

W.S. 972  
**ORIGINAL**

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21  
BURD STAIRS MILITARY 1913-21  
**No. W.S. 972**

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. **W.S. 972**.....

**Witness**

Tomas O Cleirigh (Thomas Cleary)  
Ballinakill Lodge,  
Waterford.

**Identity.**

Member of Irish Volunteers, Waterford,  
1914 - ;

Second Lieutenant later.

**Subject.**

National activities, Waterford,  
1911-1921.

**Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.**

Nil

File No. **S. 2247**.....

Form B.S.M. 2

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STATEMENT BY THOMAS CLEARY,  
Ballinakill Lodge, Waterford.

In the year 1911 I was at an age when one would begin to take an interest in the current affairs whether at play and work and the national affairs of one's country. The year 1911 was a memorable year as far as Ireland was concerned, for it was the beginning of the end of British rule in Ireland. At that time the Old Irish Parliamentary Party were fighting very hard, under the leadership of John E. Redmond (member for Waterford City), for Home Rule. I, like many other young Irish boys, was very interested in reading the various accounts of the speeches made in the British House of Commons. I remember asking my father what was Home Rule and what would we have. He tried in his own way to explain that we would be able to govern the country ourselves but we would still be under the British flag. I asked why, and he said that was the way and the only way England would give us Home Rule. I had no use for England as my mother told me that they exiled

her great-grandfather from the country. My father was a member of the Fenian Brotherhood and his great-grandfather, O'Brien of Knockarelish, Woodstown, had his land taken from him. My mother always said: "Don't join the British Army. Let them do their own work". Excitement was now running high with the Home Rule Bill, especially in southern Ireland, but there was another spot in Ireland which had something else to say and that spot was Ulster which was under the leadership of Mr. Edward Carson (who, by the way, became Lord Carson before he died). This Edward Carson formed the Ulster Volunteers and vowed he would march on to Dublin with his Volunteers if Home Rule was passed. The South did not mind what Carson said about the march to Dublin but instead they, too, organised the Volunteers in every city and county below the border. This force grew very fast. All the young men, and even the old ones, too, joined up. This was in the latter part of 1911, and fired by the flaming national spirit I joined up with the rest of the Waterford City force. In a short time this force numbered some 7,000, and at first we used to drill at the Fish Market which was situated at a place called Peter St.

As time went on this place became too small and we were given the Market House on the Quay. That was also too small. Then the Army Council of the Volunteers got together and rented a place at Hennessy's Road called the Inebriate's Home. This building was an ideal barrack with a very fine drilling yard. We had retired British Army drilling instructors employed but owing to the shortage of funds to buy guns we had to use wooden rifles. But what did we care! We were learning how to use a rifle.

Now John E. Redmond at first did not approve of the Volunteers as he did not want war with Carson and kept apart from the movement at first, but when he saw that it was growing in strength and afraid he would lose power he became head of the Volunteers. Everything was going on well for the next two years and then the 1914 war started. This is where Redmond made the one and only mistake in his political life, for never in the history of our country had any leader commanded such power as he did and with a fighting force of hundreds of thousands of Volunteers at his back he should have demanded Home Rule, but instead he allowed the British to put it on the Statute Book during the war, from

where it never saw daylight. Redmond soon became aware of his mistake - only to commit another one - the one that put paid to his power as leader of the Irish race for all time and the one that broke his heart. When he went around the country in 1915 reviewing the Volunteers he appealed to the young Volunteers to join the British Army and fight for small nations. That was where England fooled Redmond and his party with their broken promises. But other men in Ireland had something else to say to that - men like Patrick Pearse, Tom Clarke, Tomás McDonagh, James Connolly, Arthur Griffith, Eamon de Valera and hosts of others. In Waterford we had Seán Matthews, Patrick Brazil, J.D. Walsh, Michael O'Neill, Patrick and Nicholas Quinlan, Kevin Corbert, John and Tom Wyley, Liam Walsh, Seán Lane, Tom Kirwan, Seán Cooper, Peadar Woods, Denis Barry, Martin Noonan, Michael Fanning and myself, who signed a note which was sent to Redmond in June 1915 commanding him to refrain from making an appeal for Volunteers for the British Army when he came to Waterford to review the Volunteers. Redmond ignored the letter and the split started in Waterford.

By this time a new force was started in Dublin called

the Irish Volunteers. They, too, had cut themselves away from Redmond's Volunteers. Some twenty-five of us left the Redmond Volunteers and Peadar Woods organised us into the Irish Volunteers. Granted we were small and the Redmonds used to try and make a skit of us when we marched into the City every Sunday. We all attended 10 o'clock Mass at the Cathedral every Sunday and met outside after Mass when we received our instructions as to where we were to go.

The Sunday before Redmond came to Waterford to review the Volunteers in 1915 the Waterford Gaelic League held its annual feis at the Waterford Sports' Field and they invited Patrick Pearse, the man who was in later years to become Ireland's noblest leader. I well remember that day. It was a beautiful summer day and a very large crowd assembled to hear Pearse. This great man told his listeners to love and cherish the Irish language: "Love your country and support the national movement of the Gaelic League for the time is not far off when you may be called on to defend your language and your country".

How true were those words of Pearse, for in less than 12 months the fight did start.

Easter 1916 shall live in the memory of all Irishmen

and women while Ireland is Ireland. The battle started and we in Waterford were standing ready to move at a moment's notice, but word came on Tuesday that our services were not required at present but to continue the important work and get in more young men into the ranks. The task was slow but we succeeded after two years.

By this time another Irish organisation, Sinn Féin, was getting very strong throughout Ireland and they selected men to stand for parliament but not to go there. Redmond now saw the mistake; Young Ireland was rallying to Sinn Féin, the Republican movement. Members of the Irish Party resigned from the party and joined the new party. Redmond became a very sick man with the vision of losing his power, and in March, 1918, he died of a broken heart.

