

W. S. 1,060
ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BUREAU STAIRS MILITARY HISTORY
No. W.S. 1,060

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,060

Witness

Seamus Finn,
Athboy,
Co. Meath.

Identity.

Adjutant, Meath Brigade, 1916-'17.
Vice O/C. and Director of Training
1st Eastern Division.

Subject.

Activities of Meath Brigade
1920-'21.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S.2160.

Form B.S.M. 2

ORIGINAL

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STATEMENT BY MR. SEAMUS FINN,

Athboy, Co. Meath.

PART III.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
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The withdrawal of the police from the smaller places to strengthen the garrisons in the towns was in consequence of the capture of Ballivor Barracks by Comdt. Mooney and the men from the 2nd Battalion, and all south Meath, except Longwood, was evacuated in the spring of 1920. This move was to some extent helpful to us as it gave us more freedom to move around openly in our organising and training work, and gave an opportunity to the Brigade Staff and some Battalion officers to evade capture by the enemy forces. Any of us who had been prominent had been marked down and were being zealously sought out by them, and our friends in the police made it known to us that some of us would have to face murder charges should we fall into their hands. However, this did not worry us unduly as the work of keeping our organisation intact had to go on. We decided to destroy all vacated barracks and make it more difficult for the enemy to re-occupy the villages which they had left. A complete list was compiled at a Brigade Council meeting held in John Newman's, Bohermeen, and each Battalion Comdt. received instructions to have them buried during Easter Week.

This operation was a complete success and, with the exception of Longwood in South Meath 2nd Battalion area and Crossakiel in North Meath 5th Battalion, all police forces were concentrated in the towns and the barracks were barricaded and surrounded by barbed wire. We were

at a loss to know why Crossakiel had not been evacuated, but as it had also been strengthened, we surmised that its location was responsible. It was about half way on the route from Athboy to Oldcastle and, as Clonmellon and Delvin had been closed, was the only link between Kells and Mullingar. The village had direct telephonic communication with Kells. Its normal strength was three-four constables and a sergeant, but this had been doubled and the precincts protected. One result of these concentrations of police in bigger towns was that police duty as applies to civil offences ceased completely and some lawlessness made its appearance. The Dáil, realising the seriousness of this, set up Courts throughout the country and with the co-operation of the Volunteers helped to combat this menace. While it did inconvenience us in our other work, it gave our lads something to do, but we realised that it would be necessary to detail certain men in each battalion to carry out this work. Incidentally, battalion staff and company officers were asked not to do it themselves but appoint lower ranking officers. Even in the enemy occupied areas this work fell on us. The police just looked on and then tried to arrest any of our men who were known to have done this duty. It is to be regretted that our instructions regarding battalion officers were in some cases ignored and some of our best officers undertook to deal with the more serious cases themselves. To ensure that the orders of the Dáil Courts would be carried out we found it necessary to look for likely places that could be used as detention posts for prisoners while they were being tried and afterwards detained until the sentences were carried out. These sentences varied from fines to deportation to England

and these places became known as "Unknown Destinations" and mention of them was often enough to force a confession from a wrong-doer. These "Unknowns" were a worry to us as it meant that we had to guard and feed our prisoners and maintain guards for them while under our charge, and all while the enemy police were scouring the countryside trying to find their locations. As far as my memory serves, only two of them were found and then after our men had set their prisoners free and evaded capture.

To return to the continued occupation of Crossakiel, it was during an inspection visit by me of the 5th Battalion that the matter of attacking this barracks was first discussed. The Battalion Council meeting was held in Keogh's, Ballinlough, and was presided over by Comdt. Seamus Cogan, and it was decided that the usual preliminaries for the attack would be made. This entailed careful scouting of the barracks, noting arrivals, departures, patrols and routine work of the occupants. The personnel of our attacking party was discussed and arrangements for a course of special training was considered. Then the matter of arms for the attack was raised and it was found that other battalions would have to be asked to augment the local supply. The whole matter was left thus until after the next meeting of the Brigade Council when Comdt. Cogan would submit the plans for consideration and approval. I remained in the area for a couple of weeks and assisted in training the various companies and discussing the plans. It was obvious that the party to attack would need to be specially selected and be drawn from different companies, and during these weeks Cogan and I were spotting likely men to form this party or column. Our task was not too hard as we had plenty of good material to choose from, but it was our intention

that the column would be good, tough, and close knit with no weak link. We had not formulated any definite plan when I had to leave the area but the foundation had been laid and it should not have taken us very long to complete the details.

At the Brigade Council meeting the whole matter was discussed in detail but no decision was come to, as it was found that the amount of arms available was not sufficient but it was agreed that after a survey of the area and an appeal to G.H.Q. that the plan would be again discussed at the July meeting. In the meantime Cogan went ahead with the drawing up of the plan and he had it ready for this meeting. Just then we were forced to give all our attention to another phase of activity, as the Local Government Elections were about to take place and the County Board of I.R.B. had received instructions that some members should be put forward as Sinn Féin candidates. Meetings of all Circles were ordered to be held and likely men suggested to the county board. We succeeded in doing this and also arranged that members of I.R.B. whose ages excused them from active Volunteer work would also be put forward. The result of the election was decisive as our candidates were returned everywhere and when the Councils were called to their first meetings we had complete charge of them. The first move was to pass resolutions refuting England's right in Ireland, withdrawing our connection with the British Local Government Board and acknowledging only the Local Government Department set up by Dáil Éireann. This meant that the officials of the councils would now have to send all reports to Dáil Éireann and that no minutes of meetings or other correspondence must pass to the British body.

The local government scheme in Meath at that time consisted of three Urban and seven District Councils and Boards of Guardians and a County Council. While the elections for all bodies were held together there were separate voting papers for each body and we had county, urban and district councillors being voted in at the same booth and time. The Chairman of each Urban and District Council became a member of the Co. Co. by virtue of his position as such. The decision to recognise only the jurisdiction of Dáil Éireann Local Government Department by all the Councils in Meath had far-reaching effects and affected every official and employee. With one exception all of them threw in their lot with us, loyally obeyed our instructions and carried out our expressed wishes. These entailed the lodgement of all funds, rates, etc. in secret accounts, refusing to send minutes to the British body and sending them to the department set up by Dáil Éireann. Our first meetings showed our mind and our resolutions endorsing this action were unanimously passed, all Sinn Féin, Labour and other members concurring. The attitude of one of the senior officials of the Co. Co. quickly brought about a crisis as he refused to sever with the British and maintained his right to send minutes of meetings, lodge monies and accept instructions from that body. At our second meeting he continued his opposition, so we formally passed a resolution dismissing him. Still he continued to act and refused to accept our dismissal. On the occasion of our third meeting we found when we arrived at the County Hall that the British Military and police were in occupation of the building. The members who were Volunteers, and for whom warrants of arrest were out, abstained from attending but the others entered the Hall and the Chairman, Mr. Martin O'Dwyer, on taking the chair

demanded the reason of the presence of the police and military. On being told by the officer commanding that their attendance was to enforce an order to get an assurance that the council would carry out their duty according to British instructions, or prevent any meeting being held, Mr. O'Dwyer replied forcefully that the council refused to be intimidated and he vacated the chair and called on the other members to follow him from the building. This was the beginning of a battle of wits that was fought all through the years 1920-21 until the Truce in July 1921. As our meetings could not now be held in the County Hall, and were proscribed by British Martial Law, other meeting places and means of carrying on our duties had to be considered.

We were a council "on the run" and acted as such for some time. Meetings were held, among other places, in Martin O'Dwyer's, Clonee, and Pat Kane's, Bohermeen, until we were eventually fixed up in the South Dublin Union, James's St., Dublin, through the assistance of Liam Cosgrave, who was Minister of Local Government in Dáil Éireann. Our call to the rate collectors to lodge all monies on hands and being collected by them only as directed by us met with a good response, but all monies to the council's credit in banks was frozen by order of the British and we found ourselves trying to keep staffs employed WHILE WAITING FOR FUNDS to come in. We withdrew all the loyal members of the staff and offices were got for us by the Department in Cavendish House, Parnell Square, where all the work of the council was done under the direction of our acting secretary - Barney Grogan - assisted by Con Corcoran. We left Mr. Pat Weldon at the County Hall to keep us informed of the position there. In the meantime the

former County Secretary carried on under the direction and protection of the British but, as no meetings were held there nor any of the officials, including the rate collectors reported to him, his duties were light. We received loyal messages of support from all our rate collectors and our roadmen, the gangers particularly guaranteeing to carry on and do any necessary work until some arrangements were made to pay them. The council got over their immediate financial strain by the very patriotic action of the more prominent members who, having been put in touch with a branch manager of ^{AN} ~~the~~ Irish Bank by a friend of Liam Cosgrave - Mr. Burke, James's St., agreed to act as security for the required sum and with the funds made available by this banker the immediate needs were met. These men were Messrs. Pat Kane, Martin O'Dwyer, Pat O'Growney and Seán O'Farrell. There may have been others but I only know of these. In the meantime the subsidiary councils - Urban and Rural District Councils and Boards of Guardians - followed the lead and only gave allegiance to Dáil Éireann. In all this campaign we were strongly supported by Labour and other members of these Boards and in only one instance did a council - Navan Urban Council - turn tail and re-affirm its allegiance to the British Local Government Board.

All the other bodies and officials carried on under great strain and their courage in doing so deserves the highest praise. The officials of these bodies came in for a good deal of unwelcome attention in the form of raids and abuse from the police and military but they refused to be shaken and right loyally they carried on to the end of the struggle. This phase of the struggle threw much more work on the shoulders of the Volunteers as all notices calling

meetings were handled by them and delivered to the Council members, while the holding of County Council meetings in a company area entailed supplying guards and cycling patrols to ensure that the councillors would not be surprised by the enemy, who were zealously seeking out such meeting places. That they failed to discover even one or succeeded in causing much disorganisation was due to the loyal services rendered by the officials, discretion of the members, and also to the efficient manner in which the Volunteers of Meath covered this branch of the national activities.

List of the members of the Republican County Council who were "on the run" as a Council and held their meetings regularly although much sought by enemy forces:

Martin O'Dwyer, Chairman, Clonee, Dunboyne.
 Patrick Kane, Bohermeen, Navan.
 Patrick O'Growney, Athboy.
 Patrick Hopkins, Kells.
 Seán Brennan, Kells, Chairman Kells R.D.C.
 Seán English, Kells, Chairman Kells Urban Council.
 James McDonnell, Seymourstown, Crossakiel.
 Thomas Clinton, Moynalty, Kells.
 Michael Peppard, Clonard.
 Bartle Fitzsimons, Tara, Chairman Dunshaughlin
 District Council.
 Seamus Finn, Athboy, Chairman Trim R.D.C.
 Patrick Proctor, Trim Urban Council.
 James Kelly, Chairman Navan R.D.C.
 Michael Markey, Chairman St. Mary's R.D.C. Drogheda
 James Langan, Bellewstown.
 J. McCabe, Chairman Oldcastle R.D.C.
 Seán Boylan, Dunboyne.
 Seán O'Farrell, N.T. Julianstown.
 Patrick Moore, Dunboyne.

