in my opinion then, and in my opinion now, the greatest generation. (I am not a person that believes in particular people having a mission but, when a whole generation has a particular mission, then neither time nor the world can ignore it.)

The scare created by the German offensive died down after two or three months and, whether it was that, or the united resistance of a whole people, that dictated the policy of shelving the Conscription Act is not known, but reasonable opinion leans to the view that the British were averse to the creation of another front, even though we had only pikes and makeshift weapons to defend ourselves with. In that year again, the German plot was uncovered. There is no proof that there was one, but, as before, any enemy of England was a friend of Ireland and perhaps one or two here and there were doing their utmost - their very right utmost too, in my opinion - to enlist as much help as they could abroad so that we could obtain help in the shape of arms. It must always be borne in mind with regard to those years that Clan na Gael in America was always working in one way or another in an endeavour to help the home-land. While these methods never erred in sincerity, one feels now that a

little act of direction or suggestion by the people at home working in a friendly way with the leaders of Clan na Gael would have strengthened us considerably here.

In Westport Joe McBride and the usual people were again arrested for the German Plot. I seemed to be lucky, with some others. Perhaps I was regarded as a schoolboy still, which I was, as I did not finish school until June, 1918, when I passed Senior Grade, taught by Brother Ward.

In the Autumn of 1918 it was obvious to us all that Germany was beaten and that once again England had come out on top, which foreshadowed disaster for us as a race. So some people thought. We of the Volunteers did not. The Armistice came on the 11th November, 1918, and all over Ireland, the forces that stood for England jubilated. In Westport they endeavoured to have a big display, but it seems to me now that it was no larger than a small tea-party. The people, while they were glad the war was over, distrusted England, their agents and sympathisers, and 1916, which originally appeared to have swamped the national movement, had given it a new lease of life and created greater enthusiasm than ever among the people. As the years lengthened, the Rising was seen for what it actually was - a sacrifice, that the nation itself, as a living thing, might live. The life of a nation is the life of the average individual in it, I have always held, and the life of the average person in Westport and around it, or in the whole area, was, in the main, a national life. The people were whipping themselves up to an amazing height as regards patriotism. Perhaps after every great creative period there is a fallow period, and perhaps that is the reason cynicism has been so much

evidenced from 1923 onwards.

Lloyd George, one of the ablest, if not the ablest politician next to Castlereagh, who has ever ruled England, decided to get a khaki victory and he rushed an election in December, 1918. This generation may have forgotten by now that a British election in those days spelt an election in Ireland also. Dillon, who had replaced Redmond (the latter died on the 6th March, 1918) was the leader of the Irish Party and, in justice to him, it should be said that he decried and opposed by every means in his power the 1916 executions in the English Parliament. The election set us all busy in the Winter, which was the year of the Great 'Flu that carried away, over the world, something like twenty millions of people, and carried away quite a lot of people in my own locality too. Joe McBride contested South Mayo, as Sinn Féin candidate, against William Doris, the Redmondite M.P., and beat him soundly by something like ten to eleven thousand votes. In East Mayo the issue of the campaign was particularly knit. On one side you had John Dillon, the leader of the Irish Party, and on the other side you had Mr. de Valera. The eyes of Ireland and of England too were turned on the East Mayo election, and workers from every district in the country contributed to the overthrow of Mr. Dillon whose connections and influence in East Mayo were very, very great. When the result of the election was known, the Irish Parliamentary Party had ceased to exist and Sinn Féin controlled the situation.

It is easy enough to say that Sinn Féin controlled the situation but now, what they had to do in actual fact was to form a government and to create the

necessary executive army to function in opposition to the government of the greatest empire the world had known to that date. The Dáil met in January, 1919, and they affirmed the allegiance of the people to the Republic declared in 1916. The first act of the new Dáil was to read the Republican Declaration of 1916. The Volunteers were declared the Army of the Republic of the people and, within a short time, we were all called upon to take our oath of allegiance to the Republic of Ireland. It was a proud day for us. Here was something that all the other generations had failed to do. We in our day had planned and carried through to fruition the vision of Tone, the dream of Emmett, the song of Davis and the aim of Mitchel.

After the 1916 Rising, in Westport, the Volunteers for a time were dormant but sprang into activity again when the prisoners were released from Frongoch. A Company of Volunteers was in existence in Westport since 1913. Joe McBride was the Company Commander. Derrig was in charge of the Fianna. The strength of the Company would be about twenty to thirty. For arms during this period we depended on what we could take from British soldiers home on furlough up to 1918. Indeed it is no harm to tell a rather amusing story of how one particular rifle was captured. A particular British soldier had come to Westport with his rifle. To this day I do not know why he came to Westport, because I could never trace any connection he had with the town or the locality. However, he decided to have some refreshment in a local publichouse, the foreman of which was, of course, a Volunteer. He was joined later by three or four more Volunteers, and a good time was had by all and the wine flowed freely. After about two hours

the suggestion was made that no one knew more drill than a British soldier and that he might drill a little platoon of Volunteers, which, of course, he agreed to do. They proceeded to a remote part of the town on the Distillery Road and the British soldier drilled them, demonstrating at the same time the rifle drill. One of the Volunteers asked if he came out to drill them, would the British soldier watch the proceedings, to which he assented. This went on for about fifteen minutes. Then the suggestion was made that the British soldier would go into the ranks and one of the platoon would demonstrate the rifle drills and, at the same time, drill the platoon. He agreed. So the self-appointed drill-sergeant drilled the platoon, placed himself at its head, turned up by the convent towards the mill dam and, of course, disappeared with the rifle. Years afterwards I heard a sequel. I was at home one night after the Civil War when we heard a knock, after we had closed down the licensed premises for the night. I let this man in. He said he was a traveller and wanted a drink. I brought him into the kitchen. After a while, he limbered up, so to speak, and started telling us his impressions of Westport. He referred to the disastrous loss he had sustained a good many years before and how he had been fooled. Apparently he had been courtmartialled for the loss of his rifle, and it must have been before the 1914-1918 war finished, because it certainly saved him for a while from active participation in Flanders.

To revert back to 1916, Josie Gill, who had been in America for a number of years and was a most direct, forthright man who believed the gun, and the gun alone, could solve all our problems, refused to be arrested

after Easter Week. The local Sergeant at the Quay Barracks was told bluntly that, if he wanted him, to come and get him and see what would happen. That position continued for three or four days until Josie's mother and relations got round him to let himself be arrested. Josie was released after 1917 and I think went back to America in 1919 or 1920. He got away very discreetly on one of the boats plying to Liverpool. Like the rest of us, he was a much-wanted man.

During the 1914-1918 war years, Westport was a port town which had derived its importance from the Burns Laird Line who operated steamer services to and from Liverpool and Glasgow and, when the Line withdrew its services for use apparently in war theatres, the port became derelict almost. Business, of course, got the usual artificial fillip, but most of the imports came from Dublin by railway, with the resultant loss to Westport. The political organisation of the Irish Parliamentary Party had ceased to exist, and Sinn Féin, of course, was controlled entirely by us. During that time it is my recollection that every post of any importance, commercial and otherwise, was held by Unionists who were, in the main, Protestants. The Nationalist population, which was all Catholic, had no share in any "plums" that were going, either in the State services or in the commercial posts, such as, sugar agencies, flour agencies and the like, which provided very large incomes to those interested in them. The State services too, including, of course, the R.I.C., Customs and Excise, were, to a man, anti-Irish. The clergy, on the whole, were favourable with one or two exceptions who did not realise the greatness of the

struggle that still lay ahead. It might be said in general that the Parish Priests played a cautious and careful part, but the younger generation of clergy were definitely pro-militant.

With regard to the political organisation, I remember writing some Sinn Féin notes in the 'Mayo News' at the time, reporting the activities of our Cumann and stating that in October, or December at latest, the country would be in the throes of a general election. It should be remembered that Lloyd George was looking for another lease of power and he selected what he considered the most suitable moment, after the victory in the greatest war of our time. Here at last was something definite to do with an immediate object, and each of us and all of us together threw our hearts into the fight. Parliament was dissolved on the 14th November, 1918, and a General Election fixed to take place on the 14th of December.

We appointed a Director of Elections, and at a Convention held in the Sinn Féin Hall in Westport, Joe McBride was unanimously nominated for T.D., as the Irish Republican Brotherhood intended that he should be. We had a host of workers and, though the opposition was poor, still we had to submerge it, we hoped, for all time. We got control of all transport, including side-cars. Our bill-posting was most effective and, while most of it was done at night, the R.I.C. during this election period relaxed, so far as election work was concerned, some of their restrictions. Apparently they had instructions to do so, because they came across us at night, or in the small hours, posting up the election slogans and, in reply to their inquiry, I remember telling them on one

occasion that we had a perfect right to do it and we would do it, which they did not challenge. Joe McBride was in jail at this time, and this election I think was one of the most satisfactory in the country from the point of view of numbers. The Dáil met in January and, when the names of the deputies were called out, most of them were replied to as "fé glas".

When it came to taking the oath of allegiance to the Dáil, one member of our Company said he would like to consider this, that this was a serious thing, with which we all agreed. I remember I was very annoyed at the refusal and I pressed him for a reason. As well as I remember, he had been a long-standing member of the Volunteers. His reply was so honest and, at the same time, so funny that you could not harbour any enmity for him. Repeating that it was a serious business, he said that parading and walking were all right but, when it came to getting a man's skin punctured, it was an entirely different thing. We agreed that he should not be forced and we always considered that he was a fully trustworthy man in his own sphere.