From 1916 onwards a very close watch was kept on our movements by Dublin Castle and a special man was appointed to keep that watch, policeman Byrne from Mary's St. barrack. This man became known to all I.R.A. as I.C. 83, for that was his number. I remember one Sunday early in 1917 we met at Grace Dieu, which was then about two miles from the City, and we were marching in formation along the narrow road

when word came to us that we were being followed. Our O.C., Peadar Woods, gave the order to quicken our stride which we did, and got around a bend of the road. Here we were ordered to jump the hedge and take cover and wait until the policeman was well out of sight. Then we did some cross country and carried out our drill programme for the day at a place called Straw Hall, moving down towards the Cork road by the Holy Cross from where we marched into the City.

I will leave this for a space and go back to the National Volunteers and give you some of the officers. They were: Mr. Gerald Purcell Fitzgerald, The Island, Mr. Robert A. Kelly who was a City Rate Collector, Mr. Wm. Fitzgerald, stonecutter, Mr. John Hearne, builder, Mr. Wm. Jones, Mr. H. Matthews, Seán Matthews, P. Brazil and J.D. Walshe. These were some of the officers and the instructors were: Sergt. Major J.M. Murphy, Sergt. P. Kiely, Sergt. Toomey. Each Company had to parade on a special evening as it was impossible for all to parade on the same evening. The big parade to the Sports' Field in June, 1915, when John Redmond reviewed them was their biggest. The twenty-five rebels watched this parade at the Clock Tower



on the Quay as it passed along. Many of those who took part in that parade left the Volunteers when they had heard of Redmond appealing for men for the British Army for at our first parade after this big parade we were joined by more rebels. Our Sunday parades were continued and our membership was growing very slowly but the spirit was strong and the country was answering to the last message given by Pearse.

Sinn Féin were holding monster meetings in every city and town in the country, and to the town of Dungarvan in the west of Waterford fell the honour for the first Sinn Féin public meeting. This was held at The Square, Dungarvan, on the second Sunday of November, 1917. To this meeting all Republican Volunteers were asked to attend. We travelled from Waterford by the Rosslare Express which left Waterford at 8 a.m. and arrived at the old Boro (which was the pet name given by the locals) at about 9.15 a.m. We numbered about 25 and were under the command of Peadar Woods. On arriving at Dungarvan we went to O'Callaghan's Café where we had something to eat, and then to Mass at the Friary which was just across the road. After Mass we wandered

around the town and watched the other Volunteers coming in for the meeting. While I was standing in the Square that day I saw a picture which never left my memory. It was a Company of Volunteers from Ardmore coming into the Square with their leader, who was non other than the hero of the famous Ardmore wreck, the Rev. Fr. O'Shea. The Reverend gentleman was a small well-built man with beautiful white hair. It would do one good to see the way he marched his men into the Square. No General could be more proud of his Company as Father O'Shea was that day. We returned to O'Callaghan's and had some lunch before the meeting, and after lunch we had a little sing-song while passing the time away. One of our members, Paddy Wyley, was a very good comedian, especially with Irish singing, and always ready to oblige. Among the songs Paddy gave us was a very popular one at that time with all republicans, The Peeler and the Goat, and boy did Paddy let it go. He had just finished the first verse when Mrs. O'Callaghan came in and warned us that there were about a dozen Peelers in the next room. "Tell them to come in and join in the song" said Paddy, and sang the second verse louder but nothing happened. The time for the meeting arrived and we marched

to the Square carrying the national flag, of which I was the standard bearer. This flag bore initials of I.R.A. and it was the first national flag to bear those initials outside Dublin. The policemen made several attempts to capture this flag but each time they were frustrated by both our own Volunteers and other Companies who attended the meeting. I lowered the flag and took it off the flagstaff and put it away for safety. There is a short history in connection with this flag which I will tell later. This meeting was one of the largest and most important ever held in Waterford County for it was the first real opening and awakening of Republican Ireland. Mr. Dee, Dungarvan, presided and the principal speaker was Count Plunkett. Mr. P. Kenny and Mr. T. Gallagher represented Waterford on the platform. The news of this meeting went around the country like wild fire and hundreds of Volunteers were now leaving the National Volunteers and coming over to us. We had now secured a hall in Thomas St. where we held parades and lectures, and also the start was made to form new Companies for we were now informed that Mr. E. de Valera was coming to Waterford City to address a monster Sinn Féin meeting

Great preparations were now being made for this meeting for Dev., as he was affectionately known throughout southern Ireland, was a very warm and popular figure and beloved by all Republicans. Ald. Maurice Quinlan (who in the old days of Redmond was a great advocate for the cause of the Old Irish Parliamentary Party but changed over to Sinn Féin with his three sons, Paddy, Nicholas and William) was the Chairman of Organising Committee. Ald. Quinlan was the strong man of the City, a man who had great powers of persuasion. He came to visit our Volunteer hall to see how we were shaping and was very pleased with the large number of new recruits. We had to work hard to be ready for the meeting, expecting that it would be on the same lines as the Dungarvan one, but we were to be disappointed as the day before the meeting Ald. Quinlan received a note from the County Inspector of the police that the meeting was banned by the order from Dublin Castle and no parades or meetings were to be held in the City. This is what our Army Council were waiting for. Now the National Volunteers could see the kind of a friend England was. While she was begging for young Irishmen to go to France to fight for the freedom of small nations she refused to allow Ireland the

freedom to hold a political meeting. Why? She was afraid that the man to speak at the meeting, Eamon de Valera, would convince the young men of Ireland that it was no business of ours how England got on in the war. We here in Ireland had nothing against Germany and they in return had nothing against Ireland. Ald. M. Quinlan took the order of the ban very cool and calm and called a special committee meeting and put the news before the meeting, when it was decided to hold the meeting outside the borough boundary, fixing the Cork road end of Paddy Brown's Long Road as the meeting place. The news was passed around to all Republicans on the Sunday morning after all the Masses. This did not give any time for the Police Inspector to get in touch with Dublin Castle to ban the meeting. The County Inspector called at the Sinn Féin Headquarters (which, by the way, was the old Victoria Hotel at the end of Colbeck St.) and warned the Alderman about the meeting. The big hour came. Hundreds and hundreds of Republicans, young and old, men, boys, women and girls made their way out to the meeting place which was about  $2\frac{1}{2}$  miles outside the City. The County Inspector had both sides of the road lined with armed