The plan of attack on Crossakiel was again discussed at our July Brigade Council meeting and assistance in the matter of arms was arranged from other battalions. Seamus Cogan was very enthusiastic about it and produced a rough outline of what had been done. Eventually it was agreed that I would attend a Battalion Council at Keogh's,

Ballinlough, on the following Thursday when the plans would be finally completed. The Brigade Council was held in Larry Clarke's, Navan, on Sunday and I again met Seamus in Kilskyre on that night. He was anxious that he and I should scout the barracks surroundings in the moonlight but I demurred and finally convinced him that such a move might attract the attention of the police. On this note I left him on Sunday, little dreaming that it was to be our last meeting and that fate was to strike us one of its hardest blows in the meantime. On the Wednesday, while in charge of a party conveying an offender against the civil code to an "Unknown", he was shot in an engagement with a party of British Military outside Oldcastle. I was around Delvin - at Ginnell's - when the news reached me and to say that I was stunned is to put it mildly. What cruel luck that we should lose, what we knew was our best Battalion Commandant, on work that could and should have been carried out by subordinate officers and Volunteers. I immediately moved into the 5th Battalion area and, while keeping well out of range of enemy intelligence officers and spies, proceeded to arrange that full military honours would be paid to him when his remains were handed back to his people. He had been brought back to Kells and after the British inquiry was over he was removed to Kells R.C. Church where he lay until Sunday when he was buried in the Republican plot at Ballinlough, a plot which was procured by his fellow officers and comrades of the 5th Battalion for the occasion. The other officers forming the Battalion Council took charge of the funeral arrangements while I issued a general mobilisation order to all Battalion Commandants for a full muster of brigade strength.

Making Conaty's, Ballyhist, my Headquarters

I made contact with Kells Company Captain, Bob Mullen, and he kept me informed of the movement of events.

Using every available rider in the 5th Battalion

I issued mobilisation orders to all battalions to assemble in Kells Park at 1 p.m. on Sunday July 21st, 1920.

All other national organisations were also invited - Sinn Féin, G.A.A., Gaelic League etc., and with the energetic co-operation of Pat Hopkins, Seán English, Seán Brennan and some others in Kells these bodies arranged for strong representation. The Volunteers fell in at the Park in battalion formation, his own 5th leading, and after some preliminary parading they listened very attentively to the orders which I, as Brigade Adjutant, issued to them. I, by common consent, took charge of the whole proceedings and, in full uniform, led the parade to the church. In the street facing the church all the other organisations were already drawn up, having been marshalled by the men already mentioned assisted by Comdt. Pat McDonnell.

The order of the march was as follows: small advance guard of cyclists, remains with bodyguard of officers, main body of Volunteers led by me, then followed the members of the other organisations and general public. We moved off shortly after 2.30 p.m. and the order was "slow march" until we were outside Kells when 'route march' pace was set. We continued this rate until we came near Ballinlough Cemetery, six miles away, when we reverted to "slow march" order. In the rear of the procession there followed a huge line of cars and horse drawn vehicles, and when we were nearing the cemetery one of the cycling scouts which had been in the rear of the whole entourage

sped up and reported that enemy police were following the funeral in lorries. I sent back orders that the cars and traps were to be used to block the roads in our rear and prevent the police from interfering with final respects being paid to our dead comrade. This was very effectively carried out and Seamus received full honours - three volleys fired by men drawn from his own battalion and company - Stonefield - and the Last Post and Reville sounded by a Volunteer from Oldcastle Company.

In the autumn of 1920 when on a visit to the old Athboy 3rd Battalion and while enjoying the hospitality of the Ginnell homestead, an urgent dispatch came from the Castlepollard that a man who had been very seriously wounded in an engagement in Longford was about to be brought to Dublin for a major operation and that he was being conveyed by car through Meath. We were asked to arrange for protection and safe passage for this man. I called on Comdt. Fox and Company Captain J. Kiernan and arranged for them to see about this in their area. The car came to Delvin where we had this man brought to the local Workhouse and he was looked to by the nurses there. In the meantime I had sent on dispatches to the companies along the road which he would travel and asked for a systematic cyclist patrolling and the fixing of information posts at various places. The route travelled was Delvin, Kildalkey, Rathmoyle, Summerhill, Kilmore, Kilcloon, then to Dublin. This was carried out very efficiently and the patient reached the hospital in Dublin with a minimum of delay considering the circumstances. We felt very pleased with ourselves about this as it tested our organisation and showed it was in good shape.

Soon afterwards we faced another big test. It came

in the form of tracking and capturing a gang of men who shot one of our lads. This occurrence happened in North Meath, along the Meath-Cavan border, and the young man who was killed was Mark Clinton, a very good Volunteer who belonged to a family which was rendering us great service. All his people were good and his uncle's house below Mullagh, where his sister Rose kept house, was always open to us and where we received wonderful hospitality. Some time earlier his uncle had bought a farm and Mark was helping at the work on it.

There was some opposition to the sale of this farm and a group got together and decided to force Clintons to give it up. After failing by agitation they hired a killer who had been a sniper in France during the 1914-1918 war. This man waited for a suitable opportunity, and one day while Mark was ploughing he shot him dead from a distance of about 400 yards. This event caused a good deal of consternation in the locality and some days afterwards the R.I.C. arrested this man. They held him for some days and then transferred him to Navan where he appeared before a special court and was charged with murder. We were watching events very closely and had made arrangements with a friendly ^Press man to keep us informed of what was happening. We were not surprised to learn from him that the proceedings at this court were not a serious matter and that the culprit would be released later in the evening. Seán Boylan, who was in Navan on that day, received this report, sent to Comdt. P. Loughran for a few Volunteers and decided to make an attempt to capture this man when he made his appearance in Navan streets. After a while the man was noticed leaving the barracks and making his way towards the railway

station, obviously with the intention of travelling to Dublin.

Boylan, Comdt. Pat Kelly and Volunteers Mick McKeon and Markey waited for him and found that he had gone into a public-house on his way to the station. Markey and McKeon, armed with revolvers, followed him into the pub and after a short talk with him produced their guns and ordered him to go quietly. At first he showed some fight but a tap from McKeon quietened him. They rushed him out to where Boylan was waiting with a car and he was conveyed to "An Unknown" at the residence of our friend Peter O'Connor, Salestown, Dunboyne, where he was kept under close arrest. After some hours' hard questioning, in which several of us took part, this man admitted the whole business and gave us the names of his associates, naming one man as the leader. We sent orders to the O.C. 4th Battalion - Pat Farrelly - to arrange for the arrest of these men, which was done expeditiously and successfully. They were brought to a place at Boltown, Kilskyre, where men from the 5th Battalion supplied a continual guard for a few weeks. When the news of these happenings became known the R.I.C., aided by military, became very active and huge raids and encirclements began. The hunt was up and it became hot. The enemy forces got some inkling of the location of this "Unknown" and one morning some weeks after our men had made the arrests the enemy surrounded a big slice of country inside which this place was and after a house to house search came on it, only to find that our lads and prisoners had got away. This had been carried out by careful planning and hard going by the lads, who were hard pressed while doing guard on the prisoners, who, incidentally, numbered seven.

We had planned ahead and had arranged for the next stop which was at a point six miles east of Navan at a place which the lads in that area named "Ballypousta". Its real name was "Slanduff". The prisoners were kept there for another while and guarded by men from Navan Battalion until the enemy showed some signs of easing their offensive which was very intensive all over the county. After careful watching and more detailed planning ahead we succeeded in getting them away and eventually brought them all to O'Connor's of Salestown, Dunboyne, where we kept them until ready to go ahead with their trial. It had been a trying time on our men and they had acquitted themselves very well throughout.

We then submitted a full report to G.H.Q. and told them that we intended putting the prisoners on trial for the murder of Mark Clinton. We asked for a direction and were told that, while we had done well in capturing and holding the culprits, they would have to give the matter more thought before permitting us to take extreme measures. However, we went ahead and held a preliminary trial at which we produced all the evidence in our possession. Some of the prisoners broke down and the whole plot was revealed. We made a fuller report to G.H.Q. and asked them to supply officers to constitute a court. After some delay and much parleying they eventually sent us down an officer who was to act as senior court officer along with two of our brigade officers. This court sat at O'Connor's and tried the prisoners. All the evidence was heard and they were given every facility to prove their innocence but all of them, with one exception, a man who was the real ringleader, admitted their guilt and implicated the killer as the one who fired the shot.

The leader eventually admitted his part in the affair too and the court passed sentence on them. The killer was sentenced to be shot, the ringleader was expelled from the country for life, while the others were sent to England for terms ranging from 7 to 15 years. All these sentences were duly carried out by us.

The enemy continued their search for these men for a long time after we had finished the case, and this continued activity made things more difficult for us as they seemed to know that something drastic had happened to them and were determined to find out who were the principals acting for us. They failed in this but their continual raids to discover our hide-outs made things very inconvenient for us, but we must have shaken them off successfully because they never came near Peter O'Connor's, where we continued to be always welcome and used as our headquarters.

An arrangement had been made that some of our staff would call to certain places in Dublin at least once a week and receive orders from G.H.Q. verbally. This was suggested by them and as it was only a "hen's race" from our headquarters at Dunboyne, we looked forward to this weekly run into town with keen pleasure. During these visits we came in contact with all the G.H.Q. staff and learned things that otherwise would never have come within our ken. Vaughan's Hotel was one of the haunts that we visited and there we met Mick's aide, Tom Cullen, Liam Tobin, Eamon Fleming (whom we already knew), Frank Thornton and, among others, the O/C Dublin Brigade, Dick McKee, and his Vice O.C. Peadar Clancy. As well as handling the Dublin Brigade, these two also had charge of the engineering section of G.H.Q.

On one of our visits they informed us that they intended coming down to our area to carry out an experiment on a Stokes gun or mortar which they had manufactured in one of their Dublin factories. The date was fixed, we got our instructions about scouting and guarding the route to be taken by them, and the proposed place where the trial was to be held. We took all the precautions prescribed by them and as the enemy were active then we had a very strong ring of guards thrown out. The experiment went very well. The gun acted very well, and the gunner, Capt. Matty Furlong, was well pleased. He had fired a number of dummy shells before he was satisfied that the first live one should be tried. This was a time fuse shell and he loaded and fired it. Watches were scanned and after roughly ten seconds the ground shook with the force of the explosion. Matty and Dick danced a jig. Peadar just grunted. Another one was tried and again a good result. We were deeply impressed and began to visualise the destruction and capture of many police barracks. Then they went further and began on the percussion shells. This one differed from the others in that it should land on its nose, which contained a percussion cartridge, before it could explode. One, two, three dummies were fired. None acted as desired. Then the fourth landed as required and the small cartridge exploded. Peadar, Dick and Matty were delighted and we felt happy too. Then we heard a long rumbling noise in the distance and our scouts signalled the approach of enemy lorries. Further investigation shows us that a very large force of military was approaching from the direction of Dublin. There were sixteen lorries of them. Dick gave the

order to dismantle the gun. Each man grasped a part or shell and retired. We had already decided on our line of retreat. We then waited for a further signal, which came after about ten minutes - all clear. The gun was reassembled and the experiment continued. Some technical discussion took place between the three of them and then Matty placed the shell in the gun. There was a thud and then a roar. Everything went black for a split second. When we recovered tragedy stared at us. Matty was down, his left leg was dangling grotesquely, blood was oozing from the back of his head, but he was conscious. After a while he asked for a fag, and while we went here and there seeking doctor, nurse, blankets, coats, etc. he lay there without a murmur, just an occasional groan. It was a long time before we succeeded in getting medical aid, but eventually a nurse was located and she did all she could to make him comfortable. I regret I cannot remember her name, but should I get it before I finish these notes I shall be glad to take the opportunity to pay tribute to her for her great work then. O.C. Boylan rushed to Dunboyne and rang up Michael Staines, who, in an appreciably short space of time, sent down an ambulance which conveyed poor Matty, although curfew was long on, to one of the homes attached to the Mater. I understand that a prominent surgeon operated on him at once, amputating his leg, and he recovered from the operation, but ⁱⁿ a particularly vicious raid on the hospital - they were seeking Dan Breen at the time after the Drumcondra scrap when he and Seán Treacy fought their way out of a house in the middle of the night and escaped, but Dan was badly wounded - Matty was roughly handled by the Tans.

