

W.S. 977

**ORIGINAL**

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURD STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 977

ROINN  COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.  
**STATEMENT BY WITNESS.**

**DOCUMENT NO. W.S.** 977.....

**Witness**

Patrick Kerin,  
 Knocklistrane,  
 Milltown Malbay,  
 Co. Clare.

**Identity.**

Member of Glendine Coy. Irish Vol's.  
 Co. Clare, 1917 - ;  
 Captain same Coy. 4th Btn. Mid-Clare Bgde. 1919 - .

**Subject.**

Glendine Coy. 4th Btn. Mid-Clare Bgde.  
 1917-1921.

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

Nil

File No. S. 2294.....

# ORIGINAL

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STATEMENT OF PATRICK KERIN,  
Knocklistrane, Miltown Malbay, Co. Clare.

(Formerly O/C, Glendine Company, 4th Battalion,  
Mid-Clare Brigade.)

I was born on 29th February, 1896, in the house where I am living at present. My people have been residing there for generations. I own a small farm which is worked by my wife and myself.

I was the eldest son in a family of ten and went to school at Letterkelly National School which I left when I reached the sixth standard, being then about fifteen years of age. After leaving school I went to work on my father's holding where, apart from periods which I spent on the run or in jail during the Black and Tan and Civil Wars, I have been working since.

On my mother's side I had Fenian blood. Her uncle and first cousins were members of the Fenian Brotherhood; two of her cousins, named O'Leary, were sentenced to penal servitude for their part in what is still known in North Clare as the "Ballygaston affair" where the local Fenians were led into a trap by a British spy, named Cullinane, a native of West Cork. He had worked his way into the confidence of the Fenians, principally because of his advocacy of extreme methods. On the occasion in question he had pre-arranged with the R.I.C. to lead the Fenians in an attack on the house of a man called Sexton in Ballygaston who had police protection because of land trouble. The R.I.C. in the house were considerably reinforced and, being aware of the plans of the attackers through Cullinane's information, succeeded in capturing almost all of them, although a Head Constable was killed during the melée which ensued.

My first connection with the Sinn Féin movement was in October, 1917, when I joined the Miltown Malbay Sinn Féin Club. Early in the following December I became a member of the Irish Volunteers in Glendine where a Company was after being formed. I regularly attended all the *weekly* Volunteer parades and drilling exercises which generally took place on the public roads and fields in the Glendine district. In the winter of 1918 I was elected 1st Lieutenant of the Company and in October, 1919, following the promotion of our Company Captain, Anthony Malone, to the post as Vice O/C of the Battalion - 4th, Mid-Clare - I was elected to his place.

From the commencement of the Irish Volunteers in Glendine we had nearly every man of military age there in our ranks and we had the support of practically every family in the district. Though the older generation did not generally take an active part in the Sinn Féin movement, the Volunteer movement had their sympathies, and I do not think ~~there was~~ any district in Clare ~~which~~ from 1918 to the Truce was as free from British supporters as Glendine.

In December, 1918, I was selected as one of the Volunteers to go to Mayo to help the Sinn Féin candidate in the General Election contest there. However, I did not prove to be of much assistance as I got the 'flu when I arrived and spent most of the period in bed. Immediately after returning from Mayo the Glendine Company got orders to collaborate with the Miltown Malbay Company in driving cattle off the lands of Mr. Kenny, K.C., who was undergoing a term of imprisonment in Mountjoy for a speech made by him at a Sinn Féin meeting. He lived with his sister on these lands in Freagh, about a mile north of Miltown Malbay. During his absence a number of land hungry local people who

did not belong to the national movement put their cattle on his lands in opposition to the wishes of his sister. The local parish priest, Canon Hannon, made strong representations to the Irish Volunteer leaders against the action of these people and, as a result, the Volunteers were given orders to drive off the cattle. There were three drives altogether, two at night and one during the middle of the day on a Sunday. The first two were moderate affairs and consisted merely of turning the cattle off the lands and driving them a short distance. However, this did not prove effective and the trespassing continued. The drive on Sunday was of an entirely different pattern. All the Volunteer units from Miltown Malbay to ~~Freagh~~<sup>Inagh</sup> participated; relays of Volunteers took over from each other in driving the cattle along the road running from Freagh, through Miltown and Inagh into Ennis where they were left. The R.I.C. who did not like the Kenny family followed the drive for a few miles outside Miltown and a few days later arrested myself and eight others for our connection with the drive. We were taken to Limerick Jail where we were detained for a fortnight and then charged with illegal assembly. All the prisoners recognised the court and, on giving an undertaking to turn up for trial when called upon, we were released.