policemen from the borough boundary out to the meeting place. The day was very showery. The showers were heavy at times but what did we care! We were going to hear Dev. speak and tell us the truth about the doing of the British Government. I was accompanied by Miles Fanning of Johnstown, a plasterer by trade, and James Drohan, butcher. Jim lived at the Mayor's Walk and worked for Stafford's who had a stall at George's St. Ald. Maurice Quinlan opened the meeting. Mr. P. Kenny also addressed the meeting. Pat Cahill who, by the way, was carried in a butcher stall at Peter St. Then the big moment came, for when Ald. Maurice Quinlan announced that the next speaker was Eamon de Valera there was a tremendous outburst of applause lasting for over five minutes. In fact Dev. waved his hand for silence. Ald. Maurice held an umbrella over the speaker's head in order to keep off the rain. During that speech he appealed to all young men to join the Republican Army and prepare to fight for the freedom of our country. De Valera told the huge crowd that Redmond was trying to sell Ireland to the British Government. "But we of the Republican movement will see to it that our country will not be sold" he said. He also appealed to his hearers to join Sinn Féin organisation,

the Gaelic League and help to revive the language, and last but not the least, to foster Irish céilí dances, "for a nation without its language and native dances is dead".

De Valera was speaking for over one and a half hours and received a tremendous applause, with hats and flags waving returning from the meeting. The R.I.C. were still lining both sides of the road. That night at headquarters a very important meeting was held and it was decided to form Companies in the various districts of the City. B. Company, of which I was a member, was already formed. A Company was formed out of the staffs of Hearne & Co., Drapers, Robinson Ledlie, also drapers, and other shop assistants. You had D Company in the district of Ballytrackle, Alphonsus Road and Newtown; you had C Company in Barrack St. - Yellow Road district and F. Company in Ferrybank. I was instructed on the first Monday of February, 1918, to form D Company by H.Q. I got in touch with Tom Brennan, who later became Captain of the Company, and Jim McGrath who took over the position of Captain from Tom Brennan when Tom was on the staff. I arranged the first assembly for a place called Couse, owned at that time by Mr. Cheasty. It was well off the road; it is about  $2\frac{1}{2}$  miles from the City. On the

night of the parade there was a moon and we had good vision. I was surprised to see such a large attendance. I know it was over 60. I put them through some of the instructions, such as springing to attention, numbering off in smart fashion, forming fours and right and left turn. I kept them at this exercise for over one and a half hours, giving them a little lecture in between. They took a great interest in their work and were very eager to learn. Before dismissing them I informed them that the next parade would be on the following Friday night, but on Friday morning I received word from Headquarters to cancel the parade and instead to go for a stroll out that direction with a friend, which I did and saw the reason for the calling off of the parade. The R.I.C. got word somehow of the parade and were waiting for us to turn up. But they were disappointed. I refixed the parade for a place called Williamstown Paddock. It was a very large enclosed field with very high walls around it and a big opening at one end. The parade was fixed for Sunday after Mass and they were instructed to go there by various ways. When I arrived I placed scouts out to keep a lookout. They were to whistle in a certain way so as to warn us. The attendance was larger than the first



night. They had a good morning's work and were instructed to march in formation. At the end of the morning's exercise I informed the men that they were to form their own Company and elect their officers as I had to go back to my Company. The men held their meeting and elected their officers and I returned to B. Company..

All Companies were working very hard in getting ready to have their Companies in good trim, but on top of this came the news of J.E. Redmond's death. Sinn Féin now started to work in earnest for the by-election which would take place very soon. But what an election! Easter Week 1916 could be only compared with it. For Waterford City was the greatest Imperialist City outside Belfast. The Ballybricken boys were up and working to retain the seat for Capt. Redmond, son of the late J.E. Redmond. The Captain was a true son of his father for he donned the khaki and went to fight for the British. Dr.V.J. White was selected to stand for Sinn Féin. The doctor came from a very well known and very popular Waterford family. His late father was also a doctor and they carried on a chemist shop at Broad St. which as time became the most noted house in Waterford. The election campaign commenced and we had a very rough time of it.

The Ballybricken mob, with the assistance of the R.I.C., gave us very rough treatment, but in all cases we gave as much until we came up to the point of the bayonet. During our meetings large stones, bottles etc. were thrown. I well remember one meeting at the Market House on the Quay.

De Valera was addressing, and I had only just pushed Miss Kathleen Hicks (one of our best workers) to a better spot when a stone struck me on the head, cutting the felt hat I was wearing at the time. I was lucky that the hat had a high crown which broke the fall of the stone. Nevertheless it cut my head, but if Miss Hicks had got hit with the stone it might have done more harm. Times were very rough for any man who wore a trench coat. He was waylaid by a band of cowards. But they did not frighten the lads.

I remember one night we were marching to a meeting and going towards Manor St. by Parnell St. and coming to a place called the Car Strand - it is the crossroads at Michael St., John St., Parnell St. and Manor St. Just as we arrived near the crossroads, Commandant Seán Matthews leading, I was behind him, James Drohan was on my left, a large bottle came flying towards us. It just skimmed

me and caught J. Drohan on the knee. Commandant Seán gave the order to charge and we put those behind - the corner-boys - to flight. When this was over we reformed again and continued our march to the meeting place.

The fight was rallying now and we were getting more recruits. The result of the election was a victory for England, but the doctor was not disgraced. Dublin Castle was getting very busy hunting us around, so much so that we had to go very easily. During the summer months the I.R.A. carried out a lot of manoeuvres across country. Headquarters secured some guns and rifles and on different nights there were lectures given by various men. Dr. White also gave health lectures.