One of the results of the Volunteers coming under the control of the Dáil, in Mayo at any rate, was a very much-needed reform. The cumbersome, unwieldy organisation, in my opinion, had to be remoulded and reorganised to meet the new situation which was about to develop. Mayo, a huge County (the third largest in Ireland) could not, by any means, be organised on a Battalion basis around the principal towns from a centre in the County. Perhaps it is not easy to visualise this now, but at the time transport had not reached the stage of perfection it now has. Motor cars were expensive,

and the Volunteers were drawn from a class that could not afford expensive means of travel. A bicycle was about the most we could reach to, except on occasions we would employ a car. The County was divided into four Brigades - North Mayo, East Mayo, South Mayo and West Mayo.

Tom Derrig was put in charge of West Mayo Brigade at a meeting in Balla, or Castlebar, about May, or June, 1919. Joe McBride, as well as I remember, had some kind of nominal leadership over the four Brigades, but it was only nominal. By this time McBride must have been between sixty and seventy years of age. Michael McHugh of Castlebar (afterwards Commandant in the National Army) was appointed Vice Commandant of the West Mayo Brigade. Ned Moane was appointed Brigade Adjutant. Joe Ring was appointed O/C, Battalion No. 1 (Westport); Michael Kilroy, O/C, Battalion No. 2 (Newport); James Chambers, O/C, Battalion No. 3 (Castlebar); and Paddy Kelly, O/C, Battalion No. 4 (Louisburgh).

Westport Company was the best and the strongest Company in the West Mayo Brigade and, even though I do say it, the credit in the main was due to a group of three or four of us. Charles Gavan was the Company Captain and later was succeeded by James Malone (afterwards Volunteer Captain in the Army from 1933 to 1948). We had drill once or twice a week, and in the summer months of 1919 we decided that something must be done about the arms question.

By this time I had been appointed Assistant Brigade Adjutant to Ned Moane and, between my ordinary work, Volunteer work, Sinn Féin work and Parish Courts work, I was an extremely busy person. I made out a list of possible subscribers for the arms fund and suggested that

we should aim at, at least, a mark of £500 and that we had a man on the spot who could deliver the goods and go direct to G.H.Q. - Tom Kitterick. Kitterick, myself and one or two more approached all the sympathisers we had listed, who ranged from the big shopkeepers to one or two of the professional men. We would not take less than £10 from anyone, and we got it. One man had the temerity to offer us £5 and we refused it, rather ungraciously I think now, because, contrary to appearances, the man could not afford to give us £10. We had the money - quite a good lot. We must have approached nearly the £500 mark, because I remember I had a big roll of notes in a large tea can in the shop and on one or two occasions handed it out to Tom Ketterick before he departed for Dublin to contact the Quartermaster General. His instructions with regard to our money were: no matter what the arms cost, to buy them. He seemed to have some magic about him because, compared to other Brigades, we did pretty well. Westport Company and Battalion did exceptionally well, as they should, seeing they had put up the money. Still we were not satisfied. We felt that the strength of a chain is the strength of its weakest link and that, if the Brigade and the Battalions thereof could be suitably armed when we would start fighting, it would be quite easy for one Battalion to ease the pressure on another. G.H.Q. were difficult in our opinion and slow in giving us what we thought we were entitled to. Bearing this in mind, we suggested to Tom Ketterick that he might go to England to see if he might do any better, which he did. Dick Walsh was also in England at the time, and Ketterick was successful in buying a quota of rifles and revolvers which were shipped to Ireland through, I

understand, the Headquarters route. We did not get this particular consignment. I believe G.H.Q. commandeered them.

At a Brigade Council meeting which I attended in Brockagh, Kilmeena, Westport, in August or September or October, 1920, Tom Derrig directed that a Flying Column be formed and that the Quartermaster would order twenty sets of breeches, leggings and suitable shoes.

By this time our Intelligence system was fairly good and I, as Assistant Brigade Adjutant, was doing what I could to make it reasonably satisfactory. District Inspector F.J. Maguire of the R.I.C. in Westport, a native of Enniskillen, was, on his own admission to me privately, a Dominion Home Ruler and did not believe in either interfering with the Dáil Courts or in arresting people for political activities. The I.R.A. at this time were very active as regards commandeering petrol, etc., and on one occasion I remember Mr. Maguire asking me what we were doing with all the petrol. I said I didn't know what he meant. "Well", he said, "someone held up a train this morning and took a large quantity of petrol off it." I again repeated that I didn't know anything about it. I don't think he was satisfied. I noted on one occasion, when we had a Circuit Court at which Conor Maguire, now Chief Justice, presided, that District Inspector Maguire, who attended, did not interfere in any way with the proceedings, while all over the country at the time the pressure against the Courts by the R.I.C. was more than violent. When I joined the Flying Column, Maguire passed on information to Father Patterson, the Administrator in Westport, with the result that none of our important boys were put behind bars. In October, 1920, I think it was we were ordered not to sleep at home,

but we were informed, through Maguire, towards the end of October not to be at home as there were three or four of what I would call a murder gang going to operate in the district. When they called at the various houses, we were all missing, which was just as well because it helped to expedite matters with regard to the Flying Column and meant that we could devote all our time now to getting on with the job.

Perhaps I should mention here that one night during that winter of 1920 I was going down the street in Westport with another Volunteer who was on the run - Ketterick or Rushe - when I heard a voice from a doorway at Shanley's calling me. It was District Inspector Maguire. He said, "I'm going to be sacked. The Unionists have got me. They call me the 'Sinn Féin D.I.". He was changed to the Depot almost immediately. Later, during the Truce, I heard that the Archbishop of Tuam had saved him from dismissal. I was informed that he had been reduced in rank and had no station until after the Truce when he was sent to a Donegal town. I saw him in Westport during the Truce on one occasion but I did not get speaking to him. He joined the Civic Guards on their formation and wrote a handbook, I understand, for them. He became Chief Superintendent of the Garda at Limerick where, I think, he died.

I came in contact with D.I. Maguire originally in a court case when I was a solicitor's clerk with John Kelly, Solicitor, Westport. I had threatened a member of the R.I.C. who was flashing a gun in an attempt, I think now, to bolster up his own courage while paying a visit to our licensed premises at home. I had told him he should not be flashing a gun around in the presence

of children - there were seven or eight - and we had got quite heated whereupon I had told him, "You will not be in it in three years". At the Court proceedings that followed some months afterwards, Maguire, who was prosecuting asked me if I were the defendant. I was sitting beside my employer who was defending me. It was easy for him to know who I was, although he was new to the town, because at the time I had the Fáinne and they were few and far between. It was easy for any of the R.I.C. to tell him who I was and where I was. The office in which I worked was convenient to the Barracks in James Street, Westport, and if I were standing at the door any morning, Maguire would go out of his way to talk to me until finally he began passing suitable bits of information which were of great assistance to us in avoiding arrest. During the organisation of the Dáil Loan, all the principal supporters of the Loan in Westport who were business people were to be arrested, were it not for Maguire informing me that he had received an anonymous letter advising him of the meeting.

On the 31st October, 1920, I did not turn in to work and, though I had not been called for by the police, decided to go on active service. Ned Moane, myself, Ketterick and Charles Gavan were together then. Tom Derrig was still carrying on as Vocational Teacher in Ballina and Castlebar. One morning Gavan and I, from the room in which we had slept that night, saw Derrig going off as a prisoner in a military lorry. Some time before that, an order had come from General Headquarters directing that the officers of the Brigade appoint a Staff to carry on in case of arrests. Michael McHugh and Derrig were arrested at the same time and that left, were

it not for Derrig's precautions, the Brigade without a head. Looking back now, it appears to me he must have had the faculty of good judgment. Michael Kilroy was the man least in the public eye, and he it was whom Derrig selected to act in case he himself were arrested. One would think that the Vice O/C of the Brigade would be the obvious selection. Kilroy was not long calling a Council meeting. He escaped arrest by a very short head when the R.I.C. called for him. As he put it to me afterwards, "I never believed", he said, "in displaying myself very much over twenty years. I have read De Wett's Campaign through and through, and there aren't many tricks (he referred to guerilla warfare) that I don't know!". In accordance with Derrig's instructions, I became Brigade Adjutant.

Our first effort was the formation of a Flying Column in the Westport area which was the best armed, thanks to the energy of the Westport Company. It was the first to send out a reasonably large quota of men - eight to sixteen. We moved around from village to village. Kilroy trained us how to shoot accurately by means of the disc method. This avoided the expenditure of ammunition which we could not afford. He permitted us, however, to use the .22 revolver for snap shooting, as he put it. We had a reasonably large amount of ammunition. Of course, most of us had read Wild West stories, so that you can imagine what each man was when his turn came, as he was marching along, to use the .22 revolver for snap shooting. Kilroy was determined that West Mayo would as soon as possihle become a war area, but progress towards it at times seemed to be slow. The months of January and February dragged on into March, 1921, without much excitement

except our endeavours to form Columns in each of the Battalions.

