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STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

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Witness

Lieut.-Gen. Michael Brennan,
Simmonscourt House,
Simmonscourt Road,
Ballsbridge,
Dublin.

Identity.

Brigade Adjutant East Clare Brigade;
" Commander do.
Column Commander East Clare Flying Column.

Subject.

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1911-1922.

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STATEMENT OF LIEUT-GENERAL MICHAEL BRENNAN,

Simonscourt House, Simonscourt Road,

Ballsbridge, Dublin.

In 1911 I joined the Limerick Branch of the Fianna which at that time was run by Joe Dalton, proprietor of the City Printing Works. The Fianna were closely associated with the Wolfe Tone Club, which I later discovered was only a cover for an I.R.B. Circle. As far as I can remember, the principal members of the Wolfe Tone Club at this time were Jim Ledden (later T.D. for Limerick), George Clancy (murdered by Black and Tans while Mayor of Limerick), John and Paddy Sweeney, Paddy Whelan, Dinny Curtin (of Cork), Fonse Kivlehan, ... Grant, Jim McInerney, Fonse Blake, Fonse O'Halloran, Liam O'Sullivan, Jim Gubbins, Ned Fitzgibbon, ... O'Donnell, R.P. O'Connor, Dan Burke (later T.D.), Tom Hayes.

We met in the Fianna Hall, a wooden hall built on a site given by John Daly, at the back of his house in Barrington St. Normally, when the Fianna went on its Sunday route march out the country, most of the members of the Wolfe Tone Club accompanied them.

About this time, my brother Paddy, while home on a holiday from London, had sworn me into the I.R.B. As I was only 15 years of age, special permission of the Supreme Council was necessary and this was secured through Seán McDermott with whom he was intimately associated. When I joined the Wolfe Tone Club Paddy Sweeney was detailed to work on me as a prospective member of the I.R.B. Over a period of months he referred continually to the old Fenian

Movement and its advantages, and then progressed to hints that some people thought there was such an organisation still alive in the country. I had been told that this was the normal approach, but I wasn't to declare myself until I was actually asked if I would take the oath. When I had been apparently approved, Sweeney asked me if I would take the oath and I let him know that I was already sworn in. I was then formally attached to the Limerick Circle of which George Clancy (later Mayor of Limerick and murdered in his home by Black and Tans) was the Centre.

For the next two years we "mustered and paraded" in the Fianna, while in the Wolfe Tone Club and I.R.B. we met regularly and discussed ways and means of infiltrating local organisations and public bodies. Occasionally a new member appeared, but progress was very slow, and we didn't seem to be getting anywhere.

Late in 1913, the lead given by Carson when he formed his Ulster Volunteers began to show possibilities and we knew our chance had come. At our meetings all our members were directed to press their friends and associates everywhere towards having a committee formed to organise a meeting which would launch a branch of the newly-formed Irish Volunteers in Limerick. As there was hostility to us amongst the Redmondites, we were not ourselves to take a public lead, but rather to induce supporters of Mr. Redmond to appear as the moving force. This was managed and a Provisional Committee was formed representative of all Nationalist bodies in Limerick. We were allotted representation for the Wolfe Tone Club and the Fianna, but in addition, many of our members got themselves selected to represent trades unions and such bodies. As a result, I

think we were in a majority on this Committee from the beginning. Actually, several of us attended the meetings not representing anything. As we did most of the work, our right to be there was never questioned and we were accepted as regular members.

The Provisional Committee organised a big meeting in November and this was addressed by Pearse and Casement amongst others. Immediately after the meeting, the Volunteers were formally established. Units were organised and drilling by ex-N.C.Os. of the British army commenced. Control was exercised by the Provisional Committee of which I remained a member.