A few days afterwards I went to see Dick and Peadar about

Matty and located them in Talbot St., and having settled the matter which brought me I left. About an hour afterwards I met D.P. Walsh who told me that Seán Treacy had been shot in a fight just outside the Republican Outfitters where I had met Dick and Peadar. A short time afterwards these two were to die also. As I have mentioned, some one of us usually called to Vaughan's, Jim Kirwan's, Parnell St., or a couple of other places where we would be given information how to find some G.H.Q. men. Usually Tom Cullen, Bob Price or D. Hegarty or Eamon Fleming were our contacts. On one of these visits I went direct to Vaughan's where I found a full conference taking place. It was the biggest gathering I had yet seen and there were some present whom I had never met before. I asked for Dick as I had brought in from Dunboyne a hand grenade which was one of a dozen which had been dumped at Dunboyne since they failed to come to me in time for the attack on Bohermeen Barracks. I handed it over to Peadar and he asked me to go with him to see it tested in a place near Westland Row. Afterwards I received an exploder from the Q.M.G., Seán McMahon, which he told me was to be brought back to Meath. I demurred about this but had no option but to hawk it with me to my lodgings and bring it back next day. I left Peadar and Dick after a good long chat on general field work and other matters at about 10 p.m. - curfew hour. Next day when leaving Phibsboro after 10 o'clock Mass I was met by Tom Walsh of H.Q. Intelligence and was shocked to learn that Dick and Peadar had been got last night and I was to get out of town at once and bring my exploder. I didn't do so but later in the day went to Croke Park and received not only a baptism of fire

but a full sized bath of it. I did not succeed in getting out of town until Wednesday as all roads were held up by military, police and Tans who were conducting a close search of all travellers.

As an example of my difficulty in getting out I might say that I spent eight hours lying along the canal bank near Donnelly's Bridge at Blanchardstown until they moved away from the bridge. However, I got back all right and handed over the exploder to Eamon Cullen. But the shock of the deaths of Dick and Peadar, following so closely on those of S. Cogan, M. Eurlong and S. Treacy, was rather unnerving and did not tend to help. This was in November and to make things harder the weather broke badly. We arranged some inspections for the 3rd, 4th and 5th Battalions and Higgins and I started out on them about now. Our first call was to Dangan where we met some of the men from the 1st. We went through the usual with them and learned that there had been some intensive enemy activity around Summerhill. We reported back to the Brigade O.C. and later found out that this activity was the fore-runner to the occupation by a strong force of Auxiliaries of Langford House at Summerhill.

We went for Paddy Mooney who was around Kilmessan area and arranged for him to burn it. This was carried out by him and the men from Summerhill and surrounding companies in the usual efficient manner, and we wondered what the enemy would do then. We were soon to know as in the space of a couple of weeks they arrived in Trim and occupied the old Industrial School, but ~~THE BURNING~~ forced them away from Summerhill and averted a very serious threat to one of our most important lines of

communication. This burning had another effect that we did not foresee. About this time notices had been posted on the homes of some of our people in Trim, Athboy and other places, with skull and cross-bones on them, threatening to burn them. We had discussed this at a Brigade Council and I stated that I intended drawing up a list of the enemy houses and that we'd burn two of theirs for each one of ours. When I had the list completed I sent some to the biggest and best known enemy supporters. These had been sent before the Langford burning and both actions combined to cause consternation among them, with the result that strong representations were made to Dublin Castle and there were no burnings of our homes.

Having settled this and other matters at Dangan Hall we proceeded to the 3rd and arrived at Delvin where we stayed at Ginnell's for a few days. This was one of our provisional headquarters and one of our best houses. A wonderfully sound family that did more than their share to help. We held a Battalion Council meeting and I paraded the whole battalion at Southill but found that we had to go back to Kildalkey to attend to a matter of an arms dump that wanted attention. We had to delay a couple of days there, and while there were the guests of the curate, Rev. Fr. P. Norris, a fearless, patriotic 'sagart' who well knew the risk attaching to his hospitality. We were loath to leave this wonderfully comfortable billet--where we breakfasted in bed and ate five course dinners. However, all good things come to an end and we had to move. On to the 5th where we parted; Higgins went to stay with Mrs. Liam Sheridan whose husband was in gaol and she was

struggling to keep the farm going and attend to her young family, while I went on to Johnnie Keogh's, who was also in gaol and the place was being attended by his sisters. We spent a week there drilling, inspecting, lecturing and manoeuvring. Just before leaving to go on to Bohermeen we received a dispatch from Kildalkey reporting that the curate's house had been surrounded on the Sunday after we had been there (we left on Friday) and had been turned inside out and both he and the P.P. closely questioned. Pretty straight information no doubt. We arrived at Bohermeen. Higgins went to Pat Kane's and I went to John Newman's - another of our class 1 houses. While there we arranged for a big meeting, to which we called all Battalion Staffs, Commandants, V.C.s, Adjutants, Quartermasters and I.O.s. At this gathering we had a complete investigation on the whole organisation in the brigade which lasted all night, and after which John and Mrs. Newman entertained all there to an enormous feed that refilled us with energy.

At this conference I read an order which had been issued by G.H.Q. Chief of Staff, in which it was laid down that due to the big amount of ammunition wasted in unsuccessful attacks on police barracks that no such attacks were to be undertaken until the plans and full information had been submitted to G.H.Q. and sanction received from them. There was general disappointment as two attacks were being planned then, one at Oldcastle and one at Athboy, and had been delayed waiting for arms, ammunition and explosives from the Q.M. However, we decided on another form of operation. Each battalion was asked to arrange periodic patrols or columns who would occupy good ambush positions on roads that

were in most use by enemy police and keep this up until they succeeded in carrying out a job. The success of the Trim Barracks attack in September had caused the enemy forces to move with great caution and with the advent of a company of Auxiliaries to Trim our freedom of movement was to some extent hampered.

At this time the enemy forces in the county consisted of a company of military at Dunshaughlin, another at Navan, a small force at Kells and some outside Oldcastle. As well there was an augmented force of R.I.C. and Tans in Trim, as well as the Auxies, over twenty Tans and police at Athboy, about thirty of the latter at Kells and about fifteen at Oldcastle, twelve at Longwood and about the same number at Dunshaughlin. Except for continual raids on the homes of the most wanted men among us, these forces did no duty, but later on they began huge enveloping movements, surrounding whole towns and slices of country and making a house to house search. These big movements were fairly frequent and gave us a great deal of trouble as our men were forced to keep on the move and had to ensure that dumps of the arms we had were carefully concealed. It meant, too, that to plan and undertake even a small operation meant considerable effort, as the arms had to be lifted from these dumps, cleaned, brought to a point convenient to the site of the planned attack and again dumped, and as we had no possibility of knowing when these envelopments were about to take place we risked the loss of our small store of arms even by attempting an operation. However, we did not suffer any heavy losses in this respect. At this council meeting in Newman's we arranged for patrols to be attacked on one night in the vicinity of Trim, Athboy,

Oldcastle and Longwood. It was arranged for a night about mid December and each Battalion Commandant agreed to carry out his part.

I returned to a house near Athboy owned by Casserley's, and went from there to Delvin to hold a Battalion Council meeting. At this meeting, under the control of Comdt. Ml. Fox, we made our plan and each Company Captain got clear instructions. Men were specially picked from Delvin, Archerstown, Kildalkey and Athboy Companies, and they were told to assemble at Murtagh's, Castletown, Athboy, on a Saturday night. Some of the men were late arriving and this meant delay in taking up positions. However, the allotted positions were occupied and we awaited the patrol - one, incidentally, which was in the habit of passing that way almost every night. After about two hours' wait we sent a couple of scouts to see to see if there were any enemy movements anywhere in the town, but their report was that all was quiet, no sign of any police. After waiting for some time longer we broke up and agreed to try again next night. On this night (Sunday) some of our men failed to come at all, which left us short of arms and ammunition, so after a wait of about two hours I dismissed them and making a detour arrived at the north end of the town where I stayed in Ward's. From enquiries made by us we learned that there was no activity of any sort on either of these nights, but on the following morning at 6 a.m. I was awakened by one of the Wards who told me that there was a very big raid on in the town and that my father's place was being turned upside down. I moved out of town and eventually reached Ginnell's, Rosmead. Rose Ginnell offered to cycle to

Athboy to seek information and I sent a message to W. Doyle, Athboy Company Captain, asking for a full report. This report gave me all the news of the raids and told me that it was a very thorough one but that no arrests had been made or arms captured. I sought out Fox and discussed the position, but he did not see any point in again travelling to Athboy in view of the alertness being displayed by the enemy.

After a few days I moved down to Ballinlough, sought out the officers of the 5th Battalion and held a council meeting. I was somewhat surprised to learn from them that matters in Oldcastle had turned out similarly to Athboy. I stayed a week there, for a couple of nights at Conaty's and then moved to Bohermeen to Newman's, and heard that Trim and Navan had also been failures - Trim for lack of enemy movement and Navan had been called off through some misunderstanding. We were all very puzzled and more so when the enemy police and military carried out their biggest offensive just then and picked up some of our leading battalion and company officers. While I was at Newman's I received word from the 5th Battalion to go back there as some trouble had arisen in two company areas. I held an enquiry into their grievances and could not find any serious reason for their attitude. As far as I could discover their discontent seemed due to the effect on the men's minds of denunciation of some of our activities by certain people. After this I returned to John Newman's and heard there from some of the Bohermeen men that there was similar trouble in the 6th Battalion - that some of the battalion officers were also showing signs of discontent. As it was very near Christmas I

proceeded to Dunboyne where I failed to make any contact with either Boylan or Higgins, so I travelled to Dublin and reported to the Adj. Gen., Gearóid O'Sullivan.

I arranged to meet him after Xmas and make a fuller report and discuss it with the whole G.H.Q. staff.

In the meantime I contacted Boylan and made him aware of the situation, telling him that I had discussed it with the Adj. Gen. This seemed to worry him but nothing could be done about it.

The Christmas of 1920 was uneventful in Meath, both sides seeming to concentrate on the festivities. There were no family reunions for some of us, but we had good friends and we got through all right. Soon after the festive season we were back in harness again and our first task was not a nice one. From several areas reports had been reaching us of people who were helping the police by handing on any information which they got. Some of this information was very correct and was responsible for arrests of prominent men and officers - in many cases key men. We knew there were no deliberate leakages from our ranks but there was a possibility that loose talk might have given clues to these touts who had intelligence enough to size it up and sometimes arrive at a correct conclusion. This was very serious so we took steps to put a stop to it. Whether these spies or informers were doing this work for payment or to prove their loyalty to Britain made no difference to us. In other parts of the country there had been executions of such people, and their bodies were usually left in prominent places with a label attached on which was printed in block letters "SPY. EXECUTED BY I.R.A.". This did not seem to deter those who were

acting in our area so our men had to take similar action to stop it. Careful watch was kept on the movements of these people and, in some cases, they were actually seen to contact the enemy. Raids were made on the mails and certain sources of information were tapped in an effort to get complete evidence in each case. Our agents in the P.O. service were very helpful in this respect. Not until the evidence was very clear did our men act.