In March, 1921, Kilroy, Ring and Broddie (James) Malone were inspecting an ambush point on a moonlit evening, about seven o'clock, when four police ran into them and attacked. We heard the shooting, and I gathered up the men, helped by Ned Moane. We were on the way down to the road when we met the three of them - Kilroy, Ring and Malone - coming up towards us. They had the Sam Brown belts and the revolvers of the R.I.C. The action apparently was sharp and furious while it lasted and I think it was Michael Kilroy who said that "these damned automatics" were not the thing after all and that at least a dozen bullets had been fired into one man who was firing at them and still he was alive. Another policeman got wounded and dropped out of the fight. Two were wounded and, after a fusilade between each of them on the road, they dropped out. Apparently the shooting ability of our men was far superior to theirs. One policeman got behind the fence and, from the shadow of the fence, was giving a lot of difficulty, when Malone bent over and sent the bullets skirting along in the dark and wounded him slightly whereupon he surrendered. This affair took place at Carrowkennedy in March, 1921.

The approximate strength of our Column at this time would be a dozen. We had eight or nine rifles and most of us had revolvers. We had some hand grenades. Our supply of ammunition was very limited - about twenty to thirty rounds. We billeted, of course, on the people who were glad to receive us. Immediately after this Carrowkennedy affair, the enemy increased its activity and we were now really on the run.

At this stage I must go back to November, I think, of 1920. Tom Ketterick and I were one night in Shanley's of Westport talking to Jim Rushe, who had not yet come out on active service. Ketterick had a great fondness for a particular colt automatic that he always carried in his trousers pocket at full cock with, of course, the safety catch on. The inevitable, of course, happened and, while we were talking to Rushe, the safety catch got detached and he shot himself through the knee - a downward break of the knee. He ran immediately, about four hundred yards, to a great friend of ours, Conway's of James Street, Westport, very close to the R.I.C. Barracks. We had difficulty in getting him out and into the Post Office cart, as he was not able to walk, but we managed it successfully within fifty yards of the R.I.C. Barracks and got him to a place of safety where he was for about two months. The people with whom he stayed during those two months, Jackson's, were foreigners, so far as I know, and were extremely kind to him, but, as his leg was not getting better, he went to Dublin. Collins ordered him into the Mater Hospital. He narrowly avoided having his leg amputated by just getting out of the Hospital quickly. Before returning to Mayo, however, he had had a chat with Collins, from whom we got a further consignment of arms which he brought to the West with him with great difficulty. Collins complained that the pressure was very great on the South and that something should be done to make Mayo, as well as every other area, a war area.

At this time Kilroy, Moane and myself were in Glenisland organising the Newport and Castlebar Battalions. Ketterick, on his return, got in touch with the Westport Battalion, most of whose members formed the Flying Column.

He organised an ambush attack at Islandeady. Unfortunately, a tender load of R.I.C. came raiding convenient to the ambush point, and two men who were trenching the road were shot, which, of course, upset that.

Two days later Ketterick, Malone and Joe Baker left the Column and went into Westport. They stayed in Sandy Hill in the house of David Gibbons. Bartley Cryan and John D. Gibbons did some scouting for them on the following evening, as a result of which Ketterick, Malone and Baker got to the Red Bridge convenient to Westport railway station which commanded a view of Altamount Street. A patrol of two Sergeants and nine policemen were coming towards the station when the three Volunteers dropped their three bombs which gave them nine casualties and wounded some seriously. A further casualty was caused by one of the Sergeants shooting one of his own men in a spot which prevented him from sitting down comfortably for some time - to the consequent amusement of the inhabitants of Altamount Street who listened to the berating that the wounded policeman gave his Sergeant comrade.

Kilroy, Moane and myself had by this time formed another Flying Column composed of Newport and Castlebar men. Ketterick joined us early in May as he was anxious, I think, that we would come to the Westport Unit without delay. By this time the men were reasonably well trained, and one of them, Jim Moran, was the proud possessor of a German Mauser ~~right~~ RIFLE which had a flat trajectory up to 400 yards. Most of this unit were jumping for action too, and we decided to arrange an ambush on the Westport-Newport road, but prior to that we had instructed the

local commandant, Josie Doherty, to do something to offset the reign of terror which District Inspector Fugue of the R.I.C. was creating in Newport. This man seemed to have run amok and was out night after night hanging people until they were almost dead, tying men on cows and putting shovels in their hands and endeavouring to stage a mock combat, going into houses accompanied by some lady and shooting up the houses. Doherty laid the ambush but Fugue was too smart. At the time, an unusual thing, he had lights on his car which dipped, and he had passed through with one one shotgun discharged at him on the Newport road, some week in April or early May, at night. Jim Moran, who was a very good shot, decided and was permitted to carry on a little sniping at Newport R.I.C. Barracks but, of course, foremost in his mind was the necessity of conserving his ammunition. From a vantage point nearly four hundeed yards from the Barracks, he was successful in shooting one of the garrison - Butler by name - who died as a result of his wounds.

At this time, one of our men had become proficient in filling buckshot into cartridges and making gunpowder which we had nd tested out very satisfactorily. We arranged an ambush point at Kilmeena, about half-way between Newport and Westport for the 19th May, 1921.

The Black and Tans were very active in the Newport district the night before the Kilmeena ambush and, among other things, they burned Michael Kilroy's house and threw his wife and children out in the street preparatory to doing so.

Looking back upon the whole thing now, it appears to me that we may have allowed our enthusiasm to outrun our discretion, for at this time from fourteen to twenty

of our most highly trained men from the Westport Battalion were absent from the Flying Column, and these were trained riflemen. We combined, as well as I remember, the Battalion Flying Columns from Castlebar and Newport for this operation at Kilmeena, and I do not think there were available more than eight-ten rifles. The rest were armed with shotguns and I remember that I myself had only a Webley revolver with about four rounds of ammunition. I believe we had been located in Brockagh on the previous night and had had very little sleep, with the result that, when we got into ambush position at daylight, most of us were dog-tired and dozed intermittently till a detachment of constabulary came right to the ambush point almost unheralded.

Our positions for the ambush were laid out by Michael Kilroy. I myself, with one rifleman, was located on the left flank on the Westport side of the ambush. Pat Lambert was with me with a rifle, but, with the exception of a long-distance view, it was quite difficult to see a person on the road within easy shooting range, that is, sixty to eighty yards. Our position was on a hill and, while satisfactory enough for long-term viewing, was not as satisfactory as a flat terrain for active operations. The main ambush position itself was a ditch running almost parallel to the Newport-Westport road, and Kilroy and quite a number of shotgun men were located there. Ned Moane, Dr. Madden and one or two others were located on the right flank. I was located about two hundred yards from the main ambush point, and Ned Moane about a similar distance on the other flank. Our duty was to warn the approach of the enemy by firing a shot.

The R.I.C. had actually come through at the left

flank when Lambert fired. I fired myself with my revolver two or three times, without I believe very much success. As far as I can remember now, there were a tender-load of R.I.C. and a car-load, some of which got right through to a position on the right flank, and more dismounted between the left flank and the main body and proceeded to get a machine gun in action. Our position on the little hill was both untenable and useless after a short period, and we endeavoured to withdraw a bit so that we could get in touch with the main body by means of a ditch and hedge that ran convenient to them. The machine gun party were very active at this time and were making it very, very unpleasant, because we had to cross an open space to do this, and the only way we managed it was by a series of short rushes. I explained to Lambert, while I was doing this, that it was the only way of getting through, as the machine gun fire had increased in intensity and apparently we were the object of it. It appears to me now that it must have taken a very, very long time to cover a few hundred yards, because, by the time I got back to where I wanted, most of the main body had been driven by machine gun fire from their position, and there was still a rifleman keeping back any of the R.I.C. who would be foolish enough to rush the position. This apparently was Michael Kilroy.

On the right flank the affray developed more or less into a series of duels between Head Constable Potter on the R.I.C. side and Madden and Moane on the other. There seemed to be a very active group in the R.I.C. on this right flank, and I think the four riflemen who had to engage them had all their work cut out and were tied actually to where they were by the intensity of the fire

until someone very conveniently potted Potter in the neck, which wound he survived and which we saw later during the Truce.

By this time the machine gun that had concentrated where the main body was, had done its work effectively and well from the British viewpoint. The shotguns were ineffective, in my opinion, and it was my conclusion then - and it is my conclusion now - that this was the cause of the disaster which befell us, apart from the fact that the shelter, from behind which they operated, was a sod fence which was cut by the machine gun. The sod fence was not proof against machine gun fire. I think, were it not for Kilroy's activity at this point, that the disaster would have been of overwhelming proportions. With his rifle he more or less kept them at bay, as four of our men at this point were shot. These were Captain Jim McEvilly, Commandant Paddy Jordan, Lieutenant Jim Browne and Volunteer Collins, who were killed. Volunteers Pierce and, I think, Moloney were wounded and captured. In addition, there were two or three Volunteers wounded, including Jim Swift, whom our men were able to take away with them. The enemy had one man killed and Head Constable Potter severely wounded.

We finally withdrew to a point some hundred yards behind the scene of operations itself. Joining up with the main body, we withdrew to check what the position actually was. We had a roll-call and discovered that we had at least six missing, some of whom were accounted for, and their comrades. We had two or three wounded men on our hands who had to be attended to. We got finally - all of us - in an orderly way to another point and attended to our wounded, and arranged for an immediate search of

the area as soon as the Black and Tans would have gone back to Westport. The Black and Tans made no effort to follow us, as apparently they considered it somewhat dangerous. We arranged with some of the local women to have a search of the area that evening while we were getting ready to move, but there was no one found. Nurse Joyce and Dr. Madden attended the wounded, which included Jim Swift and one or two others.