Early in 1914, I moved to Dublin to study wireless telegraphy with a view to becoming a radio operator on a ship. I at once got in touch with Seán McDermott, who introduced me to Tom Clarke, Major McBride, Bulmer Hobson, Seán Heuston, Con Colbert. I associated mostly with Heuston and Colbert and with them I attended nearly every night at the Hardwicke St. Hall where my radio studies were turned to useful account in the teaching of signalling to various Fianna classes.

When war appeared likely, Seán McDermott suggested that as civil employment for radio operators would be pretty well impossible I would be of more value to the organisation if I went home and worked at organising and training in Clare and Limerick. He told me they had very few contacts in Clare and the few that existed were only individuals. I went home straight away and resumed my position on the Limerick Provisional Committee.

War came shortly afterwards and then the Volunteer

"Split". The great mass of the Limerick Volunteers (as everywhere) went with John Redmond, leaving us with something round 200 men. Volunteer H.Q. sent Captain Robert Monteith to Limerick in charge of training and, under his supervision, I organised and trained a Signalling Section in the Limerick Battalion. My experience was confined to flags and telegraph (or radio)keys, but Monteith introduced lamps and the heliograph. We drilled and trained at the Fianna Hall and practically every Sunday we marched out the country for tactical training. In addition to my work with the Limerick Battalion, I organised a Volunteer Coy. in my home parish of Meelick. Rather to my surprise, most of the young men of the parish joined the company. (What is more to the point, they never slackened and up to the date of the Truce, Meelick Coy. remained one of the best and most reliable units in the country). I also organised a small company in Oatfield, a district about three miles from my home. As there was nobody available in either of these units at that time with sufficient experience to act as an instructor, I had rather a busy time training the men in Meelick and Oatfield and attending parades in Limerick.

In 1915, I began to use the existing units as organising agencies. The procedure was to march them on Sundays to suitable points such as centres where sports or hurling or football matches had collected crowds. They had some equipment and Volunteer caps, although none were in uniform. Many of them had shotguns. We often borrowed a piper from Limerick and, failing this, we had some other music - melodeon, concertina, flute, or even a tin whistle. The men marched well and their appearance naturally provoked interest. One Sunday, after some "softening-up" (marching

through and drilling in the village occasionally and having talks with prominent locals) we marched about ten miles to the principal Mass in Kilkishen. After Mass we formed up outside the Church and the large congregation crowded round to look on. I got up on a wall and spent half an hour explaining what we were about, ending up with the usual appeal for recruits. Over a hundred men handed in their names and I appointed Joe McNamara in charge of them provisionally. I arranged for drills and I cycled there regularly after that to carry out these drills.

In a similar manner, Volunteer units were organised in Clonlara, Cratloe and Sixmilebridge and then, with the aid of bicycles, we commenced to go further afield. Units were organised in Newmarket-on-Fergus, Tulla, Scariff, Ogennelloe, Clarecastle, Ennis, Crusheen, O'Callaghan's Mills. In Feakle, Thady Kelly got a company established and, as a result of a police prosecution for drilling, about one hundred and fifty young men flocked into it.

One rather amusing organising aid, of which I made very effective use, was a tug-of-war team. I had noted that tug-of-war competitions were the most popular event of all sports meetings and it struck me that a successful team would be an excellent means of advertising. I watched competitions until I learned the technique and then picked and trained a team. I entered them everywhere as a Volunteer team and they always marched (or cycled) to the sports wearing caps, belts, etc. They won everywhere and in almost every instance the beaten teams joined the Volunteers. All through 1915 I practically lived on a bicycle, as at that time the ex-British soldiers (who later joined the Volunteers and were very useful as instructors) had not appeared and I had to drill every unit myself.

In the summer of 1915 a big parade of Volunteers was held in Limerick. The Dublin Brigade attended in strength and some hundreds came from Cork. The combined force marched through the principal streets and, as practically all the men were armed with rifles, the parade was very impressive and it was of great propagandist value. The march was by no means unopposed. When we got into the poorer quarters, crowds of women showed strong disapproval and in Mungret Lane and Broad St. district the shrieking women on the streets were assisted by flanking parties hurling missiles from windows as we passed. These women were in the main the wives of men serving in the British Army and they were known to us as "Separation Allowance" women. No great damage was done during the day except to tempers, and no attempt was made by the Volunteers to retaliate.