It was in September, 1918, when with the 1914 war over a general election was proclaimed in England and once again the fireworks started. Sinn Féin concentrated all their efforts on winning Waterford City, as a result of which all the leading speakers in Sinn Féin travelled to Waterford to speak in favour of Dr. White. They included Seán T. O'Kelly, the second President of the Irish Republic - Arthur Griffith, E. de Valera, R. Mulcahy, M. Collins, Count Plunkett, R. Barton and hosts of others. This election was far worse than the

first one. They (the Redmondites) went so far as to come down on the mall with bugles, blow horns, tin cans, drums and all kinds of noisy instruments to draw Fr. Flanagan when he started to address the large crowd. We had to make several charges to beat back the mob but each time the R.I.C. came between us and the mob with their fixed bayonets. There was no law or order for the Redmondite supporters. But it was different with Sinn Féin supporters. Our election campaign was a very tough one. It is hard to believe the hard fight Sinn Féin had to make in Waterford. Let me say here and now that Ireland should be very proud of that band of republicans in Waterford for their magnificent fight in 1918. They won the praise of all republicans. They were Messrs. Thomas John Paddy Wyley, John Power, Tom Walsh, Michael Malone, J.J. Sutton, Richard Lynch, Michael Fanning and myself (Tomás Ó Cléirigh), Misses Mai Walsh, Kathleen Murphy (Peter St.) and Kathleen Murphy, Ferrybank. We put on a play written by Tom Wyley called "Freedom's Cause" for election funds and it was a great success. We handed over to the election committee over £100. During the performance one night the tax collector called for his tax or the show would be stopped. He got his tax the right way - Tom

Wyley was in the act of downing him with a sword he had for his part in the play; he had the official by the neck and hanging over a stairway in the act of plunging him down when his brother John came to the official's rescue. Our friend made a hasty retreat and we heard no more about tax.

The day for the 1918 general election was drawing near and the Sinn Féin organisation were not going to be caught napping this time. They appealed for Volunteers in southern Ireland to come and give the Waterford I.R.A. a helping hand. They received a very good response. We had Volunteers from Wexford, Kilkenny, Tipperary, Limerick, Cork and Co. Waterford. They were put in various parts of the city and posted to the different polling booths. I was put in charge of Ballytruckle booth and I had a group of Cork Volunteers. The Yellow Road, Barrack St. and the French Library in Lady Lane were little hells on polling day as they were the Redmond stronghold, and any Sinn Féiner who went to vote was almost prevented from entering the booths, and mind you the R.I.C. were looking on. They would only smile if the Redmond mob attacked the republican voter. The most disgraceful act that could be committed was done to Dr. White when he was about to enter Mount Sion booth.

Some coward fired a large brick and cut a deep wound in the doctor's head. The news of this attack went around like wildfire. It was carried out to me by a scout messenger who also informed me that the mob was walking in towards Ballytruckle. On receiving this news I called all republicans in the district and formed them into a Company with our Cork friends. I mustered about 60 Volunteers and marched them in extended formation to about 60 yards from the booth.

Very soon we heard the shouting mob coming. I gave my lads instructions that they were not to spare themselves.

The mob was to be beaten back at all costs. Listening to me giving those instructions was Sergt. McGurk, R.I.C., who came to me and ordered me to take my men behind the polling booth. I refused, stating that the Volunteers were here to keep order and intended to carry out that order. "I will give you five minutes to proceed towards the oncoming mob and give them our warning" I said. This, of course, he refused to do. He would not take an order from an I.R.A. officer. By the way I should have told you that I was appointed 2nd Lieutenant of B. Company. The mob came to about 100 yards from my men when they halted in their tracks.

The R.I.C. Sergeant still warned me and this time I told him that I would count six and if he did not act in a peaceful manner I would drive the mob away by force.

He refused to take my order again. There and then I gave the command to my men to advance on the mob. This was a move the mob did not expect and I could see that they were not going to show fight. I ordered my men to make a short run towards them which they did, and you could laugh yourself sick to see the brave mob broke up and made a hasty retreat. I kept my men well in front of the booth until I was sure that the mob was gone for good, then I took them back behind the booth. This was about 5 p.m. At about 7 p.m. I was attracted by shouting and saw some sticks raised. I made my way to the spot and saw a man named Paddy Murphy who had a hold of Captain Redmond and was in the act of striking him when I called to him. At the same time Tom Brennan who was our representative in the booth, also came out to the Captain's rescue. Tom assisted the Captain to the booth and I gave Paddy Murphy a lecture on good citizenship. "If there was mob law it will not be by our organisation". Paddy said he was sorry for losing his head. He was thinking of the bad head

wound the doctor received early that afternoon. He saw red when the Captain came. He appealed to me to overlook the matter and I told him that I would look into it. In fact I had no intention of having our friend punished.

The closing of the booth took place and I decided to march with my men guarding the ballot box to the Courthouse.

By this time many more Volunteers arrived. They reported to me and at 8 p.m. I had a Company of men numbered about 200 armed with all kinds of weapons. I marched my men in extended formation with the Presiding Officer with the ballot box in the centre. All went well until we came to about 100 yards of the Courthouse when I saw this brave mob which we scattered early in the day at Ballytruckle coming towards us. They were reinforced with about 100 more and they were shouting. I had a hard job to hold my men but they obeyed my order to keep calm and when we were about 30 yards away from the mob I gave the order to charge and what a sight! The mob broke up in fright and ran in all directions. I must tell you the situation of the Courthouse. It is next to the People's Park and both are divided by Pill river, and believe it or not some of the mob raced into the Pill out of harm's way. We



charged down Catherine St. clearing the road to the Courthouse for our ballot box. I was charging along alone by the Courthouse when I saw a hand coming through the big rails holding a large stone and the owner was in the act of firing this stone at one of my men when I came down on it with my ash stick. It was rather dark at the time and I got a surprise when I heard a very loud scream from a woman. It was the first and last woman I ever struck. I am sure she had a very sore arm for some time. We were halted in our attack against the mob by the R.I.C. who had fixed bayonets and lined across the road. The mob, guarded by the R.I.C., started to throw stones, bottles and other missiles. I reorganised my men and marched them away (taking our Cork friend) to their lodging place. The result of the election was a victory for the British soldier but his majority was smaller than the by-election. Sinn Féin was on the up grade in Waterford for after the election we had many more recruits to the I.R.A. Commandant Peadar Woods left Waterford for Galway and Denis Barry, a Corkman, took over command. We carried out a lot of re-organising in the next few months and in February, 1919, Commandant Barry went back to Cork when Capt. Seán Matthews

of B Company was appointed as O/C and the Headquarters asked me to accept the appointment as Capt. of B. Company.