We moved off that night, bringing our wounded with us on horseback, and went to Skirdagh, on the Nephin side of Newport, convenient to Buckagh Mountain and within four miles of Shramore - a mountainous district. We were in a bad state, very depressed, bitter and upset, more particularly as we realised that, if the"Westport fellows" had been with us, victory would have been ours at Kilmeena. Moane, Kilroy, Ketterick and myself - the Brigade Staff - were lodged together, and Kilroy decided to visit his home on Sunday night. Actually he was going into the lion's mouth. When coming back on the following morning, Monday, he walked into roughly about forty R.I.C. men who were moving up to surround us where we were. Although, our sentries would have discovered the enemy before they were actually on top of us, I think it is only right to mention that Kilroy's coolness at this time of the morning was instrumental in saving us from being in the worst possible position.

Kilroy was a very highly trained rifleman, even though self-trained, and when he ran into these R.I.C. men or Black and Tans, one of them saw him and raised his rifle to fire. Kilroy waited until his hand was on the trigger. Then he dropped and the shot sped over his head. He took aim himself from the ground, but forgot

the rule about "lights high, sights high; lights low, sights low", with the result that in the dawn light all he did was to take the helmet right off the policeman who had by this time taken cover. The policeman now shouted, "First man down in the morning with the first shot". Kilroy emptied his magazine into the police and withdrew.

Of course, by this time the fusilade had wakened us all. The wounded men were our first consideration, and I have a very vivid recollection of these being moved, under the direction of Ketterick, myself and Moane, whom we sent off in charge of all that was left of the group and the wounded away in the direction of Tirawley to the mountains. While we were doing this, we were subjected now and again to a considerable rifle fire.

While this was going on, Dr. Madden, Kilroy and Jack Connolly were engaging a large body of R.I.C. at ranges from 80-200 yards. When we had sent off the wounded, Ketterick, Jack McDonagh, Paddy Cannon and myself with great difficulty got as far as them, crawling mainly, short rushes occasionally, on account of the intensive fire from a large body of the R.I.C. who extended from the village of Skirdagh for half-a-mile, or three-quarters of a mile, along the mountain towards the Buckagh road. When we came on the scene, Michael Kilroy and Dr. Madden were facing the enemy on a small slope in a straight line, about 400-600 yards distance, and, in between, Jack Connolly was in great difficulty. We reported to Kilroy for duty and we extended the line. I had picked up a .32 rifle which must have belonged to one of the wounded men. The other three had three Lee Enfield rifles.

Jack Connolly I think had a Mauser, and Kilroy and Dr. Madden had two Lee Enfields. It was now about eight o'clock in the morning, and one incident juts out very sharply in my mind. Kilroy, who was constantly complaining about his eyesight, that it was not as good as it should be, used to wear dark glasses for protection and, while we were talking, he saw the glint of the sun on something right opposite him, anything from 400 to 800 yards away, and he fired carefully and methodically as usual. (Afterwards I discovered that, with that shot, he had put out of action District Inspector Adderley, in charge of the R.I.C., actually hitting the rifle in his hand before wounding him seriously.)

From 8 a.m. to 12 noon, or 1 p.m., in the intense heat we held the enemy quite easily, pinning them down in their positions, but ours was a very difficult position. From Newport, Castlebar, Westport and Ballina . . reinforcements could be easily rushed to the spot in a matter of hours and we could not hope for victory. Through our glasses we saw lorry loads of reinforcements arriving, and Kilroy decided it was time to move. By this time Connolly had got back into comparative safety from the position in which he was. We moved cautiously over towards McDonnell's of Skirdagh, some 100 or 200 yards away to the left. Kilroy, as well as I remember, would have the last shot, at the same time instructing that the firing was to be very desultory for a while before we would withdraw, and then an occasional shot to leave them in doubt and permit us to get as much time as possible to show a clean pair of heels "and live to fight another day".

We went into McDonnell's, got some milk and bread

and moved off immediately. We sat down in the heather in the glen at Glen Laura, a glen leading to Shramore, four miles away. We were dog-tired and hungry, and the heat of the sun was intense. We did not waste much time, however, and moved on, leaving the can containing the milk there. When we had gone about 200 yards, Kilroy thought of the can and went back to cover it with heather. We moved up the side of the mountain opposite Buckagh, and we were scarcely able to walk for want of sleep and fatigue. We had not got to the top when we looked across to the shoulder of the mountain facing us, about one thousand yards in a straight line, and saw opposite us a bunch of the enemy and, looking down into the glen, we saw at least forty R.I.C. men pouring down in the direction of Shramore. Kilroy immediately instructed us to lie on our rifles, cover our leggings and boots with our trenchcoats, turn our faces down to the ground and leave nothing uncovered that might cause a reflection from the sun. We carried out his instructions and, to say the truth, I think the most of us dozed off and were wakened by the phut-phut of the bullets around us, digging up the sods. I said there did not seem to be anything for it but to get up and fight it out, that we must have been spotted. Kilroy said, "No". The others, I think, were of my mind but Kilroy insisted that the enemy were not sure, to keep still, not to move, that the only shape we could present to them was something on the mountain and that, if we did not move, we still had a chance. After three or four obviously machine-gun volleys that did not do anything but dig up the space around us, things eased off then. Apparently the enemy moved towards Shramore in another direction (we learned later that they had practically the whole place invested), and the only thing left for us to

do was to get to the top of the mountain, if possible, and make for the direction we had sent the wounded.

We got eventually to a view-point on the mountain which was not the top, but provided shelter, and from which we could see with our glasses what was going on towards Newport and particularly in the Skirdagh direction. We saw the lorries coming up with reinforcements. We left one man on sentry and we slept, six of us in turn, until night. One of our troubles at this time was the shortness of the night.

At this point, Michael Kilroy remembered that he had two salmon ready for cooking that day down in McDonnell's in the village of Skirdagh, and we decided to go back and have a good meal. We would have to try and break through the cordon, as the mountain journey was nearly an impossible one at that time of night. We got down, went into McDonnell's and proceeded to eat the salmon, placing one man on sentry in case the enemy had not completely withdrawn.

We left McDonnell's of Skirdagh at about 1 a.m., which left us very little time to get outside any cordon that might be forming, and we moved towards Glenisland. As the dawn was coming, we were just crossing the vital road which we knew would be taken in by the military, when we saw, first, a motor-cyclist and sidecar coming slowly, examining the ground, then an armoured car and, I expect, troops thereafter. Naturally, we moved pretty quickly into the boggy district and we were no more than twenty or twenty-five yards from the road when they passed by. Dawn was coming too rapidly into daylight for us to be happy. One of our men - Dr. Madden - got stuck in the bog, and Kitterick and myself went back to assist him,

and still the worry of daylight was an intense one. It was providential for us that one of those mists came down rapidly and enveloped us all; otherwise, I believe our number was up. We moved into a comparatively safe place for the day, placing one man on sentry - myself I think. It was a difficult day because there were troops, police, Crossley tenders, cars - I don't know whether there were 'planes or not - a very short distance away, looking for the people they thought they had inside the cordon

On the following night, as well as I remember, we decided to move to what we always regarded as the safest district in the whole Brigade area - Corvey in the Aughagower district, about six to twelve miles from Westport - where the Volunteer Companies took over all guard operations and control of our safety whilst we were in the area. We reached there and, by a week's time, we had matters under complete control again. The wounded had been disposed of and safeguarded. Most of the men from the Westport area had got back to us, including Moane. The Castlebar men had made towards the Castlebar district. We had now, with the Westport group who had been carrying out operations more or less independently for some time under Joe Ring, a most effective unit who were soon to be tested in a very effective way.

At this stage I should say we had 25-35 rifles, all told, in the Brigade area. Twenty of them were, I should say, in the Westport Battalion who had paid for them through the activities of Ketterick, myself and other men formerly of the Westport Company, including "Bruddy" Malone, Vice Commandant of the Westport Battalion, and others who had been recruited from Westport Company, of which I had been Adjutant and Ketterick had been

Quartermaster. Malone had been Company Captain.

The Column at this stage mainly consisted of members of the Westport Battalion and the Brigade Staff, Kilroy, Moane, Ketterick and myself, three of whom were from the Westport Battalion, and in addition Padraig Kelly, Battalion Commandant, of Louisburgh and Dan Sammon. We were now a total strength of 25-28 effective unit men, armed, mostly with Lee Enfield rifles. I still had my .38. Paddy Cannon and Jim Moran had two Mauser rifles. At this time, thanks to the activities of Tom Ketterick, we had a fair supply of ammunition. I am sure we had 30-50 rounds per man.

The Column moved from village to village at night. We usually placed about ten miles each night between our last billet and our new one. We had decided, if possible, to have an ambush in the Westport area, preferably on the Leenane side, and on the day of the 2nd June we were located in the village of Claddagh, convenient to the Westport-Leenane road, from which our men had gone to our first engagement in Carrowkennedy in March previous.

Our scouts informed us early in the afternoon of the 2nd June, 1921, that two lorries and a car, containing Tans and R.I.C., had gone in the direction of Leenane. (We heard later that they went out and did a lot of destruction, beating up the people, in the district near Leenane.) At about half-past-five our scouts signalled, while we were on our way down to the road, that they were coming and we moved as rapidly as we could down to a position on the road. Three of the Column were on the far side of the road on a height overlooking Carrowkennedy. We had not time to get into position properly, but Kilroy crawled along and made the best dispositions he could

under the circumstances during the actual fight.