After the parade I met P.H. Pearse at John Daly's house in Hartstonge St. Seán McDermott, Tom Clarke, Ned Daly, Tom McDonagh, Tomás McCurtain, Terry MacSwiney and many others were there also.

In the evening the mob collected at the railway station in a violent mood and a number of Cork and Dublin Volunteers were injured while forcing their way to trains. The R.I.C. seemed to be trying to hold back the viragoes, but there were so many of them that the police were ineffective. When all the visitors had got away, a number of us were having tea at Daly's. Tom Clarke came in looking ruffled and weary and sat in a corner of the room with his head resting on his hand. He declined tea and said nothing for half an hour or so. Then he straightened up and snapped "I've always wondered why King William couldn't take Limerick. I know now".

In addition to the Sunday route marches, the Limerick Volunteers occasionally marched out the country at night and carried out training exercises through the fields. Returning from one of these expeditions on a quiet moonlight night we halted near Lansdowne Bridge in Meelick. One of the officers, Peadar MacMahon of Thomondgate, had a very fine voice and, as usual on such occasions, he sang for us. This time he gave us a new song which we heard for the first time and which impressed us so much that he was induced to repeat it. Before we resumed our march, the whole party joined in the chorus and for the first time "A Soldier's Song" rang across the hills of Clare.

In December a young Volunteer reported to me that his shotgun had been taken from him by some locals. I went to their house at once with my two brothers and demanded the gun, but it was only produced under the threat of a revolver drawn by my brother, Paddy. The R.I.C. were informed and we were arrested and taken before the R.M. in Sixmilebridge. Amongst other things, we were charged with "making a great noise and causing alarm to His Majesty's loyal subjects". We were "bound to the peace" and on instructions from Limerick H.Q. we signed the necessary papers and were released.

Early in 1916 there were persistent rumours that our arms (such as they were) would be seized. I addressed the Meelick Company on the subject after Mass in the presence of two R.I.C. men and gave an emphatic direction that they should shoot anybody who attempted to seize their arms. I was arrested and charged with inciting to rebellion. The R.M. (McElroy) who tried the case at Sixmilebridge was very reluctant to send me to prison and he spent a long time trying to persuade me that I was misled by older

men and that I didn't fully appreciate the seriousness of what I had said. I was not impressed and in the end he offered to release me without any undertaking if I said I was sorry. I declined and asked the newspaper-men to publish my repetition of the order to shoot so that other Volunteers would know of it. (Incidentally they did publish it). Mr. McElroy then sentenced me to three months' hard labour and I was removed to Limerick Jail.

Just a week later I was brought out to the Governor's office one night to find an old friend, Dr. Charles McDonnell, waiting to see me. He told me he had been asked to tell me that Seán McDermott had sent instructions that I was to lodge an appeal so that I could get out at once as I was needed for some special purpose. Dr. McDonnell was a J.P. and as such, he signed the appropriate documents and I went out with him reporting at once (as instructed) to George Clancy, my I.R.B. Centre. Clancy told me the Rising was coming off on Easter Sunday (a week later) and that I was required in Clare. He told me the arms were being landed in Kerry and that my brother, Paddy, was being sent to Carrigaholt (in West Clare) to collect boats from both sides of the river and organise the transshipment of the arms from Kerry across the Shannon Estuary to Kilrush where he was to have trains ready to move the arms through Ennis and up to Galway where Mellows would take over. Clancy told me the Limerick Commandant, Colivet, had agreed to join the I.R.B. and had just been sworn in and he would give me detailed instructions. When I got these instructions they were so vague as to be imcomprehensible. They amounted, in effect, to an order to mobilise on Sunday and to hold the roads leading into Limerick from Clare. My total armament was about thirty shotguns, one