Following the cattle drive off Kenny's lands, Miltown Malbay was declared a "military area" and our district was included. The British military were considerably reinforced and, under the guidance of the R.I.C., a sharp look-out was kept for any form of Volunteer or Sinn Féin activity. However our Company in Glandine continued our drilling as usual except that we now used scouts to watch for the approach of the enemy who never managed to come along while

we were so engaged.

Up to the middle of 1919 the Glendine Company were practically unarmed though there was at hand about half a dozen shotguns in the houses of Volunteers which were at our disposal if required. There were, though, four or five shotguns which were held by people that might not be willing to part with them, should the occasion for their use by the Volunteers arise. Towards the end of 1919 orders were received to collect all the arms in the area. While engaged in this work, we met with determined opposition in three or four houses. The Haran family, father, son and daughter, fought us with everything they could lay hands on, including burning sods of turf from the fire. We failed to get the gun that night but, in fairness to them, I should say about a fortnight afterwards young Haran handed over the gun to us. At Harry Crehan's, Knockliscrane, the owner attempted to stab some of our party with a hay-fork. We got no gun from him. In Connor's of Letterkelly a girl of the family fainted when we entered and we had to spend some time in trying to revive her. Owing to this incident, we did not proceed to search the house, but again in this case we got the gun voluntarily after some time. In all these raids we were masked and from seven to a dozen men took part.

In November, 1919, under the Battalion O/C, Ignatius O'Neill, I was one of a party who raided Colonel Tottenham's place at Mount Callan, Inagh, for arms. The Colonel was a bitter imperialist and we expected plenty of opposition. We were armed for that job. After making entry into the house through the kitchen in the basement, we found the Colonel in his bedroom who, on seeing us, lifted a table-lamp and hit Stephen Gallagher with it on

top of the head. My brother, Joe, and Gallagher rushed him. He grabbed Gallagher's revolver and had almost secured possession of it when my brother wrenched it from both of them. He handed the revolver back to Stephen Gallagher who hit the Colonel over the eye with it. The Colonel was then overpowered. He refused to disclose where the guns were kept in his house. In view of his obstinacy and of our determination not to leave without getting the guns, we tried a bit of bluff. His legs were bound and we laid him on a sofa. After dressing the wound we tried to entice him to tell us where the guns were hidden. It was of no avail until eventually we threatened to shoot him and forced open locked presses in the room, destroying the furniture in the process. At this stage he asked for one of the maids and requested her to give us the keys and show where the guns were.

In this raid we secured altogether six shotguns, one .45 revolver and one .32 revolver, with ammunition for these guns. The maids in the house were mostly strangers and were all very loyal to their employer. Some time later the Colonel relented. In a letter to the newspapers he complimented the raiders, making special reference to the fact that, though a large sum of money and valuable jewellery came under our notice, nothing in the house was taken except the arms and ammunition.

The guns which we collected in the raids for arms were handed out to individual Volunteers to keep and look after. Generally they were kept in dry places, in out-houses or in cocks of hay. The practice of constructing dumps for arms was not followed in our area as far as I am aware.

When the Sinn Féin Courts were set up in the area,

the sittings mostly took place in Lahinch Town Hall and they were held once a month. I was present at some of these Courts as a Volunteer officer to see that the proceedings took place in an orderly manner. When things got too hot, due to raids by the R.I.C., the Court held its sittings for a while in farmers' houses. At one such Court held in May two Volunteers, both fairly active, Gus Wolfe and Seán Burke of Lahinch, were charged with the robbery of Lahinch Post Office and taking the sum of £30. Each of them was sentenced to a term of imprisonment which had to be served by working with local farmers, usually people who had sons of their own in the Volunteers and were thus in a convenient position to see that the sentences were enforced and that the prisoners did not escape. I took part in the arrest and trial of these two men.

I also assisted in the collection of the Dáil Loan in Glendine where nearly every householder bought at least £1 bond. Towards the end of 1920 I was one of a party that seized the rate books in Miltown Malbay from the rate collector there, James McClancy. We also seized on that occasion some undeposited rate monies, but I cannot remember the amount. Afterwards I helped the Battalion Vice O/C, Anthony Malone, to collect the rates in Glendine and continued at this work until well after the Truce.