A Crossley tender came along (driven, we discovered later, by District Inspector Stephenson), and 7-10 men in the principal ambush position waited till the psychological moment before they fired but, when they did, it was very near fiasco for, between misfires and safety-catches, only three or four rifles were fired, one of them shooting the driver of the first tender dead. The first thing the enemy did, when the tender stopped dead, was to throw out a machine gun and proceed to set it up. A volley from our men accounted for the machine-gunner, and this is where good training told. Each time they endeavoured to use the machine gun, the gunner was knocked out.

The second lorry, which was actually an armoured tender, came along and they put up a spirited fight from behind their armoured plating. As well as I remember now, while the fighting at the first tender continued, they were never able to utilise their machine gun effectively on account of the marksmanship of our men.

The actual fighting started at a quarter-to-six. Kilroy came around to me and told me to take a Volunteer and the glasses - after about two hours in the ambush position - and watch for reinforcements and signal their arrival by firing shots over their heads. I went back about 200 yards, from which point I could see both the road leading to Leenane and the road leading to Westport and also, with the glasses, a wide expanse of country. We knew perfectly well that the shooting must have been heard in Westport, six or seven miles away, for the Black and Tans, with their usual desire to make noise, let off the rifle grenades as fast as they could from their comparative security in the tender.

By 8-8.30 p.m. - the time I was sent back to watch for reinforcements - Michael Kilroy was coming to the conclusion that the action was lasting a bit too long, so he decided that the second tender, from behind the armoured plating of which the enemy were still giving us considerable trouble, should be outflanked. Two flanking parties of two men each were sent down. As well as I remember, the two Duffy's - Paddy and Johnnie - were members of a party. Johnnie Duffy had always a Colt automatic revolver, of which he was very fond and in which he had great confidence. He crawled down to a point within easy range of the Crossley tender and proceeded to use his Colt automatic, the others, of course, doing likewise from their respective positions. The result was that, while one of the policemen in the car was preparing to use a rifle grenade, a shot struck the grenade and exploded it in the lorry, leaving them in a pretty bad way. While this was going on, isolated duels were being fought out between various members of the Column and the R.I.C. and Black and Tans, our men all the time moving closer to them to make sure they got the job finished as speedily as possible. Some of the R.I.C., under Head Constable Hanlon, occupied a house on the roadside from which they carried on the fight. When the rifle grenade had exploded in the lorry, our men, who had come quite close by this time, poured a volley in and called for surrender. I think the exploding of the grenade was the last straw and the enemy in the lorry surrendered. Those who were in the first tender and some in the other lorry surrendered.

There was still life in the party under Hanlon in the house, and Ketterick, taking one of the Black and Tans

and putting him before him, marched up to the house and called, not in his politest voice, for surrender. Hanlon said, "Never!". Ketterick told him what he was going to do, throw bombs into the house and turn the machine gun on it. I should mention that at this stage we had a fully trained machine-gunner - an ex British soldier, named Jimmy O'Flaherty - in our Column, an efficient soldier in every way. After some verbal exchanges, Ketterick, without promising anything, got Hanlon and his group to surrender.

It was now almost 10 p.m. I returned to the main body. On checking, we found we had obtained 25 rifles, a Lewis gun, complete with several service pans of ammunition and roughly 3,000-5,000 rounds of .303 ammunition, plus approsimately 20 revolvers, rifle grenades and equipment. We burned the lorries and, I think, the Ford car.

A rather not so amusing incident for the driver of the Ford car that accompanied the lorries was his position during almost four hours of very intensive engagement. He was Gus Delahunty who I think had been a Volunteer. He had to drive the enemy to Leenane, spend four hours under a bridge in an endeavour to safeguard himself from the fire because every man that had left the cars was a pot shot for our men.

To sum up, we had no men wounded or injured in any way. The enemy had six killed, I think, and one or two wounded. We had roughly twenty-five men and they had, as well as I remember, the same number. The position was not the most perfect one for an ambush, but it proved to me one thing conclusively, that, with the Column we had there, we were practically unbeatable because they had

taken their training over the past twelve months seriously and intelligently.

Our immediate difficulty, of course, was to safeguard what we had won. We were now in a position to arm more men, and in all the Battalion areas we had volunteers galore for active service. Some of the Companies in the Westport and Newport areas were by this time capable of operating on their own. The policy of the Brigade Staff was to go from Company area to Company area, perfecting and working up organisation, inculcating an offensive spirit and, generally, bringing all the men to top grade for a fight which we thought would last for years and from which there could not be any withdrawal.

Our immediate difficulty after the Carrowkennedy ambush was, (a) how to safeguard the rifles and munitions our men had fought for so well, and (b) how to safeguard ourselves and the Column so that we could arrange for an organisation of Battalion units who would effectively operate in their own areas, so that the Brigade Staff should be able to carry out their duties from some kind of a headquarters and put matters on a proper army footing and ensure that a sudden onslaught of the enemy would not leave the Brigade denuded of its whole fighting force at one time.

We returned to the village of Claddagh, heavily laden, and decided to move west towards Durless, at the back of The Reek (Croagh Patrick), to the houses of two friends there, called Joyce's. One house was owned by two brothers, and the house next door was owned by four brothers, neither of whom were related. This was roughly a distance only of six to eight miles, but it took us all our time to get there and under cover in daylight.

on the 3rd June. Before we left Claddagh, Joe Ring, Battalion Commandant of Westport and, of course, a member of the Flying Column like the rest of us, had told one of the Claddagh men that, if the British asked him where we had gone, to make a great secret of it and to say we had gone east whereas we had gone west. This was done and proved of great assistance to us, as it diverted their attention for some days from the actual district in which we were. We re-armed our men with the best rifles, revolvers, bombs, and dumped the remainder under the direction of the Quartermaster.

At dawn on the 3rd June the British had, I think, an aeroplane out, which gave the sentries quite a lot of trouble. Michael Kilroy at this stage was very firm and every order he gave was carried out under the most severe penalties, as he realised that slackness of any kind might entail grave disaster. We stayed in the Joyce's houses for two days, or three, and we were well looked after, even though the accommodation was limited. The surrounding houses were able to provide us with sleeping accommodation, but the Joyce's looked after the commissariat.

We stayed at the Joyce's and in that area for two or three nights when we moved on to a place called Almore, always on the qui vive because the enemy were very active. The people of this area, like indeed the whole of West Mayo, were particularly good. Enemy intelligence had practically ceased to function.

About the 7th June we began to direct our steps across the whole Brigade area in stages. We moved towards Crumlin, five or six miles outside Castlebar, the beginning of a mountainous district and quite convenient

to the Windy Gap, where the soldiers passed through from Killala to Castlebar in 1798. Next night we moved into two villages on the top of the mountain, quite convenient to the Windy Gap road itself which comes over the mountain from the Nephin side.

I have a distinct recollection of the Quartermaster, Tom Ketterick, coming in some time before we got up the day following our move to these villages and saying, "Well, boys, the sheep are killed and in the pot!". (Apparently he had commandeered two sheep, bayoneted them, saw that they were cleaned and distributed them to the houses.) I think it was again a Friday morning, which gave rise to Michael Kilroy's constant complaint, "Why is it, Tom, that we have always meat on Friday?".

During the day it was reported that some woman, of the tinker class apparently, was in the village and her bona fides were doubted very much. Still we did nothing definite about her, and I don't know what bearing she had on the incident that followed some days after.

We waited two or three nights here before we moved further on. One thing that perturbed us very much was that someone from the village had gone to Castlebar on business quite early and we did not know of it in time to stop him. There probably was nothing whatever in it but, when we had moved to the next village, the following morning we were awakened quickly at daylight by the information that the enemy were raiding quite convenient to us, two or three miles away, and that there seemed to be quite a lot of shooting, an unusual feature, in view of the fact that there was no armed opposition to them. They were apparently soldiers from the Barracks in Castlebar, helped as usual by the Royal Irish Constabulary,

and their modus operandi was: they went to a house, took out the father, brought him to the barn, fired a shot, told him to lie down, threw a bag over him and came back to the house, saying they had him shot and the best thing for the remaining people to do was to give any information in their possession with regard to the I.R.A. They had not much to gain for their pains. They also utilised carrier pigeons for messages to their headquarters.

By eight or nine o'clock in the morning we ascertained from our intelligence and outposts that we were in a pretty tough spot. There was a camp of military, right over the hill. On our left flank facing east, say, towards Kiltimagh, there was a fair amount of the enemy within our own view. Our right flank was similarly handicapped. This, in effect, would leave us with only one avenue of retreat, that is, to face east towards Bohola and Kiltimagh on the plain. The only alternative was to fight, which was exactly what the British wanted. We numbered roughly 25-35 men and, if the enemy could engage us, they could hold us with the numbers they had on the spot on three sides of us and await the reinforcements they could draw on directly from Castlebar, Ballina and Newport for our destruction.

As usual, Kilroy discussed the position with us, and it was obvious that there was only one thing for us to do, to get as far from the enemy as we possibly could without engaging them, but the difficulty was to move any substantial body of men in daylight through the country. Again Kilroy was equal to the occasion and insisted, through his officers, that his instructions be carried out to the smallest detail, with the result that we were able to move some two or three miles, protected by the natural cover given by grass, ditches, fences,

shrubbery, etc.