service rifle, two or three .22 rifles, about two revolvers and a few hundred rounds of ammunition. There were five or six roads spread across about five miles of country and I couldn't even learn in which direction I was supposed to face - whether I was to prevent people getting in or getting out. It seemed so much simpler to just hold the line of the river and occupy the bridges, but this was outside my area. The whole scheme seemed "cockeyed" but we were all so excited at the prospect of action that we weren't too worried about this. We were convinced that we would either be given or capture all the arms we needed within a day or two and beyond that we refused to look.

The next week was spent cycling all over East Clare preparing for the "mobilisation" on Easter Sunday and attending conferences in Limerick. As far as the Volunteers were concerned, Sunday's parade was just a test mobilisation with all their arms and equipment - only two or three key-men were made aware of the real intention.

On Saturday evening I learned in Limerick that Professor MacNeill had countermanded the orders for the Rising and that all operations for Sunday were called off. I was directed to transmit these orders to all Volunteers under my command and, in accordance with this, I spent all night cycling to the various units. For some reason which I cannot now recollect, I let the order for mobilisation stand - probably I had some reason for thinking that further orders might come. I returned to Limerick at 5 a.m. on Sunday morning and went straight to John Daly's house to inquire for developments. I found The O'Rahilly had just arrived there from Dublin and he told me the Rising was definitely called off and I was to make no move without instructions. In conversation with Miss Madge Daly later

I got the impression that there might be a message from Pearse or McDermott and I arranged for a means of getting in touch with me.

After Mass in Meelick I marched with the local and Oatfield Volunteers to Bunratty where we met the men from Cratloe and from Newmarket-on-Fergus, our combined forces totalling about 100 men. It was a very wet day and long before the men reached Bunratty they were wet through. Not alone then, but all through the fighting of later years, I found most men were willing to risk death for their country, but most unwilling to face getting wet for it. In our six miles march from Meelick we were accompanied by two soaked and miserable R.I.C. observers and by a pony and cart carrying a box of ammunition for shotguns. As instructed, the men had brought what were described as "a day's rations", but what amounted in fact to a few slices of bread and butter. We waited all day in the ceaseless rain on the road near Bunratty Castle, but no messenger appeared. Late in the evening I directed the various units to march home but to hold themselves ready for instant mobilisation if orders came. I marched back myself with the Meelick Company and most of its men remained together that night.

On Monday I went to Limerick and later in the day I learned that Commandant Colivet had received a letter from Pearse informing him that the Dublin Volunteers were going into action at noon and ending with "Carry out your orders".

The Limerick Provisional Committee met that evening and we debated for hours whether or not we would obey this instruction. The whole controversy turned on who was entitled to give the orders - MacNeill or Pearse. Only six of us were in favour of fighting and our case was

that our comrades were already fighting in Dublin and our duty was clear, no matter who gave the orders. We had about 25 against us and the meeting got heated and unpleasant, but the minority were in a hopeless position as all the senior officers and officials were against us.

Most of Tuesday was spent in conferences and meetings at which feelings became more and more bitter, but nobody on either side altered his views. It was arranged to meet again on Wednesday, but it was clear that no decision to fight would be taken by this committee, so I decided I would go to Galway and contact Mellows who was "out" with the Galway men. I arranged with my friends in Limerick that if I found the Rising had actually started in Galway I would come back to Limerick and report. We would then collect all men willing to fight and all the arms on which we could lay our hands and move to Galway picking up my Claremen en route.

Before leaving Limerick that evening I met Seán Treacy and Dan Allis looking for .22 ammunition. I agreed with their argument that the big supplies in Limerick wouldn't be all required and (quite irregularly) I took them to the Fianna Hall and gave them a supply. (All the remainder was surrendered to the British the following week).