These executions were not too numerous but what we had of them had the desired effect. They were the hardest operations which our men were asked to carry out and taxed their courage and discipline to the limit. For obvious reasons I cannot pay tribute in this work to these men, but they can feel sure that their efforts saved the liberty and the lives of many of their comrades. In all there were ten individuals executed in the brigade area, while about twelve others who were under suspicion continued to live, principally because of the lack of conclusive evidence against them. A couple succeeded in getting out of the country. In all cases of execution confirmation was obtained from G.H.Q. before the sentence was carried out. It was while laying in wait for an alleged spy that we lost a very good lad. G.H.Q. intelligence sent us word that our headquarters at MacCarthy's, Dunboyne, was becoming dangerous and to be on the look-out for agents direct from the Castle who, it was thought, would be sent down to try and uncover our headquarters. A special squad was picked and posted around MacCarthy's. For a few nights the vigil was kept and it was no easy task to lie quietly in the severe cold of these winter nights. Orders given to each man taking up his position were very strict, and above all no man was to leave his position until the whistle sounded which called off the job each night. On this night the cold was intense and we could feel the frost eating through clothes, boots etc., and it was difficult to refrain from moving or getting up to stamp

around to keep the blood in circulation. So we lay for hours and then some thought or idea must have prompted one of the lads. Whatever it was he left his position and began to move around. He was challenged and failed to reply. Then a shot rang out/and we heard a thud. The whole party converged on the spot where we imagined the shot came from and after a few minutes we found the body of one of the lads - a young lad named Barney Reilly. He was one of our best young lads and always anxious and willing to undertake any task he was asked. We were stunned by this occurrence but immediately rushed to get the priest and doctor, who came at once. After some discussion with them we agreed to the removal of the body to his home. Next day Dunboyne was surrounded by enemy forces who held an inquiry into his death, after which we buried him close to where he had been killed, paying him his due tribute.

In different areas in the brigade there were individuals who were suspects, but we could not get sufficient evidence to carry out executions in all cases. There were some clear ones and these met their due reward. In one case though there was an extraordinary sequel. The convicted spy was taken out and the execution party fired and, to all appearances, shot him dead. Imagine our very great surprise when we later learned that he had not been killed but survived the bullets which entered his body. The enemy police found him and as usual we were treated to another surge of raids, questionings and detentions. But in all other instances these people were dealt with effectively and there arose a greater disinclination to give information about our men. There were some who escaped paying the penalty but they can owe their luck in this respect to the fact that we were very scrupulous and conscientious in this matter and the case had to be clearly proven before the death penalty was sanctioned. Some who deserved this fate also escaped

because we could not get a suitable opportunity of capturing them - fortunes of war I suppose.

Some short time after the capture and destruction of Trim Barracks the Longwood Company decided to have a go at the barracks there. It was the only enemy station in South Meath besides Trim, and it was thought by us that a determined attempt on it might have the effect of forcing the enemy authorities to close it down and transfer the police there to Trim. While this barracks did not threaten our main line of communication, it was a thorn in our side. Accordingly the operation was sanctioned and the attack was planned for late in the year 1920. The barracks was in a very exposed position with a good range of vision and fire on all sides. It stood at the junction of two roads to the south of the village and was surrounded by a low wall. The whole company mobilised for the job, and the armament consisted of three rifles, ten shotguns and a couple of revolvers. The shotgun men and revolver men crept as close as possible, while the rifle men occupied positions about 50 to 100 yards away. All were in very exposed positions, some actually lying out in the open road. The attack began soon after 10 p.m. and took the police by surprise. The aim of our men seemed to be good as every window was shattered by the early firing, but the building was strongly protected, - steel shutters on the windows and very stout doors. After twenty minutes firing they were called on to surrender but refused, and the attack was renewed and continued until the I.R.A. ran out of ammunition. The whole episode lasted for an hour, with no practical result but a raising of the morale of our men and the lowering of that of the police. Immediately

after this attack the garrison was increased and the barracks was further strengthened by barbed wire entanglements etc. But the enemy showed by their conduct afterwards that they did not feel too secure and kept themselves well within safe bounds.

The following is the list of those taking part in the attack: Pat Giles, Company Capt., Larry Giles, Moss Fagan, Wm. Murray, P. Corrigan, C. McEvoy, Ml. Evoy, Thos. Donnelly, John Grogan, Peter Grogan, P. Heavy, Ed. Bird, John Costello, Chris. Boylan.

Sometime after this there was the usual enemy activity - raids, questionings, etc., and some people were arrested. Among them was the Captain - Paddy Giles - who was kept prisoner until the Truce and we were deprived of the services of a good soldier.

Later on, nearing the end of the struggle, the remnants of the company, to show that there was still a kick in them, had another go, but this petered out after about five minutes firing.

State of organisation at the end of 1920:

Brigade Comdt. - Seán Boylan
 Acting Vice Comdt. and Adjt. - Seamus Finn
 Quartermaster - Seamus Higgins
 Brigade Engineer - Eamonn Cullen
 Brigade I.O. - Patrick Clinton
 Brigade Training Officer - Patrick Mooney.

Battalion Staffs:

1st - Dunboyne Bn.	Act. Comdt. Barney Dunne Vice Comdt. Frank Carolan Adjutant - D. Hall. Q/M - M. Toole.
2nd - Trim Battn.	Comdt. Michael Hynes Vice Comdt. - Adjutant - Q/M -

3rd - Comdt. - Michael Fox, Delvin.
 Vice Comdt. - Patrick Corrigan
 Adjutant - E. Ginnell
 Quartermaster - Patrick Carey
 Engineer - Joe Martin.

4th - Kells Battn. Comdt. - Patrick Farrelly
 Vice Comdt. - Tommy Reilly
 Adjutant - M. Cahill
 Quartermaster - M. Govern.

5th - Oldcastle Bn. Comdt. - David Smith
 Vice Comdt. - Seán Farrelly
 Adjutant - Peter Connell
 Quartermaster - Phil Tevlin.
 Engineer - Matty Tevlin.

6th - Comdt. - Patrick Loughran (later
 arrested and succeeded by Pat
 Fitzsimons)
 Vice Comdt. - A. Levins
 Adjt. - Kiernan O'Connell
 Q/M - Leo McKenna
 Engineer - Joe Hughes.

It is now early in the year 1921 and the enemy activity in Meath has become very intense. Raid after raid, big encirclements of towns and stretches of countryside, proclamations were being posted banning fairs and markets, and the business premises of our supporters were being visited at least once a week and customers ordered out while searches were made. Three towns which suffered most by this were Oldcastle, Athboy and Delvin. But our organisation remained intact, and when this activity had eased off somewhat our men made plans to harass as much as possible. Arms were very scarce, particularly in the 3rd Battalion - Athboy-Delvin - but patrols were arranged and they travelled to points near Athboy and Kildalkey and lay in ambush on several occasions in the hope of meeting up with a likely enemy force. But luck was against them, they did not meet any. The weather was very severe just then and several of our best lads went down with colds and pneumonia. In this respect the Trim men, who were moving around Kilmessan district, were suffering badly, and we also had a few bad cases in the

Athboy and Delvin area. Then many of our best houses were now being subjected to raids and it wasn't very easy to find a comfortable place to lie up while sick. But we did find them and got the food and nursing that pulled our sick men through. The nurses in the Workhouse at Delvin, Casserley's, Drewstown, Ginnell's, Rosmead, Leonard's, Ballinvalley, and others did not mind running risks to help us. Just then G.H.Q. sent instructions that the Belfast boycott should be stringently enforced and the men in Athboy Company found plenty of scope for work. There were some business people there who insisted on continuing to trade with Belfast houses, so our lads called on them and warned them that any boycott goods found would be burned. As this did not have any effect they made several raids on the railway station and succeeded in destroying several consignments, and this did stop them. Of course this activity brought more raids etc. by the enemy and we lost a couple of men by arrest, while a few others had to go 'on the run'.

About this time a call came to Comdt. M. Fox at Delvin asking for assistance in the proposed attempt to get a prisoner to escape from military detention in Mullingar. Fox sent for me and we agreed to help, so we went into Leonard's, Mullingar, and found out what was on. We learned there that a young Volunteer belonging to Milltown Company of the Athlone Brigade had been captured after a very daring job that had been brought off by his company. This lad, along with his brothers and some other men of the company, had held up and disarmed a small military patrol one evening. It seems to have been a tough assignment, and during the course of it one of the British had been killed while others of them were injured.

The Volunteers captured all the arms and ammunition and escaped. But later this young fellow, Charlie Beglan, fell into their hands and was brought to Mullingar Military Barracks where he was about to be arraigned for the murder of the soldier who had been killed. His brother followed on and sought help from Mullingar Company. Leonard's was a well known haunt of ours and he was brought there, where Fox and I met him along with the Mullingar men. Schemes were suggested but we could not work out any satisfactory one. Then one of the Miss Leonard's - Lizzie - came to our aid. She was in the habit of visiting any prisoners held in Mullingar and bringing them parcels of cigarettes, food, etc., and she suggested that she would try to smuggle in a second lady's outfit and get Charlie out. It sounded fantastic, but at that time all kinds of mad schemes were being tried and succeeding. So it was agreed. Fox and I then left to make arrangements for keeping Charlie safe when he got out. Her plan worked. She coolly went to the barracks and asked to see her "brother". She got in and acted a sisterly manner towards Charlie. Incidentally, she did not know him then. She whispered to him what was on and he quickly tumbled and put on the dress, which she had worn over her own. Then she made him put on ladies' shoes and proceeded to go out by a different gate. She acted with the utmost coolness and gave him enough courage to act his part. She reached the gate and was most grateful to the sentry there for being so good in leaving her and her sister so long with their brother and asked him to be good to him. They then coolly walked away over the open space in front of the barracks, keeping Charlie in check until they reached the car where his brother Joe and the Mullingar men were waiting. They came at once to us at Delvin and

Fox and I commandeered a car and brought them to Dunboyne. After that we held them safely until they were fixed up by G.H.Q. Needless to say Miss Leonard and her sisters got a rough handling from the enemy, but they bore it bravely and put up with all that came their way. In a generation of brave women she deserves to be numbered among the best.

When I reached Dunboyne with ~~the~~ Beglan I found great difficulty in locating the other brigade staff officers. On making enquiries from some of the local company men I discovered that there had been an incident there which led to enemy activity and into which I had run. It seems that during a raid on the mails some information was found exposing certain young men who were offering to join the Tans. These men were picked up and brought to "an unknown" but owing to slackness by the guards they had escaped and were then helping the enemy police to scour the countryside looking for their captors.

After the death of Comdt. S. Cogan his place was taken by Comdt. Patrick McDonnell temporarily, but later this was altered and he was posted to intelligence while Comdt. Davie Smith was selected as Battalion O/C. We had been given a good deal of trouble by enemy raids in this area and on a few occasions brigade officers had very narrow escapes while visiting there. It became obvious that some of the raids were the result of inspired information so Pat set himself to clear the matter up. He was given a free hand and from his occasional reports he seemed to be on the track of something. As a result of one of his reports an order was issued warning all Volunteers against loose talk, particularly in public

houses, as he hinted that some of the leakages came from this source. His last report, made verbally to one of the battalion officers, showed that he would soon be able to give us something definite. Then one morning very early the McDonnell homestead was surrounded by a large force of Tans and military. This force completely encircled the district around and moved in, closely searching every shed in the vicinity until they reached the house. Then Pat and his brother Tom, finding themselves cornered, made a sudden burst and managed to break through the military line, but some Tans spotted Pat and opened fire. He fell, rose again, struggled another few steps and again another volley rang out and he fell mortally wounded. In the meantime Tom, keeping well under cover, got away and continued to evade arrest. Comdt. McDonnell was buried beside his brother officer and kinsman, Seamus Cogan, in the Republican plot at Ballinlough, and his comrades assembled and paid him full military honours when they laid him to rest.

During the time I write of now the fight was waging fast and furious. All through the whole country no opportunity was missed to attack. G.H.Q. had sent out a general instruction to hit often and hit hard. All our battalions had this order relayed to them and they proceeded to plan accordingly.

Attacks on barracks seemed to be fairly common throughout Ireland, and G.H.Q., becoming anxious about the expenditure of ammunition and other materials,

issued an order calling off these operations and stressed that no attack on barracks was to be attempted until the plans had been submitted to them and approved. This had the effect in Meath of disorganising many plans which had been made, as this form of job seemed to have found favour. So down to it went the Battalion Staffs, and all Volunteers were ordered to carefully note all movements of police patrols, strength, time of departure and return, usual routes taken etc. This information was carefully examined and squads or sections were organised. Great difficulty was experienced in doing this, as most of our men were working during the daytime and it was not easy to find a suitable patrol at night-time. This left Sundays as the most likely days, and in many districts our men lay along these routes waiting for the patrols.