We succeeded in getting over to the East Mayo area that night, and met Paddy Walsh, Eamon Corbett (locally known as Seamus) and some of the East Mayo officers. We succeeded in getting a rest, and apparently our action had outwitted the British who were of the opinion that we would, as usual, hug the mountains.

We moved from Carrigowna to Bohola for a night or two, and it is very pleasant to be able to state those two or three days in East Mayo were the most pleasant that we had for a very long time. The men were fed and rested. We were able to bring our correspondence and orders up to date, and for the first time we gathered from reports in the papers that there was a possibility of a truce. That would be about the 12th or 15th June.

Personally, I had never thought at any time from the very start that there would be any kind of a truce or arrangement. I felt that it was a case of continual fighting for our generation and that the British, so recently the victors of the world war, would not be so easily forced to agree to a truce. I had omitted to take into account that, if all Brigade areas were like our own, the morale of the enemy opposing us must be very low, as by this time in West Mayo they were afraid to move out unless in substantial numbers.

After the rest in East Mayo, we decided to move back to our own area and see what the position was. We moved back through Frenchill and Ballyheane district and Kilboyne, until finally, within four nights, we got back to the Aughagower district which we regarded as the most satisfactory in the area from the point of view of attack and defence, and where our intelligence was of the most effective kind.

Within the next day or two, it was quite obvious from the reports coming to us that the enemy were contemplating some kind of a master-stroke in the shape of a very extensive round-up. Our objective was to endeavour to ascertain what particular areas or localities were to be covered by the round-up and to move a short distance outside such area. Aughagower, of course, was in the Westport Battalion area, and in that area it is only fair to say that the Company organisation was of a very high standard. The only thing that stopped the Companies from operating on their own was want of rifles, but they always acted as guards for the Column, with the result that the men could rest when they came there. The reports were coming in pretty rapidly, I should say, from the 14th to about the 20th June when it became perfectly obvious to us, from our intelligence, that the enemy manoeuvre was going to be a very unusual and comprehensive one, and one intended to take in a very large area.

On a Sunday, about the 24th June, at Owenwee, we decided after getting last-minute reports that the enemy manoeuvre could not be met by our usual tactics of slipping the whole Column through the projected round-up. We decided sorrowfully and reluctantly that the time had come to disband the Column until the round-up was over, and that some of the officers of the Brigade Staff should go to Dublin for a course of special training and, if possible, to induce Headquarters to give us some Thompson guns to reinforce the Lewis gun that we had captured at Carrowkennedy. At this time we were planning an organisation whereby the Brigade Staff would remain at their headquarters and let the Battalions operate Battalion Flying Columns, the Brigade Staff taking charge

of any Brigade actions. We had reached no decision on this because none of us liked to give up his place in the Flying Column, even though it was not so easy to keep the threads of organisation in the hands of a moveable Brigade Headquarters.

On Sunday night the arms were collected, with the exception of short arms for each little unit of two to four. The Brigade Staff, which included Kilroy, Moane, Ketterick, myself, Jim Rushe and Dr. Madden, whom I think we had recently attached to the Staff, decided to move towards Killary Harbour. As we had a good piece of ground to cover, we moved off about midnight, keeping before our minds the fact that it would be daylight between 3 and 4 a.m. On our way we passed Carrowkennedy, going in the direction of the Sheaffrey Hills. In the middle of a very steep road leading towards the mountain, we halted to rest. Just prior to the dawn, when looking down, we saw some few hundred yards from us the light of many vehicles. We parted into two groups. Madden, myself and Moane moved on and waited a while for Kilroy, Ketterick and Rushe. I went back to where we had left them, but apparently they had taken cover too. A thick morning mist had come up by this time and there was no doubt in our minds that they had seen the headlights of the lorries. The three of us moved to the top of the hill and decided to move off the road without delay. By this time the daylight was coming too quickly. We decided to move across the mountain down towards the Westport-Leenane road.

I remember I had a leg of lamb for the morrow's dinner which we decided to dump as it was too heavy to carry, and it was quite obvious to us now that something

more than an ordinary raid or round-up was in progress if the enemy had decided to run a large amount of troops to an area which was the least populous of the whole Brigade.

I should mention that headquarters and the correspondence were as usual on my back and Ned Moane's. As Adjutant, of course, I had to do all the scrivenery and reports to Headquarters, orders to the Battalions, the sifting of intelligence reports, etc. I rolled up all these papers and hid them carefully beside a stream.

The next step was to get down towards the Leenane road and away from the mountains, so that we could get some idea of what the British were doing and how they were operating. The sun by this time had come up and it promised to be an extraordinarily warm day, but we were wet to the knees and higher still owing to the damp grass, dew, etc. We got at last to Mark McDonnell's house, between Erriff and the Killary Harbour, and Madden, Moane and myself slipped in to the house to get a cup of tea and find out how the land lay. We had intended to send Mark, a fine type of man, about fifty-five years of age, out to round up a sheep and get some idea of the enemy movements. When we entered the house, he was out doing that, or a similar chore, but Aeneas, his brother, was in the house, and a sister, I think, who made us tea. I had just my mouth to the tea when Aeneas, who had been on watch outside, came charging in with the news that he heard the lorries coming up the road. We slipped out of the house and, looking up, we saw an aeroplane hovering above us. I have a distinct recollection over the years of standing as I was on the ditch or fence and telling Aeneas what I thought about him in the most forcible soldier's language I could muster.

The three of us moved to a little wood on the right-hand side of the road going towards Leenane, above McDonnell's house. I, for one, felt sure that the pilot or the observer in the 'plane had spotted something unusual, because one 'plane kept moving from there to where we had left Kilroy, Ketterick and Rushe for practically the whole day and, though we tried several times to get across the road, we were unable to do so on account of the 'plane activity. In addition, a mile or two in towards Westport, we saw the sun glinting on the equipment of the Dragoons. This was a new one on us, and we were informed by Aeneas and Mark that their numbers were roughly six hundred. I must say they made a beautiful sight, which we did not appreciate at the time. We were anxious to get moving across the road into another wooded area, as we knew from our text books that the last place the British wanted to bother with was a wood. Finally, we succeeded after the whole day in getting across eight or nine hundred yards. The McDonnell's, of course, attended to the commissariat.

It was now borne home to us that we must depend for our safety completely on our own wits and that the whole Column was in a similar position, but our training left us in no doubt of the result. We moved across towards Erriff village and held a council of war as to what we should do. I am not quite sure at this time whether we succeeded in getting a house to rest in that night, but, if we did, it must have been late because we spent a good deal of time watching what we called "the fire-works". It was quite plain to us that a very, very big area was invested with British troops. Their camps, so far as we could observe, were scattered far and wide. Every twenty minutes, approximately, they sent up

star-shells and verey lights to keep contact with one another. In addition, we could see the pencils of light coming from warships in Clew Bay up over the mountains, and the same procedure was being adopted in the Killary Harbour. This definitely put us on our toes. We knew that at least for many days there would be no peace and we would have to stay put wherever we were during the daytime, and the thing to do was to select the most suitable and most outlandish hiding places.

At any rate, the Erriff district and on towards Cordarragh, Derrycroff, Croy and Roigh districts were the scenes of our "inactivity" for the next four or five days. The daytime was spent in, literally, hiding, usually by streams covered over with briars, heather and fern. We were, of course, fed by the neighbours when possible, but they were taking no chances that any act of theirs would bring observation by the 'planes or by the Crown forces in our direction. Taking all in all, we had a very tough time of it for about a week, I should say, by which time we gathered an idea of the immensity of the operation the enemy had taken on. There was very little slackening in the enemy's work until, I should say, early in July when some few days before the Truce they recalled their units to their various headquarters.

At this time in the West, leaving out portion of Roscommon, the three most active Brigades were, first and undoubtedly, West Mayo Brigade, and then South Mayo Brigade and West Connemara. The enemy, in my opinion, must have worked according to some kind of plan and some kind of intelligence, for, even though the operation took time and it was obvious to all our Intelligence Officers that something big was afoot, it was only when the

reports began to come in that we realised how ambitious the British plans were. The men forming the three Active Service Units were, the greater portion of them, within the area invested, and tents were thrown up in district after district, through which the local R.I.C. in every case inspected, through a tear in the canvas, suspects as they were paraded past the tent by the Army. Several of our men had narrow escapes, but not one was captured in South Mayo, West Connemara or West Mayo. Speaking for myself, it was quite a difficult time, but nothing too much out of the ordinary. We were moving in a friendly country and the chances of being caught, unless bad luck intervened, were very remote.

One of the things that I recalled to mind later was how unnecessary it all was if we had only taken up the question of dug-outs seriously. We had the men, the time and the tools. Everyone in the Companies was anxious to do his bit and, if this precaution had been taken, it would have saved us a lot of worry with regard to the organisation which we were determined at all costs, no matter how many casualties, must be kept going as a fighting organisation, now that we had started in earnest.

The total amount of British forces involved, I gathered from my reports, was 3,000, apart from the R.I.C. and the warships, which we regarded as a joke.

At the end of the round-up, the papers were still, so far as we could learn, talking about a truce, and I began to take this thing seriously at last. So we made sure to get some papers and discovered that the 11th July was fixed for hostilities to cease at twelve noon.