I asked them to give me 24 hours to think over which they agreed, and I reported to them the following night and asked them to withdraw my appointment as Capt. of B. Company, stating that we were very short of instructors and I told them that I would be more useful as an instructor, of which I had a first class ticket. After a discussion they agreed. My old Capt., now our O/C., saw my point, and I suggested that I would call B. Company together, which I did, and addressing the men I told them the situation and asked them to elect their officers. There was some grumbling at first and after a short while they saw reason. I asked them did they want me as instructor or leader. I told them my own view and they agreed to the election when Walter Cullen was elected Captain, the best leader that ever marched in front of any Company of men, R. Deegan 1st Lieutenant, James Partridge 2nd Lieutenant, Adj. Tom Marshall, Company Sergt. , instructor-myself - Thomas Cleary. With our officers elected we got down to work and I was for most of the time confined to

Headquarters with the new recruits. We had our first parade under our new officers on St. Patrick's Day, 1919, in the St. Patrick's Day procession, and before this parade Capt. W. Cullen had an Irish class formed in the Company and I asked my brother Seamus to come and give us lessons in Irish, which he did. So on our first parade I gave all commands in Irish, and, by the way, we were the only Company to have Irish commands. The R.I.C. were on the Mall looking and taking notes, but when I gave the commands in Irish they were lost for they did not expect that. The parade was a great success but a sad one for Irish Catholics when a Redmond mob attacked the procession and fired stones and bottles at a statue of St. Patrick. The Redmond mob were still very aggressive and not a single night passed but one of our Volunteers was attacked; they would not face a number of Volunteers. They always waylaid the lone one. Things were getting very hot and Dublin Castle knowing that they were losing ground brought over the famous Black and Tans from all the jails in England, Scotland and Wales to try and break our spirit, but it was a waste of time. The harder they got the stronger we got, and they started to arrest our leaders under the

Defence of the Realm Act which was known as D.O.R.A.

The Tans used to drive around in armoured cars at a terrible speed and they were stationed in every police barrack.

The old R.I.C. were afraid of them for they were nearly always drunk. I was employed as a breadvan driver and

deliverer and had to call at Lady Lane Barracks. When the

R.I.C. knew I was an I.R.A. man they would not let me in

with the bread. I had to knock at the main door and the

orderly officer would come out to take the bread. The Tans

always made a nasty remark but I took no notice of them

which made them worse. Our Company made a few raids for

arms. I told Capt. Cullen about Dr. Baily, the Mall,

a house I called with bread, The County Club, Dr. Jennings,

the Mall, Mr. Jephensen, Passage Road, Chapman, John's Hill.

Of course I was not on the raids but gave the plans of all

the houses. Then one morning at about 9 a.m. Capt. Cullen

and Tom Fahey raided O'Grady's hairdressing shop on the Quay,

it was next to Reginald's Tower, and got all the wigs in

the shop. I had my breadvan over in Rose Lane waiting to

receive the parcel of wigs when fired into the back of the

van, and continued on my rounds and handed them over to a

member of our Company, J. Drohan, later in the day. That

night the report of the raid appeared in the local papers and shopkeepers were asked to co-operate in tracking down the raiders, which they never did. At the end of 1919 our Captain was ordered to take over Butlerstown and form a Company there by Headquarters, and Capt. Cullen, Lieut. Deegan and Adj. Tom Marshall and myself cycled to Butlerstown which is about  $5\frac{1}{2}$  miles from Waterford. There we met Jim Hunt and told him our mission. Jim promised to round up the boys and I fixed a night to meet them. I had to arrange the nights to suit the main Company nights for drill. I had to cycle out to Butlerstown two nights a week to instruct them and I had a tough job in teaching them. One night when I called the roll I found that one man (M. Phelan of Ballinaseashagh) was absent. I sent a messenger to his home to tell him to report. The messenger came back to state that Phelan said he was not attending that night as he was going to bed. I immediately went to Phelan's house with two members and knocked at Phelan's door. The latter put his head out of a window and asked who was there. I ordered him to dress and report to the Castle yard at Butlerstown within 30 minutes.

He replied by saying that he was in bed, to which I answered: "Be at the Castle yard in 30 minutes and that is an order", walking away with my two companions back to the main Company at the Castle, and I might say that our friend Phelan changed his mind and turned up. On his arrival I lectured the Company as to their duty to the Republic, stating "we do not force anyone to join but if you take the oath of the Republic you are bound to obey all orders issued to you" and warned them to attend future parades of the Company. On several occasions I had narrow escapes from the R.I.C. in returning from Butlerstown.

In April, 1920, in fact it was the first Monday in April, an attempt was made to help I.R.A. prisoners to escape from Waterford jail which was situated on the hill of Ballybricken. The day being a fair day it was thought it was a good time for the carrying out of the plan, but somehow something went wrong and the R.I.C. seeing a rope ladder over the jail wall gave the warning so the plan had to be postponed. Now every night a patrol of armed military left the barracks which was, by the way, situated at Barrack St. The patrol would proceed via Bunker Hill, Poleberry, around the green at Ballytruckle and back towards the city

again via Upper Johnstown, and on alternative nights they would patrol Johnstown and Michael St. or South Parade, the Mall and Quay. I always made it a point to avoid this patrol by going home Johnstown way one night and going by South Parade the other night, first making sure