In June, 1921, under the command of the Battalion O/C, Seamus Hennessy, I and about thirty others held up the train outside Lahinch and seized a number of bales of cloth, boxes of boots and rolls of tobacco that had been sent from firms in Belfast to merchants on the west coast of Clare. The goods were confiscated and divided around among our own supporters.

The first military operation in which I took part was the attack on Connolly R.I.C. Barracks on 21st July, 1919. The attacking party mobilised at White's Bridge, Moy, and proceeded to Crowe's Bridge on bikes and side-cars. We went on foot from there to the barracks. Martin Devitt, afterwards killed in Fermoy, was in charge of the attack. Myself and a Volunteer, named Brian O'Loughlin, were put into <sup>a position behind a road fence in front of</sup> ~~one of the houses opposite~~ the barracks. <sup>only</sup> ~~We~~ ~~each~~ had a shotgun and four or five cartridges. Our job was to keep the door of the barracks covered in case any of the police tried to rush out - which they did not do. Fire was opened with rifles and shotguns on the barracks from a number of positions and lasted well into the night, but eventually the attack was called off because certain Volunteers failed to turn up with explosives and bombs with which it was hoped we would be able to blow up the building and compel the garrison to surrender. I actually fired no shot during the attack and, when it was called off, we got orders to disperse to our homes as quickly as possible. I arrived home in time to go to eight o'clock Mass in Miltown Malbay next morning and do not remember anyone being bothered by the R.I.C. over the attack. Later in the day I went to a "Pattern" in Inagh only about three miles from the village of Connolly and, though there was a big gathering of people from all the surrounding parishes at the Pattern, I heard nobody refer to the incident of the previous night.

About the commencement of 1920 I was given a service rifle to look after and had the care of it when I got word on 22nd February, 1920, to take it to Martin Devitt, Vice O/C of the Mid-Clare Brigade. I met him on the outskirts of my own townland with the Battalion O/C, Ignatius O'Neill.



They told me that they intended to attack an R.I.C. patrol at Fermoy, about six miles away. I tried to persuade them to allow me to go, but they said that the party had already been selected and that there were not sufficient arms available for any more men. I handed the rifle over to Martin Devitt and then parted with them. Devitt was killed in the attack next day and O'Neill was wounded.

That night the Battalion was mobilised to attend his funeral. Our Company met it at Corig, Inagh, and accompanied it as far as the "Five Crosses" where the Battalion was dismissed. A small party of about a dozen men accompanied the coffin to a secret burial place in a bog at Cloonagh, Ennistymon. About a fortnight later the R.I.C. and military were able to come to the exact spot where the body was buried and take it with them to Ennistymon Barracks.

On our way home from the funeral, a Volunteer named Paddy McMahon, Kilcorcoran, was accidentally wounded. We brought him to Pat McMahon's house in Glendine where he was treated by Dr. Hillary of <sup>Miltown-Malby</sup> Ennistymon and recovered. While McMahon was in this house, it was raided one day by the R.I.C. and military who were searching for flour which it was thought the people were hoarding for the purpose of feeding I.R.A. men on the run. McMahon was lying in bed in a corner of a bedroom. A policeman opened the room door, had a look and, apparently not noticing the wounded man, went away again.

I took part in the destruction of Lahinch R.I.C. Barracks on 2nd April, 1920. The barracks had been vacated some time previously and was burned by us on that night. The Adjutant of the 4th Battalion, Anthony Malone, and Pat Frawley, Liscahane, Miltown, were injured in the

operation, and three Volunteers, Tom Cleary, Pat Murtagh and a man called Garraghy were badly burned. Later in the month of April, 1920, I was one of the firing party at the grave of the men who were shot in Miltown Malbay on 15th April, 1920.

Towards the end of August, 1920, it was noticed that a police tender travelled fairly regularly from Ennistymon to Miltown Malbay every Wednesday morning and usually returned after a few hours delay. This was discussed at a meeting of the Battalion Council, held about the second week in September, and it was decided then to attack the tender. With ~~five~~<sup>six</sup> other men from the Glendine Company, Pat Frawley, who had a shotgun, and Johnnie Burke, <sup>Don Mullan,</sup> Walter Frawley, Brian O'Loughlin and <sup>Martin</sup> ~~Walter~~ Frawley, who were selected to act as scouts, we proceeded to Mullahans, Kilforboy, and there joined men from all the other Companies in the 4th Battalion, Mid-Clare Brigade, and got into the chosen position at Rineen, about two miles from Miltown Malbay on the main road to Ennistymon. A rough sketch of the position is attached as Appendix "A".