The 5th Battalion seemed to have most luck, as on at least three occasions they made contact and attacked. In the 3rd (Athboy) Battalion the men went out on several Sundays but failed to get in touch with any patrols. On one occasion two such ambushes were planned for the same Sunday, one between Athboy and Kildalkey and the other at Girley, north of Athboy, without any result.

The men who comprised these parties were drawn from Athboy, Fordstown, Delvin and Archerstown Companies. After lying around for several hours they cycled openly along the roads fully armed, but failed to draw the enemy. But they continued to annoy them by road-blocking, bridge breaking etc.

It was now spring 1921 and the campaign was getting hotter and hotter. I was moving round through the 3rd and 5th Battalions, parading, training the men and attending council meetings, plotting and planning. At a 5th Battalion Council meeting held towards the end of February a report was handed in from ~~Can~~anaross Company that a patrol consisting of two lorries of R.I.C. had been noted to pass on Fridays from Kells to Oldcastle at about 10 or 10.30 a.m. Further watch was made and it transpired that this patrol was not regular but did often pass as mentioned on Fridays. Accordingly plans were drawn up and it was decided to attack on Friday April 1st, 1921. The plan was as follows: The ambush position chosen was at Sylvan Park. The main method of attack was to be by mine, the engineers to be covered by men armed with shotguns and rifles. The position was surveyed by me and some battalion officers, and each was shown the exact location of his men, where the mine was to be laid and where the riflemen would be. All were satisfied that they knew their jobs. On the night previous the men assembled in an empty house convenient to the ambush position, and the armament consisted of five rifles, shotguns and some revolvers.

A messenger was sent to the nearest point in the 3rd Battalion where a rifle was waiting, which was lent by Athboy Company. Ammunition was scarce - averaging five rounds per man. The plans were read over to all the men, who then lay down to rest. At 7 a.m. the engineers, covered by some riflemen, laid their mine, and at 8.30 a.m. the rest of the party occupied their posts. The operation was under the charge of the Battalion O/C, Dave Smith, but supervised by me.

The men who were taking part were drawn from Ballinlough, Carnaross, Stonefield and Whitegate Companies. This was to be their biggest operation yet. I cannot recall all the names of these men, but among them were Comdt. Seán Keogh who had recently been released from prison, Harry Lee, P. Tobin, T. Conway, Thos. Mullvaney, C. Conaty. All these were armed with rifles. Then we had the main attacking party, armed with shotguns, and drawn from Carnaross, Whitegate and Stonefield. They were: M. Wynne, - Boylan, P. Tevlin, M. McInerney, Thos. and Jas. Lynch, Jas. Dunne, and some others from Carnaross, also S. Farrelly, Vice Comdt. The engineers were under Battalion Engineer Mat Tevlin, assisted by Company Engineer Mat Smith.

All was ready before 10 a.m. and our vigil commenced. At 10, 10.30, 11., 11.30 there had been no sign of the lorries and it seemed that we had drawn a blank. The officers got together and talked things over. We'd stay on for another hour. Then some civilians discovered us and for our own protection we had to detain them in the rear at Rowley's house. Among these was a postman and we felt that there was a chance that his failure to return would draw a search party of police. He was due back around 12.30 p.m. so we decided that we'd wait until 3 p.m. At 3 the engineers took up the mine, and the various sections were about to disband and go home when a signal from one of our scouts was seen, telling us that the enemy were beside us. Back to their positions rushed the lads, and they were scarcely down when the first lorry was on them. Fire was opened by the whole party, shotguns, rifles and revolvers. It was a hurried affair as the

driver accelerated speed and literally flew through. Our riflemen kept firing while they were in sight. The whole affair did not last five minutes. The police returned the fire but made no attempt to stop and fight it out. When it was finished we found one rifle and a policeman's cap on the road. We wounded at least three of them but this was far from what we had planned. We expected a second lorry but it did not reach the ambush. We then scattered, hoping that our next effort would meet with greater success. The aftermath of this was soon to follow. Many raids were carried out by huge forces of military and police and again we lost some of our best men, among them being Comdt. S. Keogh who again fell into their hands. However, undeterred the 5th kept on sniping at them and the police began to show very great respect for them. In the 4th also there were some scraps, the principal one being at Mullagh Lake where the enemy again showed their dislike for a stand-up fight by keeping very fast on the move.

While these events had been happening big things were taking place in organisation circles. G.H.Q. were finding some difficulty in keeping close touch with brigades throughout the country, so decided on a scheme which divided the army into bigger units, namely divisions. These divisions were to consist of groups of approximately eight brigades. Meath was selected as the centre of one, which was to be known as the 1st Eastern, Longford another, called 1st Midland. The 1st Eastern was to consist of nine brigades namely: 1st - Meath - which embraced all the old 1st Battalion as well as part of North Kildare with headquarters at Dunboyne; 2nd Brigade to consist of most of the old 2nd Battalion and all the old 6th

Battalion with headquarters at Navan; the 3rd to take in all the old 4th and 5th Battalions along with three battalions in East Cavan as far north as Kilbride East; 4th was a small one tucked in along the Westmeath border and taking in the old 3rd Battalion as well as part of Westmeath with headquarters at Delvin; the 5th was to have headquarters at Mullingar and took in half of Westmeath; 6th was North Offaly with headquarters at Edenderry; 7th was in Kildare with headquarters at Naas; 8th was Fingal and 9th was South Louth with headquarters Drogheda.

There was some difference of opinion among us about these areas as some of us thought that it was not a suitable divide. One counter suggestion by me was that Trim should be made a Brigade Headquarters and embrace all the old 2nd, 3rd and part of the 1st Battalions, as it would help to strengthen areas that were weakly armed, but this was turned down. Then the appointing of Brigade Staffs did not meet with unanimous approval among us as some of our best officers were passed over and men who were not so well qualified were placed in charge. All this organisation took up a good deal of time that might have been better used in planning operations, but the powers that were seemed to consider it of very great importance. The new appointments meant more work in that the men appointed had to be given some idea of their work, and they in turn had to move around their brigades and get some idea of the stuff of which their subordinates were made. With enemy activity at its highest peak in the matter of raids, searches and arrests all this work was slow. One thing was obvious, we could not undertake big operations with the arms at

our disposal as the new areas which had come under our command were not well armed. However, at our first divisional conference great stress was laid on the importance of our engineering arm, so the brigade officers were asked to concentrate on bridge demolitions, road blocks etc. There were several big operations of this kind carried out. Among them, as far as I can remember, were: Carlanstown Bridge, completely wrecked by explosive, under Col. Comdt. Cullen; the nine-eyed bridge over the River Blackwater near Virginia Road; Rockview Bridge and McCormack's Bridge between Delvin and Mullingar, which was done by Comdt. Fox and the men of the 4th Brigade; Tandy's Bridge on the main road between Athboy and Oldcastle, done by Athboy Company. The 2nd Brigade tried to demolish the Boyne Bridge at Kilcairne and also Dillon's Bridge near Tara, but both were failures owing to lack of explosives of the right nature. Several small bridges in this area were destroyed. As a matter of fact this form of operation was extensively carried out all through the Meath Brigades and did much to hamper the enemy and slow up the tempo in the matter of raids and big surrounding movements which had become a feature of their work. The Divisional Engineer was continually asking for equipment to carry out this and other work so he issued an order that each brigade engineer should report on the likely amount of suitable stuff which might be in their areas. He listed what he required and asked for co-operation from the Brigade O/Cs. This, of course, was forthcoming and some very successful raids were made on garages etc. and valuable stuff got. One very successful coup was made at Athboy where two

garages were raided and a large quantity of tools captured. These two raids were very daringly carried out right under the noses of enemy police and the stuff got away. Included were complete sets of taps and dies, copper and other tubing badly needed for bomb and mine making and other necessary articles. As both garages were on the main streets the raiders had to be covered by the other members of the company and afterwards transported for some miles across country - no easy task as there was considerable weight in the captured stuff. It was a very well carried out job and of course brought an unusual heavy set of raids, searches and hold-ups in its wake. Company Captain Doyle was in charge of the covering of the men on the job, who were under Brigadier ~~for~~ Engineer J. Martin and Battalion *ENGINEER* Jas. Ward. This stuff was very welcome at the Divisional Engineering Headquarters and some of it reached G.H.Q.

At Kells an attempt to capture a set of telegraphic instruments from the Post Office failed as the men on the job were surprised by an R.I.C. patrol and some of them were wounded and captured. Another big effort by the engineers was the establishment of a bomb and arms factory at Bailieboro in the 3rd Brigade. This was done so quietly and secretly that only a select few of our own men and officers knew of it, but it worked well and hard until after the Truce was over. But still that uneasy feeling persisted and some discontent showed itself on account of the overlooking of certain officers in making senior appointments in the brigades. It speaks well for most of them that these officers accepted the appointments and continued to give loyal service.

The staff of the division was made up of the following: Comdt. General Seán Boylan, O/C; Col. Comdt. Seamus Finn, Vice O/C and Director of Training; Adj. - Coll Comdt. Pat Clinton, who also acted as Director of Intelligence; Q/M - Col. Comdt. S. O'Higgins; Director of Engineering - Col. Comdt. E. Cullen.

As well the following were attached: Comdt. P. Mooney, Asst. Director of Training; Capt. A. Levins, Organising Officer; Capt. Barney Dunne and Capt. M. Finn as Medical Officer. transferred from Dublin. The Brigade Officers were as follows: 1st Comdt. D. Hall, 2nd Comdt. P. Kelly, 3rd Comdt. Pat Farrelly, 4th Comdt. M. Hiney, 5th Comdt. S. Maguire, 6th Comdt. Seán Powell, 7th Comdt. Tom Lalor, 8th Comdt. M. Lynch, 9th Comdt. E. Kavanagh.

This new scheme threw a great deal more responsibility and work on the men who comprised the Div. Staff. It meant visiting and inspecting all these new areas. We knew where we were with the Meath Brigades but the others had to be contacted immediately. Delay in doing this meant holding up operations, and as all this had to be done by bicycle there was much delay. Mooney went to the 6th first and established a training camp below Johnstown Bridge. I also went to this area but penetrated further, going to Carbury, where I met the brigade staff - Seán Powell, Jas. Moran (commonly known as Ginger), Jas. Earley and Ml. Clarke. We fixed up matters there in a short time as they seemed to be very efficient. I had as host Mr. L. Dempsey, Carbury, who afterwards received a good deal of attention from enemy raiders. It was when in this area that I got the first taste of enemy cavalry movements. Realising that ordinary raids by lorried troops were not paying big dividends, horse troops were sent out across country

and it made matters very difficult for us to keep moving round. Long tramps across country, dropping into deep ditches while they passed close to us and eventually getting outside their flanks after a tiring journey of miles did not tend to help us to complete organising inspections as quickly as we wished. Eventually we got finished there, arranged for a constant flow of officers and men to the training camp for short courses and returned to report progress.