On the Monday night of the attempted jail escape I was out in Butlerstown drilling the Butlerstown Company. I returned to Headquarters and handed in my report to Captain Cullen as this was part of my duty. Before leaving Headquarters the Captain handed me a copy of An tÓglach, which was the official military organ of the I.R.A., giving instructions on the way to train men for their various jobs. Each N.C.O. was given a copy going home with the instruction to read the paper and to take notes of the important points in the paper. So important was the paper to I.R.A. that Dublin Castle imposed a term of two years in jail to anyone caught with a copy. Is it any wonder that I was always dodging the patrol. I was also at the time a member of the Waterford Temperance Hall which was just across the road from Headquarters. I always paid a visit to the hall each night before going home and sometimes enjoyed a game of billiards, a game I played very well. I won many prizes

at playing the game, both C.Y.M.S. and de la Salle Past Pupils Club. On one occasion I played through a billiard league for C.Y.M.S. without a defeat. This night I crossed to the hall; it was rather late and I felt a little tired because I had a rather hard night at Butlerstown. So I just saw down in a quiet corner and had a look over the official organ. I put it in my inside pocket of my coat. When we were about to go home I said to one of the boys living at Ballytruckle (his name was Tim Hurley) "which way did the patrol come last night?". He said "South Parade". "Right, we will go home South Parade way". We had about eight in number going home that night. Tim Hurley and myself were walking in front. All went well until we reached a place called the baths (it was situated at the junction of South Parade and Water Street), when the order came "Halt and put up your hands". "Oh by the good sticks Tim I'm caught". "Why?" he said. I had not time to answer him. The patrol O/C came up to us and called Tim up first, which was a stroke of luck for Tim was in the British Army and lucky enough had his discharge papers on him that night. In fact Tim informed me afterwards that he carried them in case he was ever held up.



The officer examined his papers and tried all his pockets, finding also a betting docket 2/- E.W. The Bore for the Grand National, for which The Bore finished third. The officer smiled saying, "I see you had hard luck but you had good luck now by having your discharge papers". He handed all back to Tim and then called me. I stepped up to him and he immediately took my hat (which was a felt one) off my head and held a very strong torch towards my face. I would say he held it for about two minutes but I thought it a year. He never spoke a word. Then he put out his torch and started to feel down my breast. I told him that the pocket was inside. He made no reply but started to feel around my leggings which I was wearing at the time. After that he handed me back my hat and told me to go. While he was inspecting me a man who had a few too much was called to halt by the patrol but he shouted back to the patrol "Halt be damned, I'll halt when I get home" and then started to sing "Old Soldiers never die, they simply fade away". The officer smiled and told his men to go easy with him. The rest of our party was searched by the officer. Some had to take off their coats, others

had to take off their boots. We all waited at a place called the Pillars (which are at the end of John's Hill) until the search was over and they all told how they were searched, and strange to say that I, the one they wanted, stepped through his net. For that night I also had in my pocket a copy of Fr. Flanagan's suppressed speech, for which a sentence of 5 years was waiting for anyone who was caught with it. Before the rest of the boys came up to us I showed the official organ and Fr. Flanagan's speech. He whistled and said "You must have said your prayers well that night". It was a lucky break and I had to report it to Capt. Cullen next night, when he informed me that owing to the attempted jail escape from Ballybricken jail Dublin Castle ordered a patrol on all main roads that night and that solved the reason why I walked into the patrol trap.

In 1920 a general order was issued that all rural postmen were to be held up. I was appointed to take charge of the raiding party to hold up the Butlerstown rural post from Waterford. I was given instructions to assemble my party at a point called Kilbarry and Ballybeg crossroads which is about  $1\frac{3}{4}$  miles from the City. The party was to be

in position at 5 a.m. Included in my party were Volunteers W. Upton, Christy Power, Patrick Walsh and James Drohan.

There was a small hitch in the general arrangements as the Headquarters did not receive full information with regard to the post. There were two roads on which the postmen would travel and Headquarters did not know which was first, and this was very important in a general all round raid in order that the alarm of the raid would be given at about the same time. This was important as the scout with the letters should have ample time to get away from the scene together with the raiding party. On arriving at Kilbarry that morning I was second there as Christy Power was already on the spot. We had not long to wait for the rest of the party. I took a plan of the spot and addressed the party on procedure of our plan, placing each member of the party at a particular spot. All was ready and I was waiting for the arrival of the postman and at about 6.30 I had a glimpse of him coming in the distance, but instead of coming our road he went by the Lacken road. I called Volunteer Upton to mount cycle immediately and capture him. Upton made good time in catching our friend and taking the mail bag which he was instructed to take and returned same to me,

which I gave to the scout to take to the Headquarters, instructing the party to return to their homes immediately. I myself reported to my work at O'Brien's Model Bakery, being  $\frac{1}{2}$  hour late which I had to make up in order to throw off suspicion when I called at Lady Lane police barrack. There was a great hum of excitement there when the alarm of the raid was given out. All raiders got away. That day the Tans were driving around the city in all directions. Many of our members were visited by the R.I.C. and questioned about their movements that morning but there were no arrests, but a warning was issued in the press that the raiders would be shot if caught. The postmen stated that we were masked, which was not true. By the way, our postman was Mr. Tim O'Regan. Good information was received from the post over the raid, and it warned those who were weak to keep their mouths shut and their pen idle.

Life as a republican in Waterford was very hard and rough. The Redmondites, who by the way were more British than the British themselves, were ever attacking our members. About the month of October, 1919, Doctor White's shop was attacked by the Ballybricken mob, led by a bully called the Dummy Synott. They smashed the windows

of the doctor's shop and looted the stuff from the windows, and strange to say two members of the R.I.C. stood looking on and made no move to stop the mob. One of our members came on the scene and saw what had taken place and reported to Captain Cullen what happened that afternoon. On hearing this the Captain called for Volunteers for reprisals. About 80 men volunteered. We left Headquarters which was situated at the end of Colbeck St.; all carried sticks and we marched down the Mall, along the Quay, turning up Barronserand (?) St. into Michael St. When we arrived at the corner of Lady Lane we were, at the sound of a revolver shot, to take both sides of the street and smash all windows, which we did, and the people got a terrible fright. At the corner of New St., which was one of the strongholds of the Redmondite mobs, we gave chase to several Redmondite supporters up the street and giving them plenty of the stick. There was commotion everywhere as the attack was so sudden. After the attack we were reorganised and marched back to Headquarters. When we arrived back I was detailed to do night duty at Dr. White's that night in company with Michael Fanning. We had to take up duty at 10 p.m. until 6 a.m., for the doctor's house was, by