The I.R.A. party entered their positions before daybreak and the plan of attack was explained by the Battalion O/C, Ignatius O'Neill, who with the assistance of John Joe Neilan, O/C, Ennistymon Company, and Patrick Lehane (killed on the night of the attack by British forces when carrying out reprisals in Lahinch) allocated the men to their positions. The main party, which consisted mostly of shotgun men, took up a position along a "bohereen" leading over rising ground from the main road to the railway gates on the south side of the main road. This laneway or bohereen is about a hundred yards long and at the railway gates is roughly forty feet above the level of

*the land, on the north side of*  
the main road,<sup>^</sup> which at that point, is for a distance of forty or fifty yards from the road low lying and marshy. Stephen Gallagher, afterwards Battalion Quartermaster, Sean Burke of the Lahinch Company, Anthony Malone, then Battalion Adjutant, and myself volunteered ~~as~~<sup>and</sup> we took positions as shown in the sketch. On both sides of the position towards Miltown and Ennistymon scouts were placed at points of vantage. One of the nearest of these scouts on the Ennistymon side to the main party was Joe D'Arcy of Miltown Malbay.

It was the intention to attack the tender on its way to Miltown Malbay. Due, however, to a wrong signal having been transmitted by D'Arcy who altered the message which he had received from "Ford lorry travelling" to "four lorries travelling", the O/C, Ignatius O'Neill, decided to allow the tender to proceed unmolested. From my own position I could distinctly hear what had been sent on by the next scout to D'Arcy and what the latter had sent on to the main party, but unfortunately I was not able to let O'Neill know this as I was too far from him and I was expecting the tender at any moment. In the circumstances, I felt that O'Neill was right in his decision not to attack, as the positions in which he had placed his men were not suitable for taking on more than one lorry.

No sooner had the lorry passed than O'Neill realised that a mistake had occurred. It was then about twelve O'clock (noon). He at once sent a scout, Jack Clune of Inagh Company, to cycle in to Miltown to find out all he could about the tender. Clune returned after about two hours with the news that the tender would be soon coming, and suitable instructions were given to each man in the ambush to be ready for instant action. The sound of the

tender's engine confirmed Clune's information and, in a matter of minutes, the vehicle was at the laneway leading to Gorman's house on the ~~south~~<sup>west</sup> side of the road. It had gone about ten yards beyond this point when a signal shot, fired by John Joe Neilan, opened the firing. I had time to fire only three shots when the attack was over. The entire enemy force was killed, six R.I.C. men, including one man who escaped from the opening burst of fire and had got away unnoticed towards Miltown. However, he was pursued and shot in a field beside O'Connor's house a few hundred yards from the ambush position.

When the firing stopped, Malone and myself rushed over to the tender. I searched one of the dead men and, from correspondence which he had received from lady admirers in London, I learned that his name was Reggie Harmon, obviously a Black and Tan. Six rifles, one revolver, some grenades and a large quantity of .303 ammunition fell into our hands.

Our party was congregated round the tender searching for spoils when I heard firing in the distance. Orders were given to disperse. Most of my comrades went towards the railway line which meant climbing very steep ground until we got to the top of Dromin hill. I had almost reached the top when I met John Callaghan of Inagh coming towards me. He told me he had left his overcoat at the bohereen leading to the railway gates and that there was a prayer book in the pocket which bore his name and address. I went back with him and retrieved the coat.

On returning again to the hill top I met Seamus Hennessy of Cloneyogan, Lahinch, afterwards O/C of the Battalion, and he informed me that the military were