I spent all Wednesday trying to get through to Galway, but I was met and turned back on every road by armed R.I.C. patrols. Rather to my surprise they made no attempt to arrest me, except at one point where I was held for some hours, and they always accepted my fictitious name and business, but they wouldn't allow me through anywhere. It became obvious eventually that there was no prospect of getting to Galway except by force, and I decided on returning

to Limerick and collecting a party strong enough to overcome any opposition we'd meet on the way.

I reached Limerick early on Thursday and cycled right up to a barricade on the Sarsfield Bridge before I saw it. People were passing through the opening unchallenged, so I brazened it out and kept moving. Nobody challenged me, but when I got through I realised there was another barrier about 50 yards in front. I saw British soldiers running across to the opening in the second barrier and I wheeled round to try and make a run for it only to find the first barricade was now also closed against me. I was taken into the Shannon Rowing Club beside the bridge and put into a tiny room with a soldier who had his bayonet fixed and who remained all the time at the "engage" position with his knees bent and the point of the bayonet about a foot from my chest. At first I made fun of him, but he was mute, and I realised after a while that he was so nervous he was actually dangerous, so I also remained silent. After about an hour I was removed under a heavy escort to William St. R.I.C. Barracks and from there to Limerick Prison.

For a few days I was alone, but early in the following week a few others (including my brother, Paddy, who had been arrested in Carrigaholt) arrived. On May 9th we were taken to Richmond Barracks in Dublin where we found many hundreds of prisoners from all over the country. On May 23rd three or found hundred of us were marched to the North Wall and put on board a cattle boat where we were herded down amongst the crowded cattle. The night was stormy and the rough sea, the darting and twisting of the boat to avoid torpedoes, and the movements of the terrified cattle amongst whom we were

wedged, made all of us violently ill. Many of us were hoping we would meet a submarine to end our misery. We got to Holyhead some time in the morning and our escort crammed us into a waiting train which travelled all day with many long halts until we reached Wakefield near Leeds in Yorkshire. No food was provided on the train so we had had nothing to eat for about 30 hours but most of us were still so sick from the crossing that food was the least of our worries. There was no water to be had either and the resultant thirst was a pretty bad business.

In Wakefield we were taken to the local prison. We were all locked in separate cells and only allowed out for an hour each day when "In single file around the ring, we trod the fools' parade". The food was very bad at first, but a number of factors eased matters. Friends outside sent food - in our case two Unionist ladies from Sixmilebridge (they were the Misses Ievers of Mount Ievers) brought in hampers of food for Clare prisoners. Protests about the starvation of prisoners were made in the British House of Commons (Alfie Byrne, M.P. visited us and saw many of the men). The culminating point was when a number of men fainted during a parade which was being inspected by medical officers sent down by the British War Office. They were satisfied that it was from lack of food, and our rations were doubled at once. After this also we were allowed to associate for most of the day and we were only locked up at night. After three weeks in Wakefield we were removed to Frongoch Camp near Bala in North Wales. We were located in the South Camp and within the week detachments from other English prisons such as Stafford and Knutsford brought our numbers up to 1,000 and filled the available accommodation. 500 or 600 more prisoners followed into

the North Camp which was within sight, but with which no contact was allowed. Very much to our surprise, we were informed we were to be treated as prisoners of war and we were to be organised and administered accordingly. This was ideal from our point of view and the men were promptly organised into units with officers in charge. Colonel J.J. O'Connell was elected Commandant and he got classes for officers and N.C.O.s established as well as ensuring drill parades all through the day for all of us.