On my return to Div. H.Q. at Dunboyne the O.C. informed me that Mick Collins had spoken to him about a very important job which was due to take place in the Fingal area. I was sent in to meet Mick. I met him in Vaughan's Hotel and explained that Boylan had sent me in. Mick lost little time in telling me what was on. One thousand Thompson guns had been purchased in America and were about to be sent to this country. They were being met at sea by a yacht and I was deputed to visit Fingal and choose a suitable landing place. Fingal is the ancient name of North County Dublin and the Fingallians never allude to it other than by its ancient name. When Mooney and I arrived at Oldtown we were met by some of the Column and escorted to the Camp which was situated on a farm at Mooretown, owned by Liam Sheridan of Oldcastle. The Brigade Staff consisted of the following officers: Brigadier Micheál Lynch, Vice O/C Mick Rock, Adj. Wm. Rooney, Q/M Vincey Purfield. The Column Officers were: Camp Comdt. Jack Shiels, Adj. Jas Crennigan, Q/M Vincent Purfield, I/O Thos. Peppard. The names of the men forming the Column were: J. Maguire, J. Gaynor, Wm. Corcoran, Dick Taylor, Kit Mackey, J. Rickard, Thos. Kelly, P. Mason, P. Macken, Thos. Murphy, J. Wilson,

D. O'Callaghan, P. Barry, J. Battersby, C. Gilsonan, Wm. Rooney, J. McKenna, Philip Coleman, M. Derham and P. Murray. These constituted the regular camp but we drafted others for short terms for training and sometimes our strength was up to forty. Sometime before our arrival an enemy police officer had been shot in Balbriggan and the Tans retaliated by descending on the town in the middle of the night and burned and looted it. They also shot some civilians and generally terrorised the townspeople. Some of the lads now on the Column got away and were hunted from place to place until finally they were formed into the Column. When we met them they did not seem much the worse for their tough time and were still full of fight. Among the ordinary people of Fingal, Mooney and I found a great spirit. They had a fine appreciation of the ideals that imbued our lads and were very sound and reliable. Oldtown was completely with us and we were able to move round openly and freely without any fear of spies or informers. Certainly Fingal was sound.

Loughshinney had been suggested and I was to scout this place very carefully. ^{Bohkins,} He also told me that there was a small group of Volunteers encamped at Clonmethan, Oldtown, whom I was to contact. I sent for Mooney and we moved to this place. We found this group, about twenty strong, in snug billets, which consisted of three bell tents and situated in an old road or lane which had long been out of use and known to very few people. We quickly settled in and began our preparations for this big task. First procedure was, of course, a Brigade Council meeting, when we contacted the officers and tried to size them up. Likely they were doing the

same about us. Arrangements were made for strengthening the group and we formed a permanent camp thirty strong, with fresh drafts coming for short terms of training, which consisted of drill, field work, musketry and lectures on strategy, scouting etc. Strict discipline was enforced and the whole column responded in a fine spirit. Training began at once and both Mooney and I, being very fit, gave it to them good and hard. There was complete reciprocation from the lads and soon we became a happy family.

Operation No. 1 was a raid on the mails by a car load of these lads in Balbriggan. These mails were guarded from the station to the P.O. by a lorry of Tans, who then went back to barracks. Our car drove up, the staff of the P.O. were held up and the mails, which had not been opened, were thrown into the car, which sped to the camp. This was organised by the I.O. Peppard, and some of the letters made lovely reading. The I.O. sorted them out and the most important ones were sent into G.H.Q. This job proved so successful and easy that Peppard asked for another one, and again it came off, but this time the Tans gave chase in Crossleys and at one time it was so close that the mails were thrown over a ditch while our lads' car kept going. A circuitous route was then taken back, and when some distance away the car was driven through a gate into a field and then across country until it reached the very unique garage where our stock of cars was kept. This stock consisted of three cars, a Ford, Overland and an Essex, which became well known as Ikey - its registration number was IK 1. It served us well on a few occasions later. Mooney and I now realised that we were handling

an exceptionally good lot of lads and we gave them all we had. Moving them around on manoeuvres we occasionally took up ambush positions along roads where suitably sized enemy forces might be met with, but always we found ourselves up against huge convoys which we had to let go by. All this time I had my own job of scouting the coast to do, and I brought along Mick Rock as guide. I could not divulge what the job was until G.H.Q. permitted me. Having looked over most of the coastline I went back to Mick Collins with my report.

I pointed out to Collins that there was a line of Coastguard Stations which completely guarded all approaches, and a good sized one right on the small harbour at Loughshinney. All these stations were connected by telephone, and according to our information the occupants were armed with rifles as well as being supplied with Verey lights. North of our camp stood the main Black and Tan camp at Gormanston with a strength of about 1,200, and south east of us was Collinstown Military Camp with another 1,000. My report was carefully gone into and my suggestion that there was no hope of landing even a goat from Lambay Island, much less a consignment of arms, while these coastguard posts were there, brought the obvious reply from Mick: "Well, wipe them out". I raised the matter of arms and ammunition and was told that we would have to do our best with what we had, a prospect that did not seem too rosy. However, it had to be, and H.Q. promised that they would make it a general order to all areas and so help to divert any suspicion that the enemy might have that the operation had an ulterior objective.

Back to the Column, when I took some of the senior officers into my confidence. I was glad I did so, and from then they put greater heart into their work. Our scouting became sharper and when we decided to strike we had all the information necessary. All we wanted now was a bit of luck. As Mooney and I had to move through the brigade, mostly at night, contacting the different Battalion Staffs, we did not share the accommodation with the Column. We were billeted on Mrs. Cusack, whose husband, Dr. Cusack, was a prisoner in Ballykinlar. This lady was undeterred by the risk she ran and fully realised what was bound to happen should her house be raided while we were in it. She was a most gracious hostess and made us very comfortable. It was women such as she who made our task light and, indeed, they were an inspiration. Her indifference about any punishment that might be visited on her reflected a high courage that did us good to contact.

Our plans are complete and we have brought the strength of the Column to forty. The outside men are also ready to do their part. Six stations are to go up together and the time fixed is 1 a.m. We move out of camp, and as we cross the first road I notice a lady standing with a bicycle a short distance down the road. She waved to us and we answered. Afterwards she told us that she stopped when she saw us as she thought she might bring us ~~bad~~ luck - she was red-haired. She was our good friend Mrs. Cusack. Our journey to the coast was hard and tough. It meant a long tramp across country. We moved to a point about ten miles from the camp, when the various sections went their different ways. I had ten men with me and we headed for Loughshinney.

Mooney and his section went to Rush, Rock to Skerries, while the others were covered by the local men not attached to the column. We reached our objective at 12.30 a.m. and rested. At five to one we surrounded the building, and at one sharp, like ten possessed devils, these lads went through front door, back door, front windows and back windows. We were inside before the occupants realised what had hit the place.

There was little opposition. Two of the coastguards made a show, but it was all over in a few minutes. We explained that we were about to burn the building and told them to remove their belongings. Some of our lads gave a hand. Our time was limited as we were too close for comfort to Gormanston and Collinstown, so we had to make them hustle. We completed our job by setting fire to the house and waited until it was well alight before moving back to camp. A nice prospect of a tramp of 16 or more miles across country. Bidding good-bye to the homeless guards, who took it philosophically enough, we started. After about six miles hard going one of the lads, Macken, moved up to me and suggested that the place through which we were moving held several motor cars. I resisted the temptation to let him have his way for some time but at last I succumbed, and with a whoop he and "The Bok" Maguire started at a run for a house about $\frac{1}{2}$ mile away. After some time we heard a shot and then back came the two boys driving a brand new Ford. I asked about the shot and Macken said he fired it as a matter of persuasion. We all piled aboard and were first back to camp. The others dribbled back later on and all had the pleasant news of complete success.

The next night other areas did their work, and we now had a line of coast from Dollymount (which had been done by the Dublin Brigade) to Annagassan, with one solitary coastguard station - Balbriggan - which we failed to destroy. However, this one post would not affect the success of the landing. The British Army Remount Depot at Lusk was also destroyed at this time. It was burned down and the horses let loose on the country. There were no armed forces in it.

There was an easy day for the Column next day and Mooney and I went to Dublin to report our success to G.H.Q. We were surprised to see huge headlines in the daily papers telling the world of our work. We contacted one of Mick's aides and gave him our report. We stayed in town for a couple of days and then set out back to Oldtown. We were cycling down Lower Dorset St., going easily. I was slightly in front, and nearing the Canal Bridge I spoke back to Mooney about going out Drumcondra way as I wanted to call on a friend. Receiving no answer I looked back and was stunned to see him with his hands well up and being searched by military. It seems that a lorry darted out from the North Circular Road and a cordon was thrown across the street. I had just passed but he ran right into it. I dismounted on the bridge and watched proceedings and was relieved to see him getting through, parting the best of friends with the officer who had searched him. I wonder what this officer would have said or done had he known the charming personality he had just let by. We reached camp without further incident and next day got down to work in earnest. Our main task now was to keep close eye on the coast, particularly Loughshinney.

Transport for moving the guns had to be looked to also. All this was done satisfactorily. Then we had to fix on temporary dumps, as only a small percentage was being left in the 1st Eastern. A fairly large supply was going to McKeon in the Midland Division, and also to the 1st Western. Dublin were getting some too. All this was arranged and we seemed to have overlooked nothing. Just then Mooney and I received a message to go to town and report to a small place called the Plaza in Gardiner's Row. We went there and found a big gathering of officers from all over Ireland. We were all brought upstairs to a large room where we met two American ex-officers who, without any preamble, started giving us instruction on the Thompson sub-machine gun. They had two of them, and after some hours we had been given a complete run through on it. They certainly were very efficient men, and they knew their guns. We spent a few days at these lectures and then returned to camp, feeling very snug about matters. We spent another week in Fingal and then received orders to report back to Div. H.Q. at Dunboyne. This surprised us, but back we must go. Reaching there we learned that there would be no Tommy guns as they had been seized on board the ship on which they were coming, in New York. This knocked the bottom out of us, and when we were told that we were bound for other parts and were not returning to Fingal, we didn't feel any better. A few easy days hanging around Dunboyne and off again. While at Dunboyne we were amazed at the progress that had been made there in fitting up a H.Q. but I felt an uneasy atmosphere. There was apparently a strained atmosphere between the Divisional O/C. and his staff and that happy family feeling and team work which I formerly knew to exist was now missing. There was some sense of rift in the air. Eamon Cullen was doing great work in the engineering line.

and already had ~~brigade~~ small factories going in practically all brigades. In the 3rd he had fixed up a foundry at Bailieboro, in a place owned by a Mr. Rogers, and here hand grenades and mines were being turned out, while a first class armour section was at work repairing arms. All the staff had good and continuous communication with their counterparts in the brigades and altogether everything was going well.

I was sent to Kildare but before going I went into G.H.Q. where I met my new boss - Emmet Dalton, who was Director of Training for G.H.Q. I believe I have never met anyone so efficient in my life. He was a pale faced slightly built man, but gave one the impression of being made of whalebone. I was very much impressed by him and I was not alone in that. Very soon I was to know more of his efficiency. I made tracks for North Kildare and my first stop was at Leixlip. Here I met the Battalion Comdt., Pat Mullanney, and his fellow officers. A battalion parade was arranged and we got through some good work. I liked these men, they were quiet going lads but I got the idea that they were sound. I stayed around there for a week and then moved south to Naas, where I came across the Brigade O/C, Tom Lalor. The first step was, of course, to hold a brigade council meeting where I met all the battalion staffs. I did not find them as forward as other areas, and I thought that I would adopt a go slow policy with them. I visited every battalion area, usually with Tom Lalor, and brought as many men and officers as possible to different points and put them through it. After a few weeks an improvement became apparent and I picked a few

good lads showing promise. One of these was Dick Harris of Prosperous, but before he could show how good he was he got picked up by the enemy. This Kildare area was a very difficult one as it was honeycombed with police and military. Naas was chuck full and the Curragh was right in our centre. The country was as flat as the proverbial pancake and the cavalry were operating in rather strong forces. Then curfew was at 10 p.m., while there was a complete ban on the use of bicycles. Still we did get something done, and after I had left the area some of these lads had a brush with military somewhere round the Hill of Allen. I never met any of them since to learn the facts, but they deserve credit for trying under such difficulties.