coming from the Ennistymon direction. Others with him were Pat Frawley, Liscahane, Miltown, Michael Nestor (Miko), Ennistymon, Francis Mee, Clooncoul, Anthony Malone, Battalion Adjutant, and John Joe Nealon. We decided to make for Ballyvaskin nearly a mile as the crow flies from Dromin Hill. The intervening country was shaped something like a saucer and provided little cover as the fields were very big. We went in extended formation and had gone a hundred yards or so when we came under heavy machine gun fire from the north-east. The military had reached the top of Dromin hill and placed a machine gun in position four hundred yards away from us. Our party at this stage were in the middle of a ten-acre field through which ran a stream in the direction of Ballyvaskin. Pat Frawley and myself made for the stream. On the way I was stunned by a bullet which passed between my ear and head. Recovering after a few seconds, I got into a shallow drain where I remained for ten minutes or so, and then dashed twenty or thirty yards further on to a cock of hay. There I found Pat McGough, O/C of the Inagh Company. With him I got as far as a low stone wall. The firing was still fierce and was mostly coming from a machine gunner. Here we began to time the machine gun burst and reckoned that a pan was being changed. We dashed across another fifty or sixty yards of open ground behind another stone fence where we met two more of our crowd, Dave Kennelly and John Crawford. Kennelly, who had a rifle, was in an exhausted state and enquired if any of us were in a condition to return the fire. Crawford had a carbine which he had captured from the tender, but the "cut off" had jambed. This I put right by forcing it open with my teeth, and we both opened fire. I exhausted all the ammunition I had, a total of fifty-two rounds. Our fire enabled the other men in our vicinity to retreat in

more safety and, when my ammunition was finished, we went after them. I overtook Mick Curtin of Cloneyogan, Moy, and we travelled together for a distance, thinking we were safe from the enemy fire. We were approaching a garden wall close to the houses in Ballyvaskin when Curtin was wounded in the thigh. Somehow we managed to get into the garden and relative safety.

As we realised that the further away we got from the scene of the ambush <sup>its better</sup> - we anticipated a big and quick envelopment of the area by the enemy - and as Curtin was well able to walk, we agreed to make off towards our own homes which were in different directions. After leaving Curtin, I had not gone far when I met Pat Frawley again. We dumped our arms and the Tans' correspondence in a wall near Molahan's of Ballyvaskin. We went on to my house where we had our tea.

After the Rineen ambush, the British forces in the area of Miltown Malbay and Ennistymon ran amok. They burned and looted several houses in these towns and in the village of Lahinch, and also murdered a number of innocent persons, some of whom were only on a holiday in the locality. In their searches through the countryside they set fire to dozens of haystacks. My home was frequently raided by them and I was obliged to leave home altogether. During one raid they shot a number of turkeys, geese and hens and, before leaving, made my father sign a statement to the effect that no damage was done. Parties of Tans and military laid in ambush about the house. In November, 1920, a party of a dozen or so of them in masked attire raided there one night but only my parents were at home.

My health failed as a result of wettings and neglect

while on the run during the winter of 1920 and, though moving around the country, I was in a bad way by the time Spring arrived in 1921. One night while on the way to Miltown Malbay in March, 1921, with a party under Seamus Hennessy, then O/C of the Battalion, to attack R.I.C., I was obliged to fall out due to physical exhaustion. A month or two afterwards I went into the Battalion Active Service Unit. Under ~~Seamus~~<sup>Seamus</sup> Hennessy the unit occupied positions in Monanana to attack Tans and military who travelled in lorries from Ennis to Ennistymon. This was about the middle of June, 1921. I was lying in a meadow all night in which the grass was very wet. From this I contracted lumbago which prevented me from taking part in the big attack in the same position, which occurred a week or so later. The enemy did not put in an appearance on the first occasion.

On 3rd June, 1921, about twenty or twenty-five men of the A.S.U. under Hennessy held up the train at Blackhill, Lahinch, and seized the mails and also some Belfast goods. I was in this party. We took the mails to Curraghaden and there censored them. Two days later the mails were returned to ~~Dunscragh~~<sup>Dunscragh</sup> Post Office.

I would like to include in this statement a reference to events which, in my view, hampered the I.R.A. activities in the 4th Battalion area after the Rineen ambush until approaching the Truce in July, 1921. Ignatius O'Neill, the Battalion O/C, resented being reprimanded by the Brigade Headquarters for his failure to attend to correspondence and, because of his neglect to submit a written report on the Rineen ambush. At a meeting of the Battalion Council held in McGough's of Inagh on 12th December, 1920, at which the Brigade O/C, Frank Barrett,

presided, O'Neill handed in his resignation, saying he was "no paper soldier". The proceedings at that meeting became very heated. Most of the officers present, including myself, supported O'Neill. It took several months to smooth over this trouble. In fact, some of those who sympathised with O'Neill never again took an active part in the fight.

I was in the Inagh district with the Battalion A.S.U. when I heard news of the Truce. The unit broke up and we all returned to our homes. Nearly every man was "broke" and the day was sweltering with heat. The occasion was celebrated by a good drink of spring water near Letterkelly National School.