On the 10th July, as usual, we made towards Corvey, Cloonskill and Athgower, the safest places, in our opinion,

in the whole area. Quite a number of the boys had gravitated towards this district also, including Willie Malone and Tom Heavey of the Westport Battalion and members of the Flying Column. We decided to move to Lecanvey on the 10th July and arrived in Fitzgerald's of Borris on Sunday night, the 10th July. Mr. and Mrs. Fitzgerald were both teachers. (Their son, Jack, was afterwards Manager of the Irish National Insurance Company in Dawson Street, Dublin, and died in October, 1951, or 1952.) We had a most enjoyable night there and, as usual, the Fitzgerald's did the honours in style. We slept, under guard, until twelve the next day, bade good-bye to the Fitzgerald's and moved across the mountains to Lecanvey. We did not get far there until we were brought in to McGing's for lunch, and we spent a good portion of the day there, talking. Someone endeavoured to arrange that a car would bring us home, but they had to go to Westport first.

We arrived home after dark at Westport. It was a very enjoyable homecoming for us all, though tinged with sorrow too for the men who had gone their last long journey and for their relatives. I got up early the following morning to see if Westport was still the same. For a week or two life was a very busy affair. The Auxiliaries, a Company of which were in Westport - all ex British officers - were anxious to ascertain what kind of men they had been sent to oppose and, from the reports I gatherered, were extremely annoyed when they discovered how young the members of the Flying Column were. Westport at this time was occupied by R.I.C., a very large garrison, up to sixty or eighty I should say, a Company of Auxiliaries, well over a hundred men, and a garrison of

soldiers. We had quite a respectable number of their forces tied up in Westport, Castlebar, Newport and Louisburgh, all of which were in the Brigade area.

The Brigade Staff went to Dublin, mainly to report on their stewardship and, if possible, to get lectures in the Thompson gun, about which there was a great deal of talk at the time. We saw the Headquarters Staff, including Gearoid O'Sullivan and Mick Price, the Director of Organisation. The latter gave us all a very good rating about our Brigade Headquarters. He insisted that we were completely and entirely wrong, that our place was at a permanent headquarters and that the Column should have operated on its own, to which we replied that, until we organised the Columns and fought with them, no progress could have been made, leaving him to the conclusion that time, if it were long enough, or at least if the war broke out again, would solve his particular bogey with regard to organisation. In our hearts, the four of us - Kilroy, Moane, Ketterick and myself - thought it was ridiculous. The Brigade Staff were the ones to give the example and, if they did not, no progress could, or would be made.

Dublin at this time was interesting. The forces of reaction and imperialism were routed, and the ballad-singers even were lauding the I.R.A. Enemy forces were confined to barracts mostly, and the press printed daily the correspondence that was taking place between de Valera and the Welsh Wizard, Lloyd George. The most ruthless and the trickiest politician of his time had determined in 1920 to solve the Irish problem in his way, and apparently it was as a result of this decision that he gave Sir Henry Wilson, the Chief of his Military Staff, a free hand in Ireland. The history of the British Government in

Ireland from December, 1920 to 11th July, 1921, is one of their darkest chapters and their dirtiest. Even in the negotiations, Lloyd George wanted surrender and recognition of the British Crown, but without result. In the correspondence he re-stated his opinion, and de Valera, on behalf of the Dáil and the Headquarters Staff, re-stated the position of the Republic, its people and its Army, until finally conference, not correspondence, was the only way they could resolve their difficulties.

It is right, I think, at this time to say that the Active Service Units of the I.R.A. should have been kept together in a suitable barracks. An attempt in this direction was made by the setting up of training camps all through the country and, while on the whole discipline was reasonably well kept, still better results would have been obtained from the segregation of the Flying Columns from the rest of the I.R.A. For a period they could have been utilised for training purposes, and some of them actually were.

I myself was kept rather busy at the time as it had been decided to form a 4th Western Division, and I had been mentioned as the possible Adjutant, under Kilroy, of course.

Michael Staines had been appointed Liaison Officer for Galway and Mayo, and his duty was to keep in touch with Chief Commissioner Cruise who was in charge of all the enemy forces of the two Counties. He had asked for Joe Ring, one of our Battalion Commandants, to be his Assistant as the work was onerous and difficult, covering a very large area (two of the largest Counties in Ireland). Staines came to Westport and was looking for a suitable I.R.A. officer to take control of the office in Galway.

Apparently I was considered suitable because I found myself released to go to Galway where the Liaison Office was located, in George Nicholls' house in University Road.

Looking back on it, while I must say that the time in Galway was interesting for a week or two, I got tired of it rapidly, as there was not enough work to do. During my stay there, something extremely tragic happened. Staines, Ring, myself, Joe Grehan, the proprietor of the hotel in which we were staying, and one or two more used to play "nap" every night and go to bed at the respectable hour of eleven, owing to the insistence of Mrs. Grehan. One night there was considerable commotion and, hopping out of bed, I discovered Staines, who was in the next room, dressed and going out. I asked him where he was going. He replied to the effect that he was going down to the Town Hall where an officer of the Dragoons had been shot, with the resultant danger to the Truce. I suggested that he should take me along with him, that I would be useful on a journey of this nature, but he just was not in that particular frame of mind and said that perhaps it would be better if he saw Cruise himself and got an idea of the position generally for Headquarters. In the morning I went to the office as usual, from Salthill in to University Road, and sent a report, approved of by Staines, to the Chief Liaison Officer, Eamonn Duggan. Naturally we expected someone down from Headquarters immediately to enquire into the matter. On the second day after the incident, a gentleman arrived at the office in University Road to see me, and stated he was sent down by Michael Collins to hold a Court of Inquiry into the shooting. I asked him his name and he told me it was Fionán Lynch. I informed him that I was sorry, that we

had no intimation from Headquarters and that there was nothing I could do in the matter, but that perhaps Mr. Staines would be in later on and no doubt could discuss the matter with him. Mr. Lynch warmed up somewhat at this, and I suggested to him that, were we to change positions, he would do exactly what I was doing, as we had no indication of who or what he was, but just his word. At this stage, he produced the letter that had been written the day before, reporting the matter. That did not satisfy me, but I suggested, in case I might be considered too officious, that I would take him out to Salthill where, no doubt, Michael Staines would have arrived by that time - lunch time. He was Fionán Lynch all right. He was sent down to hold the Inquiry, which he duly held and which exonerated the local I.R.A. The Dragoon should not have been at the dance.

By the beginning of October, 1921, the Truce seemed in great danger of breaking. Tom Derrig, who was acting as Brigade O/C, asked me, on one Sunday I had been in Westport, when was I rejoining my unit, to which I replied when I was ordered back. So he sent the order. Stained reported back to Dublin, and the office in Galway was closed. Ring was left behind temporarily. The position was very delicate apparently for two or three weeks, and Ring - I should have mentioned before that he was Battalion Commandant of Westport Battalion - was left practically in charge of the Galway office.

I was busy with my work as Brigade Adjutant, getting reports from every Company, having them typed and ready for inspection by Eoin O'Duffy who was to form the Division at the end of October or beginning of November.

Prior to this, we had set up a training camp in

Sheehan, Ballycroy, Co. Mayo, through which we passed, ourselves first and then the Battalion and Company officers of the whole Brigade, in a most intensive form of training. These trainees were directed to go back to their different units and train their men as they themselves had been trained.

Earlier, during the Truce, we had two large funerals of men who had been shot accidentally on active service, Jim Duffy from Westport Battalion, a member of the Flying Column, and Paddy Marley from Glenhest, Newport. I never had a more trying experience as Vice Brigadier - I had been promoted, and Tommy Heavey had been made Brigade Adjutant - as when I had to march alone at the end of 2,500 men of the Brigade. The bodies of the men, who had been killed at Kilmeena, were handed over to the relatives and I think were buried in the Republican Plot in Castlebar.

The Dáil discussions on the Treaty were postponed from the 6th December, 1921, to the following January, when they were passed and the political unity of the nation was broken. Endeavour after endeavour was made to keep intact the unity of the I.R.A. but, from the start, it was an impossibility. Events marched to their logical conclusion. All the leaders had at heart the ideal of unity, but the forces working from the other side of the water against them were too strong, with the result that, time and again, in the following month or two, people who had stood shoulder to shoulder during the Black and Tan campaign were almost at daggers drawn.

The arrangements for a Pact Election were to us all the best news we had heard since the 11th July, 1921, and, we hoped, would lay the foundations for unity among

the fighting forces, who by this time were known as the Treaty and Anti-Treaty forces, the former with their headquarters in Beggars Bush Barracks, and the latter in the Four Courts.

The Pact Election arrangements broke down at the last minute and, instead of having an agreed election, any and every interest were free to put their policy to a people tired and worn with five years of effort and struggle. The inevitable happened. The units of the I.R.A., known as Anti-Treaty, held Convention after Convention with a view to reaching agreement with Dick Mulcahy, Chief of Staff of the Treaty forces. They failed, and the shelling of the Four Courts commenced the most tragic episode in our history.

In our Brigade area, particularly from 1919, the Irish Republican Brotherhood was a great moulding and constructive force. Their members were active, individually and as a body, in the Sinn Féin Clubs, in the Irish Republican Army and in all the activities that streamed from those two bodies. I myself was Secretary to the Sinn Féin Club, Company Adjutant of Westport Company of Volunteers, Assistant Brigade Adjutant, Clerk of the Parish Court - all at one time - and, in addition, myself, Tom Ketterick, Bruddy Malone, Jim Rushe and Charlie Gavan raised money for the Company arms fund over three or four weeks to the tune of £500.