order from Headquarters, to be guarded every night, the guard to be armed. I left the doctor's house at 5.30 a.m. as I had to report to work at 7 a.m. Going down Michael St. (where we smashed the windows the previous night), I just got to the narrow part of the street when two men stepped out from a place called the Tan Yard Arch and stood in front of me. They asked me for a match which was only an excuse to find out who I was. Luckily they did not know me. I gave them the match and in giving them the matches I played up to them by asking them what happened all the windows. They replied that "the bloody I.R.A. smashed them last night". "That's terrible, they should be put in jail" I said, to which they replied "We would not put them in jail but put tar on them and burn them; we will get them yet for this work". I said good morning as I wanted a sleep after my night's work. I did not tell them what kind of work. Next night Capt. Cullen had a good laugh when I told him of my experience the night before. There was a new assistant inspector of the R.I.C. by the name of D.I. O'Byrne. He had no use for the Redmond mob, in fact he had great sympathy with the I.R.A. He informed the Redmond mob who wanted to have a revenge

by attacking the I.R.A. Headquarters, that he would withdraw his men and let them fight the I.R.A. themselves. The mob changed their idea of the attack. The warning given by D.I. O'Byrne to the Redmond gang had its effect. They were very quiet from that. Also Headquarters issued instructions to all Company Captains to show no mercy to the Redmonds. The Tans were very busy arresting our men and many of them had to go on the run. Our O/C, Seán Matthews, was arrested and sent to a prison camp, and Seán J. Hetherington who was attached to B. Company was appointed O/C. One of his first orders was that the rural postmen were to be held up and all letters taken. Again I was appointed to Kilbarry district. I had the same raiding party but this time there was no slip. I arrived out at Lacken Cross at about 5.30 a.m. I was lucky to escape arrest for when I turned into the Cork road from Bath St. I saw coming in the distance three R.I.C. Had they been nearer they would have pulled me in for they knew I was a member of the I.R.A. So you see I was in a bit of luck that morning. I also had to tell my mother that my horse was lame and I had to go to bandage his legs. But my mother told me years after that she smiled that

morning when I made the excuse about my horse. At about 5.45 a.m. the other members of my party arrived and I placed them into their positions, making sure that they were off the public road. At about 6.30 our postman came up the road towards the Lacken crossroad. On seeing the postman coming I advanced to meet him in company with Christy Power and James Drohan. I called him to halt by name which was Cornelius (Connie) Sullivan. I told him that I was taking the mail from him. "Good", said Connie, "I have a rest". I handed the mail over to Christy Power to take it to Headquarters and taking our friend Connie up to Hennessey, a farmer living near the scene, and asked them to make tea for the Postman, telling him to remain there for at least an hour. Conny reported back to the postmaster that his mail was taken from him by masked men, five in number. Having our work finished we left for our various homes. I myself had to go straight to work. There was a great hum of excitement over the whole district. Tans and R.I.C. were flying around all over the city and in the next few days there were wholesale arrests of our comrades. We had to be very cautious in our movements; in fact you could not go into a field on a Sunday to play a game of hurling as this national game was banned by Dublin Castle. Also, we could not hold a céilidhe for the Tans would raid the hall. Some information was leaking out from our Headquarters and suspicion was cast on a man by the name of Quinlisk. This proved to be correct for, some months after, this traitor was shot as a spy in Co. Cork. After this his sister used to go around with the Tans a lot and our Captain tried to get her. One of our Company, a man named R. Deegan, got great with her and, as arranged, made a date with her for a certain Sunday night. He was to take her for a walk out the Cork road (which, at the time, was a



bleak country road). We were waiting at a place called Kings Meadow House, standing in the gateway. We had a gallon of tar and a bag of feathers. It was our intention to strip this lady, pour the tar over her and then throw the feathers over her. But we were disappointed as something went wrong and she did not turn up; in fact, she left the city. The winter of 1920 was uneventful as all Companies were working hard under instruction and attending many lectures of how to make effective road blocks, etc. This was all in preparation for the big ambush which took place at Pickardstown, Tramore, on Sunday 11th January 1921. The members of our Company were not called to take part in this. It was done by D. Coy. and the country Company. It was a well laid plan in which 24 soldiers and Tans lost their lives, while our dead were Vol. Michael McGrath of D. Coy. and T. O'Brien of Dunhill Coy. Nicholas Whittle was badly wounded and left for dead by the soldiers who went after our men, but when they came back Nickey was gone also. This attack made our enemy worse than ever. Nearly all our officers were now in jail and we had to work under great difficulty. James Hetherington was our O/C. Paddy Paul was now attached to Brigade H.Q.

On Saturday May 21st 1921 a general order was issued to the 4th Batt. to assemble at the Holy Cross at 9.30 a.m. This is about 4 miles from Waterford. We were instructed to go by different roads. When we arrived there we were given orders to make a road block. R. Deegan, E. Walsh and myself were ordered to fell trees which we proceeded to axe, of course, the ignorant way, but we were very lucky not to meet any harm. We did not face the trees we were felling, with the result they came back our way instead of going on the road. Some of them - 4 in all - went across the road. It was near midnight when we finished felling the trees. Then we were ordered to knock down a wall and put

the stones across the road. This we did with our bare hands as we had no picks. Coming back to report to our Captain, who was in a by-road near the Holy Cross pub, I saw Seán O'Rourke standing by a laneway which goes from the main road to the Castle through the bog. I called to him and bade him "good night", to which he answered me. Then I turned to R. Deegan and said that the man who placed him there on outpost duty should be shot and Dick Deegan asked me why. "Well", I said to him, "Seán has a great Irish heart, but his sight is very bad". In fact, he did not know me passing but he knew my voice. How true were those words of mine for we were only gone up the by-road for about 200 yards when shots rang out. As we were the nearest to the shots we raced back to the cross-road. Captain Cullen and Tom Marshall both were armed and when we got to the cross-road they fired some rounds. We waited and got no reply; by this time more Volunteers, officers and Commandant Hetherington came. We made for the spot where O'Rourke was when we passed him and there he was lying on his side. Tom Brennan rushed to him when he said "they got me with five shots". He said "I thought they were some of the boys". Strange to say Seán asked for a cigarette which he smoked. He was taken away up to the Castle on a stretcher made from half of a gateway which was taken down. Commandant Hetherington issued orders to break up and proceed home. We had to make cross country direction and get home in the quickest time possible as the military would be out looking for us, and sure enough they were. I had to make a cross country journey by the 6 Cross Roads, Grace Dieu, Ballindeed Course and home by the back of St. John's College into my house. We were instructed to get about the city as if nothing happened, go to Mass in the usual way and not to meet in company. Dr. White and Dr. Phil Purcell called by. Dr. White stated it would be better if Dr. Purcell went, as