We were only a month in Frongoch when a small group of us was collected and removed to Reading Prison. When we reached Reading we found others had come from various prisons where they had been kept in solitary confinement since the Rising. The total number in Reading was about 40 and they included Arthur Griffith, Terence MacSwiney, Pierce McCann, Tomás McCurtain, Ernest Blythe, Denis McCullough, M. Brennan (Roscommon), Barney O'Driscoll, Peadar Ó Hannrachâin, Walter Cole, Peter de Loughrey, P.T. Daly, William O'Brien, Cathal O'Shannon, Darrell Figgis, George Nicholls, Seamus and Joe Robinson, Padraig O'Malley, M.W. O'Reilly, Eamon Morkan, Joe Connolly, Eamon O'Dwyer, Herbert Moore Pim, Tom Craven, Alf Cotton, Joe McBride, J.J. Scollan, P.J. Doris, J.J. O'Connell, Seân Milroy, Henry Dixon, Seân T. O'Kelly, J. Reader, Dr. Ned Dundon, Seân O'Neill, Paddy Sweeney, Seân Neeson.

In Reading we were allowed to associate all day and we were only locked in our cells at 10 p.m. We occupied a detached building which was originally the women's prison. The main building was occupied by about 150 "interned aliens" of various nationalities, but principally German and Austrian. Many of them were spies who had escaped convinction at their trials. Beyond seeing some of them at Mass, we had no contact with these men.

Without delay, work started and Ginger O'Connell formed an officers' class which met for instruction every day in his cell. Friends from London secured and smuggled in sets of Irish Ordnance Survey maps on which we worked. A certain amount of drill went on under the guise of physical training and exercise. Lectures were given regularly by Griffith, MacSwiney, Blythe and others about past and future and these were always followed by debates. A manuscript journal was set going and many valuable contributions appeared in it. All these energies were directed towards hammering out policies and plans for the future. Nobody ever thought of the suppressed Rising as anything but a beginning.

Shortly after arriving in Reading we were taken to London in groups, lodged for the night in Wormwood Scrubbs Prison and next day we appeared before the Advisory Commission - Judges Pim and Sankey. It was their business to advise the Government as to whether we should be released or held. The policy laid down for the prisoners was to refuse to give any information or undertaking, so the trip was only looked on as an outing which broke the monotony. About a dozen of our bunch were released, however, and they included Barney O'Driscoll, Joe Connolly, P.T. Daly, Denis McCullough, Henry Dixon, Walter Cole.

About the middle of December, the British announced their intention to release the 600 prisoners remaining in Frongoch, but there was no word as to our position. The Prison Governor, Captain Morgan, kept pressing the Home Office, but we weren't very hopeful and our preparations for Christmas in prison continued. On December 24th, the Governor rushed in and informed us we were going home at once and, after a mad dash, we found ourselves on the train

to London. By the time we reached London I had developed a violently sick stomach and, on the invitation of Mr. and Mrs. Joe Cassidy, I decided to stay in London until I felt better. I went with the Cassidys to their home in Bermondsey and stayed with them for a week.

We had left an Ireland where the great mass of the people was violently opposed to us politically. In London we had our first contact with the new Ireland. During the week I was taken to many Irish gatherings and everywhere I found wild enthusiasm for our Movement. The 1916 Leaders were already placed higher than our long-venerated "supermen" of '98, '48 and '67. We had heard in prison that sentiment had changed, but all the same, direct contact with it was, at first, rather startling.

I came home around New Year's Day 1917, and I arrived in Limerick on the evening train. We had been "seen off" at Limerick station by a crowd of British soldiers' wives ("separation allowance ladies") who howled insults, pelted us with anything handy, and several times had to be forced back physically by the military escort when they tried to get at us with their fists (or nails). Eight months later, when I got off the train in the same station, I was met by a crowd numbering several thousands who cheered themselves hoarse and embarrassed me terribly by carrying me on their shoulders through the streets. It was all very bewildering, but it made it clear that the Rising had already changed the people.

I spent a few weeks after getting home in making or renewing contacts all over Clare. Everywhere I found enthusiasm and anxiety to be "up and doing", and (now that

the prisoners were home) a general expectation that the Volunteers would be re-established on a far bigger scale. In Limerick I found great bitterness against the local leaders, more for surrendering their arms than for not fighting.