Some time in June I received a message from O/C Boylan that a very big operation was being attempted in the area and to pick about twenty of the most efficient men to take part. Soon I received the order to move and I arranged for Mullanney to bring these men in while I headed back to Dunboyne. I got as far as Leixlip, when I met the rest of the Div. Staff with a pretty large force. I then learned what the plan was. We were to attack a troop train bringing 1,000 troops from Dublin to the Curragh. The point of attack had been chosen by G.H.Q. and was at Stacumney, near Hazelhatch. The whole party had marched from Dunboyne, where they had been mobilised from different parts of the division. There were men from the 1st, 2nd and Fingal Brigades, and the Kildare men were waiting outside Leixlip. We moved to the place chosen and settled in for the night. Here I learned the full details of the plan. We occupied the house owned by a Mr. Wardell,

who was far from friendly. A very large force of military would travel by train on the next day, and were due to pass the point where we were at about 1 p.m. The order in which they would come was: first a pilot engine, which would be 100 yards in front, then a small train carrying about 200 troops, and following this at about another 100 yards distance would be the main body of 800 officers and men. The whole staff of officers were to be on this train. Our instructions from G.H.Q. were, to allow the pilot engine and the first train to pass and then to attack the main body. It was intended to be an engineering operation, with the rest of our men covering them, but all were to open fire when the engineers had done their work. Our force consisted of four sections of twenty men in each, specially selected from the 1st and 2nd Brigades, the Fingal Column, and twenty from North Kildare. The officers present were: Eamon Cullen, Div. Director of Engineering, who had ten or twelve other engineers under him, Pat Clinton, Div. Adjt., Paddy Mooney, Paddy Mullanney, Barney Dunne, and some from the 2nd Brigade (I believe they were from The Commons, Johnstown and Yellow Furze Companies) and myself. Clinton was in charge of the 1st and 2nd Brigade men. Mooney had the Fingal Column. Mullanney and I had the Kildare men. He and I occupied the south side of the line, and we were specially detailed to cover the engineers. The other two sections, under Clinton and Mooney, held the north side.

The engineers laid mines along the railway, about twenty yards distant from each other and covering a total distance of 200 yards. Our whole force took

up positions on a railway bridge, with the engineers in the centre. At about noon we moved into our allotted places. Mullanney and I had our men placed. The engineers, too, were at their posts. Mooney and the Fingal Column were moving out, as were Clinton and his men. Then we were amazed to see two big cage lorries packed with enemy troops come up behind us. Mooney and Clinton were out in the open with their men and the enemy opened fire. Mooney retired his men to the cover of a demense wall. Clinton's men took what cover they could get and returned fire. The positions which Mullanney, Cullen and I held were exposed to a raking enfilading fire, and after a word with Cullen I asked Mullanney to retire his men across the canal, which ran parallel to the railway about 50 yards from it on the south side. He carried out this very well, and after telling them to await further orders he came back to where Cullen, I and another man were waiting. We had retired the assisting engineers also. The firing was pretty hot. We had a good view of the position and I suggested to Cullen and this other man that if we moved south of the railway and took up position down a bit, we could turn the tables on the enemy, as their left flank would be exposed to us. We carried out this and opened fire, with the result that we made an opening for Clinton's section, who, quickly seeing the chance, took advantage of the diversion we had caused and they were extricated from a very nasty jam. Mooney all this time was trying to manoeuvre his section into a position from which he could do something. Time was now running out and the troop trains were due to come in sight at any time,

and still the scrap went on. We on our side, having done our best, moved back to the bridge, and I was about to bring back the Kildare men when an enemy aeroplane hovered in sight. Now this was one thing that we had not reckoned on, so I gave the order for all the lads to stay put until we found out what it was about. We soon learned. Just then the rumble of a train was heard and the pilot engine could be seen coming in the distance. Cullen started for his position on the bridge where he had his exploder, and we followed. Our party was four strong, and comprised Cullen, Mullanney, a man who had been lent to us by G.H.Q. (and who was armed with a Thompson gun) named McGuinness and myself.

We had a clear view of the railway line for about $\frac{1}{2}$ mile, and this is what we saw. The pilot engine came on and when within a short distance of the beginning of our mine field the plane swooped down in front of it, wheeled, turned and again swooped so low and close that the engine driver pulled up. Then we saw the first troop train coming, and the driver of it, seeing the pilot stopped, did likewise. Realising that our operation was now doomed to failure we ordered a general retreat, and it looked like as if it was going to be every man for himself. But the lads retired in good order, and when we reassembled at Dunboyne later we found that our whole force was intact and that we had not lost a single man. Our little party of four found ourselves on our own. Cullen had to get back and disconnect his exploder, as these instruments were very scarce and G.H.Q. would not take kindly to the loss of this one. We were lucky to have Mullanney

as he knew the country well. After taking a last look from the bridge to assure ourselves that all the others had gone, we looked down towards the stationary trains and what we saw did not reassure us of our chances of getting away. The military were pouring from the train and were extending across the country. The plane was hovering overhead, flying towards us, swooping down, wheeling and going back south where the Kildare men were trying to get away, then back to the enemy troops. We travelled fast and soon made a wood which afforded us cover from the plane. Then by keeping close to ditches we shook him off. At one point we had to cross the road, and we had just time to duck when a few lorries of Tans passed. I don't think they had any inkling of what was happening so near them. We continued our tramp and eventually Mullanney brought us into Leixlip. Here we held a miniature council of war and decided we'd head for Dunboyne, still moving across country.

In Leixlip we learned that Mooney and the Fingal Column had passed shortly before our arrival. Before we parted with Mullanney, who resided in Leixlip, he called me one side and asked if there was any possibility of McGuinness lending him the Tommy gun until the next day. After a good deal of coaxing he got it, promising to have it back at Dunboyne the following night. McGuinness was waiting over with us for a day or two. That night, with the country packed full of enemy troops, Mullanney and some of the Leixlip Company made a daring attack on Lucan R.I.C. barracks which lasted over half an hour. In the meantime we had met a few stragglers from the 1st Brigade and we continued our tramp to

Dunboyne. Here we were told to go to MacCarthy's house, and arriving there we discovered that Mac and his wife had vacated the place and handed it over to us for a few days. We did have a good rest then. There were a couple of incidents that occurred during that scrap which never left my mind. One was the conduct of McGuinness. He was so cool and quick to grasp the situation and act. Another was the action of a girl from Dunboyne. She got hold of a pony and trap, and with the aid of, I think, her young brother drove right through the whole fight with first aid outfits and a stretcher. How she got back was a mystery, but back she came with the consoling news that Clinton's section had got through the enemy and were on their way here. She was Miss Nan Murtagh, and this action was in keeping with all her other work for us during the few years that we were operating. She and her mother were always there to help us. Their door was always open to us and their kitchen at our service. She was another of the brave women who made it easy for us.

This incident took place in the month of June 1921. It was now decided to organise Flying Columns in all the brigades. With this in view lists of names of men who were 'on the run' in each area were called for, and were to be sent to me. We thought that if we could form small groups of about twenty men and arrange for billets for them in each area, we could always have men on call. Where there were not sufficient men in an area we intended bringing them in with the nearest brigade. Already these groups were in existence around Trim, in the old 5th Battalion, in

Fingal and in the 6th - Offally - Brigade. We arranged for a good system of inter-communication between these groups or columns and occasionally called the leaders together for interchange of views. We sent some of them to G.H.Q. for a special course of training and each column was being moulded into a tough fighting unit. Then when we were ready for whatever should come along we received notification from G.H.Q. that a truce was about to be signed between the Dáil and the British Government. We received one week's notice and were asked to clear up any arrears in the matter of removing known spies and informers who had been sentenced but who had escaped. In some of the brigades operations had been planned, and in the 5th (Mullingar) Brigade an attack on Castlepollard Barracks was carried out.

I do know what was thought by the general public about this truce. They saw in it the end of the fighting. We in the army saw in it an opportunity to strengthen our forces and make them more efficient. Accordingly we lost no time in the 1st Eastern about forming camps and bringing in the officers and men. We established a divisional or central camp at an unoccupied place called Ballymacoll outside Dunboyne, and after a short time the Director of Training at G.H.Q., Emmet Dalton, sent down two specialised training officers. This camp was kept going right through the Truce period, and was not closed until the British withdrew their troops from the country altogether and our men took over and occupied the barracks which they vacated. Other, but less pretentious, camps were formed also, and the improvement in the lads was

good to see. During this period a full sized conference was held at Dunboyne at which all brigades were represented. Eoin O'Duffy attended from G.H.Q. and the whole military situation was discussed. As far as I can remember this took place nearing the end of the Truce. O'Duffy explained the position and asked our views on certain points. He made it clear that in the event of hostilities being renewed that our division would be called on to play a big part. One of the moves that would be made by G.H.Q. was the evacuating of all G.H.Q. personnel and Dublin Brigade from Dublin and cutting off the city from the country by large engineering operations. Our place in this scheme was to sever all enemy communications going north and west. It suggested to us that our forces were going openly into the field. From the date of this conference we redoubled our efforts and the training in all branches of warfare became more intensive. All concerned put great heart into the work and I know that we had achieved a very high standard by Christmas 1921. What followed in the political world forms no part of my story. It spelled disaster for us as it split our army and destroyed the high morale and the "Volunteer spirit" which characterised it.

During the Truce there occurred one incident which I would like to mention. A pogrom by the Orangemen in the North was in progress against the Nationalists there. Daily the papers were filled with news of killings of our people and the burning and looting of their homes. A sudden counter-move by men in Northern Divisions was made and they captured a number-

about thirty - of highly placed leaders of these Orange mobs. These gentlemen were handed over to us to be kept as hostages. We detained them at Trim for some time and it was noticeable that the incidents in the north became fewer. After some weeks we were ordered to release them and they returned home. Their "holiday" amongst us had a quietening effect on them.

There remains little more for me to chronicle. What followed the ending of the Truce and the signing of the Treaty was a sad affair for many of us. We had done our part. The enemy forces had been withdrawn but a greater danger had arisen. Anger, recriminations among the leaders reacted all down the line, and we were to see the awful situation where the best of friends became embittered against each other, and even families were rent asunder. Brother against brother, and even father against son. What a reaction to a glorious chapter of Irish history! Let us hope and pray that it all may not have been in vain and that the future generations of Irishmen and women may derive benefit from the sacrifices of those of our time, and always cherish and preserve the ideals for which they made these sacrifices - Ireland One, Free, Gaelic and at Peace.

Billeting:

The gratitude of the officers and men of the Meath Brigade is all the reward that has been received by the people who, in dark and dangerous times, gave food, clothing, shelter and other forms of assistance to us when we were in sore need. It is indeed a sad

commentary that now after almost three decades of native government many of those people have not got any recognition for their charity, courage and the great risks they ran by housing us. They opened their doors to us without any thought that a reward would ever come their way. They asked for none, they scorned any suggestion that any be offered them, but they at least deserve that the Irishmen and women of the future should know that they did their part, a hard part and one that held the risk of getting their homes burned over their heads by the enemy forces. How they stood up to the continuous raids by day and night, being ill-treated by half drunken police and military, threatened with shooting, in fact being lined up against walls, looted and sometimes beaten, showed an indomitable spirit that in itself went far to defeat the enemy. This is the first opportunity that has presented itself to put on record the great work of these people, and I hope it will compensate them a little to know that most of us who partook of their hospitality cannot nor shall not ever forget them. I welcome this opportunity to place them on a roll of honour and trust that posterity will place them on as high a level as the men who paid the supreme sacrifice for this old nation of ours.

I shall list them in battalion form and hope to do full justice.

Battalion 1 (Dunboyne).

The O'Dwyer homestead, The Cottage, Clonee, where we were always made welcome and received valuable help and advice from Martin O'Dwyer.

Mr. and Mrs. J.J. MacCarthy, Dunboyne, who practically handed over their home to us.