SIGNED: \_\_\_\_\_

*Patrick Kerin*

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

*30.6.1954.*

(Patrick Kerin)

30.6.1954

WITNESS: \_\_\_\_\_

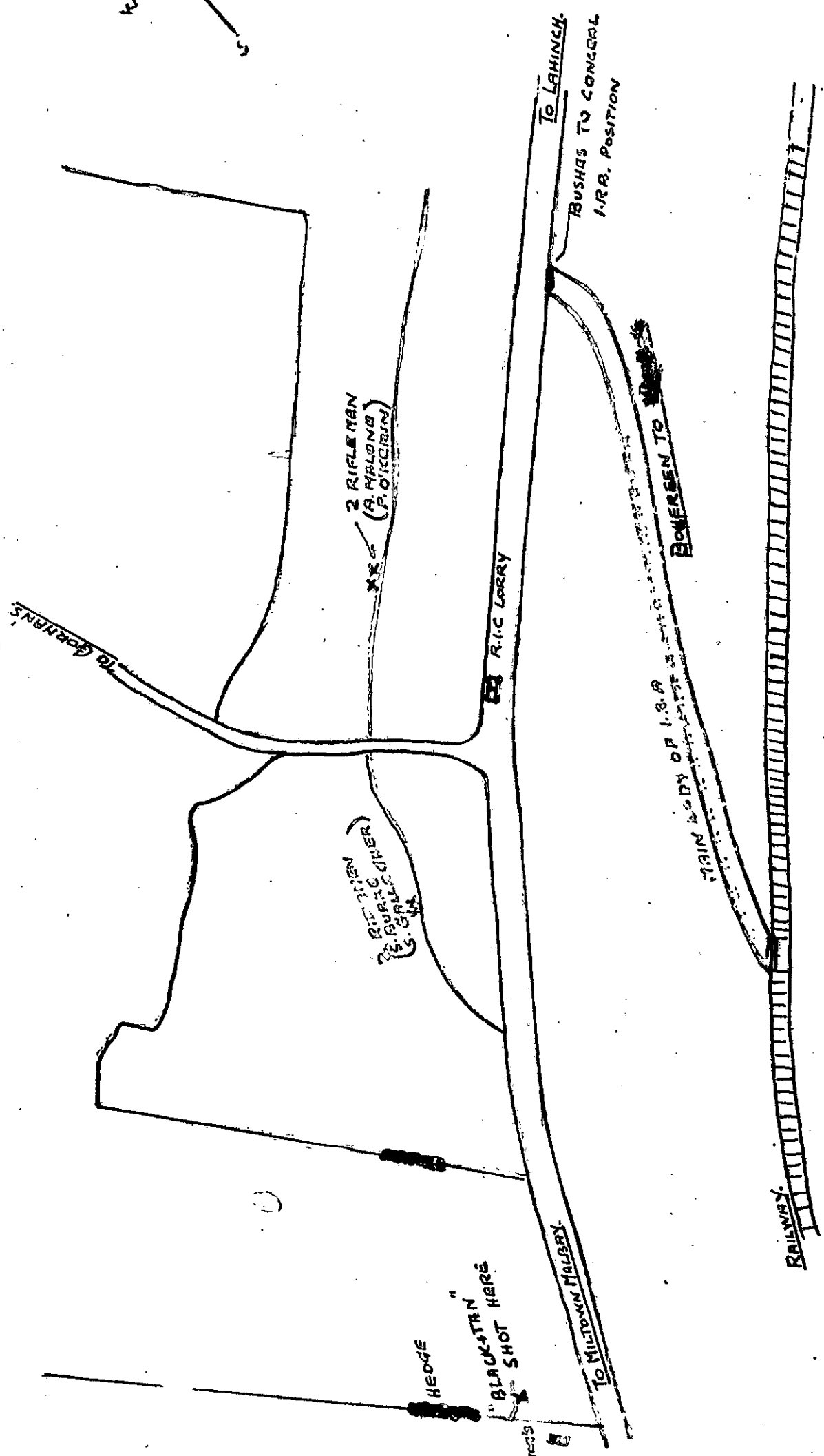
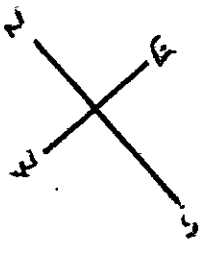
*D. Griffin*

(D. Griffin)

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APPENDIX "A"