Some time late in February the British swooped again and arrested about 25 prominent people, amongst whom they included me. When I reached Limerick Jail I found Seán Ó Muirthuile, Michael Colivet and Jim McInerney (all of Limerick) there also and we were later joined by Mick Moriarty, Joe Melinn, M.J. O'Connor and Billy Mullins from Kerry. We were taken to Dublin and lodged in Arbour Hill Detention Barracks. In the newspapers we saw an official British statement that they had discovered a plot with Germany in which we were involved. The statement was of course a complete fabrication, as none of us had any contact whatever with Germany. We also learned that about 15 others had been arrested in various parts of the country, amongst them being Terence MacSwiney, Tomás McCurtin, Seán T. O'Kelly. Michael Collins visited us several times in his capacity as Secretary of the Irish National Aid Association.

We were kept only a few days in Arbour Hill. As usual without any warning we were ordered out one evening and taken to the Holyhead boat which, I think, sailed from the North Wall. We were at first located down below, but the officer in charge of the escort objected to this and eventually he cleared the First Class saloon and parked us in it to the loud indignation of the other passengers. With such a good start, our relations with the escort of about 15 men improved rapidly and by the time we reached Crewe, the party had developed into a joint "sing-song".

During a wait of many hours in bitter cold at Crewe the escort cleared the 1st Class waiting room and took us in to its warm fire. This was violently resented by the people ejected and they collected a crowd outside who became so aggressive that the soldiers fixed bayonets and cleared the platform. There was no food available in the station, but the soldiers foraged the town with money provided by us and brought back quantities of food and drink. As a result, by the time we left Crewe, the escort was distinctly unsteady. The officer i/c. had gone out to a hotel with a pal and he was also "under the weather". We changed trains again en route and he was either asleep or he took the wrong train. In any event, we arrived in Leeds about 4 a.m. with no officer and an escort who were so drunk that they neither knew nor cared where they were. We had to lift each one individually out of the train into a waiting room and collect all their rifles and equipment. We discussed the question of escaping, but we decided it would be a very poor return to make these men for their kindness to us. It would, of course, have involved cashiering for the officer and prison for the N.C.Os. and men. We locked the door of the waiting room for fear of stray military police and we took it in turns to "stand guard". The remainder of us wandered round Leeds and when restaurants opened we got breakfast. Somewhere about 8 o'clock, our almost distraught officer jumped off a train and raced along the platform looking for us. He thought he was "seeing things" when he found us "all present and correct".

We boarded another train and round noon we reached Ripon (or possibly York) and there we were paraded before the General Officer Commanding the Northern Command.

He just looked at us, ticked off the names, signed some paper, and we were marched out. I thought he looked vaguely familiar and on coming out I inquired his name. He was General Sir John Maxwell.

The next part of our journey was by lorry on which we were still accompanied by our old friends the escort from Dublin. After 10 miles or so we got to Wetherby and there we were left in the local police barracks and handed over to the Police Superintendent, saying an almost tearful goodbye to the escort.

The Superintendent served us with Internment Orders confining us to Wetherby. He told us we would have to find "digs" for ourselves, but he would give us addresses. We could go for walks within a two mile radius of the town, but if we went further away we would be arrested and imprisoned. I think he told us we would have to report to the police daily, but we ridiculed this and no attempt was ever made to enforce it. No provision was made for us financially and we would have to pay our own expenses.

Police guides took us around to the addresses given and the three Limerick representatives and I were put up by a Mrs. Johnson. The National Aid people made us an allowance which covered the cost of board and lodging. We learned later that the other groups were confined to areas in the south - one at Oxford.