Mr. and Mrs. Peter O'Connor, Salestown, Dunboyne, who did likewise.

Bradys,, Gleesons and Kellys who made room for us and extended hospitality warm and warming, and the Morans who also helped.

Mr. and Mrs. Pat Smith, Kilcloon, the Farrell home further on, whose doors were always open.

Mr. and Mrs. Jim McGann, Kilmore, where we held many meetings and came to big decisions and also partook of food and rest.

Mrs. Murtagh and her daughter Nan, Dunboyne.

2nd Battalion

In the town of Trim where Mr. and Mrs. J. Murphy entertained P. Mooney and myself as well as Seamus O'Higgins when things were at their hottest after the capture of Trim Barracks.

The 'Buller' Fagan, Trim, whose humble cottage was always at Mooney's and my disposal.

Jimmy Rooney and his sisters who took great care of us in the County Home.

In the Dunderry area where the Ivorys, both Darcy families, Joe Slevin and Costigan's hostelry, where Mooney, Billsey Byrne from Dublin and I spent some hectic days. We also received hospitality from Jim Yore.

Caffrey's, Kilmessan, and their neighbours who looked after the Trim men when things were blackest. It was while the Trim Column was around here after the capture and destruction of the barracks that Comdt. Mick Hynes developed a bad bout of pneumonia and was carefully nursed out of it.

3rd Battalion.

Around Delvin where Ginnell's was one of the brigade headquarters and where we had a home from home. The two girls, Mary and Rose, did marvellous work in dumping documents and bringing dispatches to the riders for transmission; Murtagh's of Mooretown, which was so comfortable and restful; The nurses in the Workhouse, who thought they could not do enough, also Mrs. Ward.

Leonard's, Ballinvalley, was another hospitable rest.

And our good friends, Miss Victoria and her brother Arthur Smyth, who always sent me away with plenty of "good spirit" from Delvin.

Casserley's of Drewstown where they thought, and acted as if, nothing was good enough for us. Here Joe Martin established an underground engineering works where grenades, landmines etc. were turned out.

4th Battalion

Kells where Bob Mullen never put me out.

Moynalty where the Reillys made room for us.

McMahon's of Mullagh and Osborne's where Miss Rose Clinton looked after us well.

5th Battalion

The home of Seán Keogh, another headquarters, where, although he was in gaol, we were always made welcome by his sisters.

Conaty's of Ballyhist, Liam Sheridan's, who was also in gaol but Mrs. Sheridan was undeterred and lavished hospitality on us in spite of periodical raids by enemy police.

Connell's of Whitegate, McDonnell's of Stonefield, Wynn's and Cogan's - all at one in making things easy for us:- Bennett's of Terha Cross. The boys were members of Whitegate Company.

6th Battalion

Larry Clarke's, Brews Hill, where we began the good work in August 1916 and continued to use for meetings up to the end. The hot cocoa when leaving always braced us for a journey. Mrs. Clarke looked after this end.

Seán Newman's, Bohermeen, our second important H.Q. Here we mustered big numbers of officers from all over the brigade and held lectures and conferences. There was no limit to the entertainment here and no expense spared by him and his wife.

Pat Kane's was another such, and in this district we also had Gerry Reilly's, Thos. Gibney's and Foley's.

To Pat Quilty who gave his bed to Mooney and slept in a chair himself.

There were others, too, but I have clearest recollections of the ones mentioned.

Raid on Kells Post Office:

Around February 1921 the Brigade Engineering Officer, E. Cullen, received information that a certain type of telegraph instruments were in the Post Office in Kells. He required them for his work and asked for and received permission to have them seized. Accordingly orders were issued to Kells Company to carry out a raid and get them. The following plan was decided on: Twenty men from the Company and Kilbeg were detailed for the job, six to form the raiding party and the others to act as protective unit. A mail van usually arrived from Navan every night at approximately 12 midnight, and this was to be stopped and control of it taken. The six raiders were then to get into the van and drive into the P.O. where the seizure of the instruments was then simple. But again the best laid plans - the van on this night came too early and had flashed through the hold-up party before they realised that it was it. A complete re-arrangement of scheme was now called for and the raiding party was strengthened by drafting six from protection, and this new group then entered the Post Office premises by the rear. Having crossed some yards and gardens they arrived at the back door, which was locked. This door had two glass panels and entrance was not too hard. But while the entry was being effected the noise caused gave some of the staff warning and they rang up the barracks. Unconscious of this the raiders proceeded to dismantle the instruments, and when about to retire they found themselves surrounded by police. The men with the instruments made their getaway while the others put up a good fight.

A couple of them received slight wounds and one was captured. However, next day and for a few more days the enemy intelligence was working overtime and some of the lads were picked up and finished the rest of the year in gaol. The following took part: Benny Carolan, Farrell Tully, Bill Connell, P. Dolan, P. Brady, B. Flynn, Jack Haggerty, W. Donegan, M. Cumiskey, J. McDonnell, M. Fox, P. Maguire, J. McGillick, N. Tully, Thos. Brady, four from Kilbeg, and a man who went under the name of Brennan who hailed from Cork and who was 'on the run'. This man played a very important part in this job as he did most of the dismantling of the instruments. The man captured was Farrell Tully, who was also injured in the melee with the police.

Some short time before this there had been arrests in Kells and among those got, was the Company Captain, Bob Mullen. He was replaced by Benny Carolan.

Ambush of Auxiliaries' Patrol in Trim:

Early in 1921 the leading men of the Trim Company were out. Every one of them was being sought and they became scattered for a time. They were having hard times and the constant hardship and moving around took its toll of them by sickness. Some of them were quartered about Kilmessan and Dunderry and managed to keep together fairly well. Then Comdt. Mick Hynes fell very ill and developed pneumonia. He got a bad touch and it speaks well for his toughness that he fought it under the terrible conditions in which he existed. Eventually a group of them was got together

and formed a small column. Among those were Seán Higgins, P. Hynes, P. Mooney, M. McArdle and Patrick Duignan.

Reports were reaching them about the conduct of the Auxiliaries in Trim, so they decided to call in and give them a lesson. Accordingly a small party went into ambush at Haggard St. and lay in wait. After a rather long wait a foot patrol of Auxies came along. This patrol was moving in a kind of extended order, two now, then ten yards back two more and so on. The I.R.A. party was about twelve strong and the enemy patrol was the same strength. The site chosen did not allow for an extended front for our lads so it was necessary to wait until the centre of the enemy patrol reached the ambush party before fire was opened. This did happen, but it meant that the first pair of Auxies got outside the line of fire and took up a position which threatened the flank of the I.R.A. However, the fight went on for a while until the Auxies' party could not be seen, as they had got under cover. The ambush party then started to retire but found themselves exposed to fire from the first pair of Auxies. One of the I.R.A. sized up the situation quickly, and telling the others to keep down he crawled into a spot where he could get a shot at these two gents. He had an automatic and he emptied his magazine very rapidly at them. They immediately sought a safer place and left the way open for the retreat of the I.R.A. This party included Paddy Mooney, Seamus Higgins, Brigade O/C, Seán Higgins, Ml. McArdle (Gael), a man called Kiernan, - Coffey of the Dunderry Company, Pat Hynes, Joe Kelly.

and some others whose names I have been unable to get.

The enemy casualty list was never made public and our lads had no way of finding out. The I.R.A. had no casualties although their line of retreat was over open ground. The man who fought the covering action was Ml. McArdle of Trim Company.

The murder of Postmaster Hodgett, Navan:

In Meath Volunteer circles there existed a very virile and efficient inner organisation known as the I.R.B. - the Irish Republican Brotherhood. This was the old Fenian movement which had survived in Meath from '68 and had been kept alive. It regained some vigour in the early years of this century, and one man who played a big part in its revival and reorganisation was Pat O'Growney, Athboy. After Easter Week, while retaining his membership and usefulness, he handed over the reins of control to younger men. This organisation got and retained control of all the national organisations in the County and the key men in them were members of the organisation. The Volunteer officers were members, the Gaelic League and G.A.A. likewise were controlled, and later when the local elections were held and the Republican County Council was formed it, too, had its quota of I.R.B. men. I would say that this fact kept all those organisations national-minded and sound. But towards the end of the struggle signs began to show that some of its members found the control becoming irksome and in a few cases the County Centre found it necessary to discipline them.

There may have been strong reasons for some of this "kicking over of the traces", as a determined and

continuous propaganda was being carried on through the press and from the pulpit in strong condemnation of secret societies. Consciences began to trouble many, and possibly it was not easy for them to see eye to eye with all the decrees issued. However, in the main the I.R.B. survived until after the Truce, and its mandate was very effective and forceful. One area that suffered as a result of questioning the orders of the I.R.B. was Navan. Navan, as I have already pointed out, was a very important centre strategically, and when some officers and men suffered I.R.B. suspension they were relieved of their commands in the I.R.A. This caused much disorganisation for some time and it wasn't until contact was made with a youth named Mick Hilliard that the area became active again. This youth was just left school and he unhesitatingly accepted responsibility when he was asked. He was put in charge of Navan early in 1921 and, under most trying circumstances, pulled things together. It was not long until he contacted a sympathetic postal worker and a very useful intelligence line was made. This post office official was a man named Hughes, and much of the stuff that he handed to Hilliard was very useful to us. It led to the execution of at least one spy and also helped to uncover the whereabouts of some members of the R.I.C. who had been moved from areas where they were badly wanted.

After some time the enemy intelligence became suspicious of Navan Post Office and the local police authorities placed a young lady in the office without any examination or other qualification than that she was a relation of one of the enemy police.

Her job was just to watch and report to the police. Mr. Hodgett, postmaster, who was a very efficient and straight official, protested against this move and brought it to the notice of his higher authorities. By this action of his he brought himself under suspicion of the police intelligence officers, and after several threats to desist, which he ignored, he was taken from his home one night, shot and thrown into the Boyne river. When eventually his body was found and recovered an attempt was made to label his death on the I.R.A. and to cast the reflection on his memory that he had been executed by our men. His family refuted this and then our intelligence staff set to it to place it where it belonged. This was very slow work as the people were in such a state of fear and terror that they would not speak. After some months careful work and sifting of the information received we concluded that two prominent R.I.C. members were responsible for the actual murder, and we decided on their execution.

One of these R.I.C. men had a particularly bad record, but to make a complete success of the operation it was thought advisable to get both together. Patrols were arranged to watch for a favourable opportunity, but due to the precautions that these men took to protect themselves this never presented itself. As a matter of fact, very little was seen of them. The Truce came before the job could be carried out. Some time before the murder of the postmaster our friend in the Post Office had handed on information that uncovered one enemy agent. This man did not know he was suspect and his execution was a shock to

the enemy. It was as a result of this that suspicion fell on the Post Office in Navan and the arrangement mentioned was made by them. During the period that our patrol squads were trying for the two men responsible for killing Mr. Hodgett this I.O. of ours sent out information about another enemy agent, and this man was also erased. This latter execution may have caused the wanted men to go deeper under cover as no opportunity presented itself to carry out the job.

Mr. Hodgett had no connection with the I.R.A. or other national organisations and, as far as I am aware, was a loyal British subject. One result of the shooting of Mr. Hodgett was that some friends of his who were also considered by us as loyal subjects became incensed at his murder and now began to play an active and very useful part. Mr. Gilbert, who owned the Navan Engineering Works and who was a particular friend of Mr. Hodgett, now started to manufacture hand grenades in his shops for us. He turned out a perfect imitation of the Mills hand grenade. Were it not for the advent of the Truce a short while afterwards or had it broken again, this man's services and the others would have been invaluable to us. Mr. Hodgett's son became one of our intelligence agents.

Signed: Seamus FinnDate: July 11th 1955

(Seamus Finn)

Jan'y. 11th, 1955.

Witness: Matthew Barry

(Investigator)

(Matthew Barry), Comd't

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