42.

the R.I.C. would be watching him and would follow him. This was arranged and, as expected, the military were out in full force. They searched the whole countryside for Seán O'Rourke. They trailed the blood up halfway the boglane way. They raided the Castle and many farm houses in the district. They turned all beds out and tried all cowyards, stables, haylofts. They thrust their bayonets into the hay and straw but they misfired. They were going round all day but could not find their man for Seán was in a very safe place. Early next day members of the Dunhill Company came to Butlerstown to carry our wounded friend to the hills for safety. They placed him on a stretcher and carried him with care, but poor Seán was not able for the journey. He died on the way and was laid to rest in a little graveyard called Reck, and so ended the life of a brave soldier.

Some weeks after this I was coming out of Miss Pim's avenue at Newtown when a Mr. A. Dobbyn who was Clerk of the Crown, was passing home on a jarvey car - (jarvey cars at that time were the taxi cars and were drawn by horses; there were seats on both sides of the car). The driver was a friend of mine named John Aspes - (Jack we used to call him). Dobbyn said to Jack, "Do you see that fellow driving the bread van in the avenue?". "Yes", said Jack, "what of him". "Well", said Dobbyn, "he is a bloody Sinn Féiner and a bloody b. of a servant in my house is another". The lady in question was a Miss O'Connor who entered a convent later and became a nun. Well, that evening, when I met Jack, he told me all Dobbyn said about me, saying that I stopped for hours at the door talking about Sinn Féin and Republicans. Well, I got even with our friend later on for when the Truce was signed and the I.R.A. were given the same power as the R.I.C. we did not forget to act. I was going up to Newtown one day with my bread van, delivering my rounds, when I saw Mr. Dobbyn cycling down by the park on the footpath. I

43.

just got off my van, left it by the side of the road, and crossed over to the footpath on which our friend was cycling. When he came up to me I just caught the cycle and pushed it on to the road, and warned him that if I caught him cycling on the footpath again I would take the cycle from him and summons him. The spot where I stopped my friend was right opposite Messrs. Graves & Co., Timber Yard, and of course a lot of the workmen saw what I had just done - I a small young man about 5 ft. 5 ins. pushing the Clerk of the Crown, who was only 6 ft. 8 ins.! They gave a big cheer, crying out "that's the way to teach them to obey the law" and shouting "Up the Republic". Our friend was green with rage but what could he do, poor fellow - we were in power now. After the Truce we had to perform police duty in conjunction with the R.I.C. The people pushed the policemen around and told them to get on the boat quick. I remember one Sunday before the Truce - it was May 1921 - Captain Cullen ordered a parade at a place called Gyles' Quay. It is situated at about 3 miles from Waterford Bridge in Co. Kilkenny. It was a Sunday afternoon and we were to have revolver practice. That morning I was given a .45 with about 50 rounds of ammunition which I took home when I went for my lunch and after I had same I set out for Gyles Quay with the stuff in my pocket. I just reached the end of the street in which I lived when P.C.W. Simpson came along. He bid me "Good day", for he knew me well, and asked me if I was going his direction. I said "Yes" - me with the .45 and ammunition, I did not know what was going to happen. Thoughts ran in my mind, did anyone give the game away? It is just what would come to ones mind. We walked along talking about different matters until I came to a place called Beau St. when I said to our police friend that I was going this way and was I relieved when he said "Good evening" and everything was all right. I can tell you that Captain Cullen, officers

and men had a good laugh when I told them what happened; it was a lucky break. After the Truce, as I said, there was not much to do, only on Sunday August 15th Commandant J.J. Hetherington ordered a route march. It was a test for the Foggy Dews who joined up after the Truce. We were given the order of the march the night before and we made the necessary arrangements in taking with us food, milk, drinks, towel and togs for our swim. The fall-in was at Butlerstown which is 5 miles from Waterford. The new men, of course, walked there; we hired a jarvey car to the parade field. We marched to Dunhill, 10 miles from Waterford, on to Annstown, which is five miles from Dunhill; here we had a halt and we went for a swim. The new recruits did not for they had no togs. After the swim we had our lunch and were fresh for the road again. We left Annstown and went to Fenor about  $5\frac{1}{2}$  miles from Annstown and from Fenor into Tramore 3 miles from Fenor. The recruits were delighted when they saw Tramore as they thought they were going home by train. They were now leg-weary and tired but they did not have a halt at Tramore but we went right through and home to Waterford by the old road. At a place called Castletown, about  $3\frac{1}{2}$  miles from Tramore, we had to call a halt and get a few ponies and traps to take some of our recruits home. They fell into the roadside hedge, dog tired, and could not move another step. We had about 3 miles yet to travel to get to the City and after fixing up with our hired friend we completed the rest of the journey. During this march I played Irish marches and songs on my harmonica, which the boys sang. When I got home I asked my mother for a bath of warm water. I put some mustard into it and while I was having my tea I put my feet into the bath, so that when I was finished my tea I was as fresh as ever; in fact, I met Berty Moore that night and we walked to the Newrath railway crossing and back - a distance of about 6

miles from our home, and next morning I was up at 6 a.m. for work. But the recruits - what happened? Most of them said goodbye to the I.R.A. They had enough of it. In the march the day was very warm and they, not being trained, were unable for the task. This is the end of my little story of the fight for freedom. Thank God we lived to see our country free from the slavery of an English Government.

Signed: Tomas O Cleirigh

Date:

6/7/54

(Tomas O Cleirigh)

6/7/54.

Witness:

T. O'Gorman

(T. O'Gorman)