I was very interested in the Courts, contrary to the usual run of Volunteers who could not see any interest in this form of activity at all. My work in a law office showed me the necessity of having some form of authority which people would recognise and obey at this time. The result was we had both Parish Courts and a form of Circuit Court. The latter was presided over by the present

Chief Justice Conor Maguire in Westport in 1920 at a public session, at which the District Inspector of the R.I.C., F.J. Maguire, attended. Conor Maguire at the time was a practising solicitor in Claremorris and was Chairman of the Mayo County Council, a young progressive Republican. His father, Dr. Maguire, was very well known as an outstanding Irishman. It is a pleasant thing to see in one's own day the Chairman of an obscure revolutionary country Court becoming the Chief Justice of an Irish Republic.

The Sinn Féin Club passed through a number of vicissitudes. When J.C. Millen, the Resident Magistrate, was shot in 1919, the Hall was commandeered by the military and the whole area around Westport was made a military area, out of which or into which no one could go without a special military permit. In addition, a rate was to be collected from Westport Urban District of from £6,000 to £10,000 as compensation for Mrs. Millen and her children. The reply of Westport was not to moninate any Urban Council and, as there were two or three unsuitable candidates (from the national point of view) presenting themselves for election, it was decided that something should be done to offset any break in the decision of the people not a pay this charge. So a few of us arranged that the Town Crier, a tiny little man, known locally as "Monkey Moran", should be nominated, to throw the whole thing into ridicule. Joseph Ruddy, a member of the I.R.B., (afterwards killed in the National Army at Newport, 1922) was the principal planner with some more of us behind him. An election campaign was initiated on behalf of the candidate and some public speeching was made. He was duly nominated. We lauded the candidate to the stars and, God rest his soul, gave the

poor man had great idea of his own importance as the only candidate who had the people behind him. What we expected, of course, happened. When "Monkey" attended the meeting, the others refused to attend and the rate was not struck. The Council could not be formed because they had not a quorum.

With the formation of the I.R.A. and the Oath of Allegiance in 1919, the Irish Republican Brotherhood drifted more or less into disuse, as the things for which it stood began to be well catered for. We had quite a number of men from the old generation who could not, by their very age, be of any assistance to us in the Irish Republican Army. They said quite truthfully that they had done their job, had preserved the continuity, had brought younger men into the Brotherhood and given the organisation a new lease of life. There is no doubt in my mind that the Sinn Féin organisation and the I.R.A. organisation in our Brigade area were definitely animated and made living things originally by the Irish Republican Brotherhood.

The County Council was controlled by Republicans and I myself had a very interesting experience during the Truce when the Secretary of the Mayo County Council called on the Brigade Commandant to furnish men to take over the books from the Secretary of the Rural District Council, Castlebar, Mr. Quinn, who had refused to recognise Dáil Éireann and the Department of Local Government thereof and had refused to pass over the moneys and books to the Secretary, Michael Egan, who recognised the Dáil. I was ordered, as a senior officer, to do the job. At the time I was Brigade Adjutant. I took my assistant, Tommy Heavey, with me, plus a gun, as Quinn, we understood,

believed in the gun if he got the chance. We went to his house in Castlebar and were let in by the maid. When he came, I told him what I wanted and apologised for the intrusion. I told him I must get the books and a cheque for the amount held to credit, which had been indicated to me by the Secretary of the County Council, Michael Egan. The conversation was conducted according to the rules. There were no threats of any kind and Mr. Quinn, seeing I was firm about the matter, agreed to get the books and give me a cheque. I followed him to his private room where he had them. He informed me I was taking no chances, to which I replied that I was not. The book was handed over, plus the cheques.

In 1921, to paralyse any activities of the enemy Courts, we arrested all the lawyers who were going to attend at one sitting, and that finished the British Courts.

For some years preceding 1921, the R.I.C. had become a military instead of a police force. They were armed with rifles, were the eyes and ears of the British Army and of British institutions and were the greatest stumbling-block to our activities. - It is difficult to reconcile oneself to the fact that all these men came from Irish homes. My own conclusion was that they were quite familiar with the history of 1798, 1803, the failure of the Fenian Rising, the failure of O'Connell and the Young Irelanders, and again the failure of the I.R.B. as against Davitt and the Land Leaguers in the 1880's, the downfall of Parnell, the "failure" of 1916, to their mind - all forced them to the conclusion that the mighty Empire would never be beaten now. That was their sorrow, their tragedy, their disaster, to be classified as aliens

and enemies in and to their own land.

Generally speaking, from a physique point of view, they were the most perfect police force in the world and in ordinary times were highly disciplined. Socially, until 1916, they had a very good place in the community and generally they married very fine types of womanhood. The results could be seen in their families who were usually of a high degree of intelligence and generally very national.

I feel now that we could have made more use of the Royal Irish Constabulary, but it was too difficult to break the unapproachability that had grown up around them and, further, we regarded them as enemies. Undoubtedly, even within my own ambit, there were men, notably F.J. Maguire, whom I have already mentioned, who thought as an Irishman and who acted, so far as he possibly could, as an Irishman. There were others who just drifted along, and they had a very difficult role to play. The population was hostile to them and despised them while, at the same time, the British army authorities despised them too, as every army does the police force. Had they adopted the tactics of the Dublin Metropolitan Police who downed arms, they would have saved the country two difficult tragic years.

It was my particular duty to see that the Intelligence for the Brigade was of the highest type possible. All reports passed through a Director to me and, at one stage, passed direct to me in the Flying Column so that we would have up-to-the-minute information. John O'Dowd of Louisburgh was a Director, and Luke Sheridan of Castlebar was also made a Director in 1921. Ned Duffy of Westport, who afterwards was

Chief Superintendent of the Guards, was Battalion Director of Intelligence in Westport. We had very able men in Castlebar, Newport and Louisburgh whose reports came quickly to hand. The headquarters for the British military were in Castlebar Barracks and we had a man there who copied all the code messages and passed them to us. We transmitted them to General Headquarters. Our system of local Intelligence was extremely sound, and nothing could happen in the whole Brigade area of any importance which was not relayed to us within twenty-four hours. We, of course, had to be particularly careful with regard to the "Big House", and to see that this enemy centre, always in our midst, would be at least neutralised. We had our agents working in and near the big houses and, as a general rule, we were always able to render them useless without actually proceeding to extremes.

For example, on one occasion, a person tried to pass information to a resident of a "Big House" near Castlebar. The maid steamed the envelope, opened it, made a copy of the letter and passed it to us. We took the necessary action. On another occasion, something similar happened, and the local Battalion officer was left to deal with the person in any way he wished. He cleared him out of the area.

In the Westport area, while Maguire was District Inspector of R.I.C., any general move by the British against us was relayed to us immediately. On one occasion, during the organisation of the Dáil Loan, I was reported to the police anonymously. Maguire showed me the letter and later lent it to me, when I showed it to Frank Burke, now Chief Superintendent of the Guards in the Crimes Branch of the Castle. If the informant had

succeeded, the activities of those, organising the Dáil Loan in Westport area, would have been completely paralysed and about twenty-two shopkeepers arrested, including myself and other active members of the Sinn Féin organisation.

Generally speaking, the enemy Intelligence had broken down in 1920 and very little information about the Flying Column got through to them. On the other hand, our information with regard to their movements was first-class.

Any would-be spies or informers in our area were not of much use to the enemy. I myself at one time was under the impression that there were one or two, but I would be very reluctant to try anyone on suspicion and, in any event, neither of them was in a position to do any harm. The proof of the pudding was in the eating! Our men continually used the same houses, the same villages, they could go into the towns, and they were never given away.

As well as I remember, we did make some gun-powder and fill cartridges with buckshot, but I never believed in it. I never favoured it, and I could see no point in having any member of a Flying Column armed with anything else but a rifle, revolver, a bomb and a bayonet. We did not progress as far as the bayonet, but the worth of the rifle and revolver was proved in the Carrowkennedy fight and others.

I omitted to give details of an engagement early in 1921 at Clogher Cross, outside Westport, which was very intense while it lasted, for twenty minutes or half and hour. Those involved were the members of the Westport Flying Column, headed by Joe Ring and Bruddy

Malone, and some lorry loads of Crown forces. I can't at this stage remember the report I got on the matter, as I was not present myself.

It is only fair to say, in justice to the Brigade, that by May, 1921, we were getting into our stride for a long and intense struggle, and we were all confident that by and during the following winter we would very substantially relieve the pressure on Cork and the other Southern Counties who were being hard-pressed by the British forces.

When I returned to Westport after the Truce, it took me quite a while to realise that, in terms of time, I had only been away for less than a year but it appeared to be at least five years. In actual fact, you could say it was two or three years at any rate since I participated in the life at home, as all our spare time was taken up with I.R.A. activities. A noticeable thing was that I scarcely knew any of the people who had sprung to manhood and womanhood in two or three years. They were complete strangers to me. Perhaps my own attitude about the struggle conditioned this as, up to a fortnight before the Truce, I thought there was no going back, that it was going to be a struggle to the end, to be carried on over an indefinite period.

SIGNED: Seán Gibbons

DATE: 9th March, 1954

(Sean Gibbons)
9th March 1954.

WITNESS: Matthew Barry Comd't.

Matthew Barry Comd't.