Right away we decided on escape at the first opportunity and toprepare the way we started going for walks all over the country - at first two or three miles, then 5 or 6 miles and later up to 10 miles. For some weeks we were always followed by police, but as we split up into

pairs and lengthened our walks this became impossible and they contented themselves with watching our goings and comings. As a further development, we used to take a train at some station miles away, go to Leeds, York or Harrogate and return late at night always getting off at Wetherby and being met by very anxious police. When they had got used to this we went away occasionally for week-ends to London or Stockton-on-Tees. After about three months we were satisfied that they were sufficiently lulled to let us have a good start. The whole trouble was that a 'phone message to Dublin that we were gone would ensure our being picked up at or leaving the boat, as all passengers were closely scrutinised during the war.

One of the party (M.J. O'Connor) refused to go with us and this actually helped, as he could wander about all day making sure he was seen by the police. The other seven of us walked out to country stations and took trains for Leeds, leaving all our luggage behind. At Leeds we entrained for Manchester and there we stayed in friends' houses until night when we boarded the train for Holyhead. At Holyhead we had to pass between a number of detectives as we went down the gangway on to the boat but beyond staring us up and down, nothing happened. Similarly at Dublin - close scrutiny, but no remark. Actually we were a day in Dublin before the alarm was given and they had very little chance of finding us once we were past the boat.

We arrived in Dublin just before the South Longford election, that is, during the first week in May. I remained in Dublin "on the run" for about a month. Just about this time Willie Redmond's death in France left a Parliamentary vacancy in East Clare. A meeting of Volunteers and Sinn

Féin supporters from all over the constituency was held in Ennis and they asked me to stand. I declined promptly and suggested de Valera as the penal servitude prisoners were being released and he was their recognised leader. My brother, Paddy, was with me in Dublin and we wrote to my other brother, Austin (who was in Clare) to press de Valera's name. He replied that he was doing so against strong opposition as all the old people and nearly all the clergy wanted John MacNeill. Later, he informed us that when the convention was held in Ennis the majority was clearly in support of MacNeill. He secured an adjournment and, after private discussions, he announced that if John MacNeill were selected, the Volunteers wouldn't accept him because of his action in the Rising, but would run de Valera as the Volunteer candidate. This settled the question and eventually de Valera was agreed to unanimously.

When the amnestied prisoners arrived in Dublin we assumed we came under the general amnesty and apparently this was correct as we weren't interfered with when we moved round openly.

While I was away Clare had been set up as a separate brigade area with my brother, Paddy, as Brigadier. I had been appointed Brigade Adjutant.

I returned to Clare and got busy on election work. My time was entirely occupied in exploiting election enthusiasm by organising Volunteer units and using them for the protection of Sinn Féin meetings. At this period the friends and relations of British soldiers were still violently opposed to us and they often took strong action to show it. In one or two places shots were fired and rumours were current that de Valera would be shot. Before several

meetings I was out all night with parties of Volunteers covering the roads along which he was to travel through areas such as Broadford.

During the election my brother, Paddy, had worked out a completely new policy which I'm afraid he didn't submit to G.H.Q. for approval. He was pretty certain it wouldn't be approved, but on the other hand, he thought if it worked, G.H.Q. would accept it and issue it as their own policy. (This was in fact what happened a few weeks later). The programme which he finally prepared and to which all existing senior officers in Clare agreed involved in effect the opening of a new and aggressive campaign against the British. Drilling had been proclaimed since the Rising and it had only been carried on in secret. We were all aware of how quickly men would tire of the monotony of repetitive drill movements and the necessity for emotional stimulants. We knew that we had to go forward or, in spite of our efforts, we would be dragged back. Public drilling would stimulate interest as the British would have to treat it as a challenge and take action against us. Arrests would, of course, be made and the whole position of men arrested and charged was considered. We felt that one of the things which wrecked the many movements for independence since 1798 was that almost every man either preparing or actually taking part in rebellion immediately on arrest did everything in his power to persuade the English court that he was not guilty. Inevitably this practice must have been demoralising, as men who are faced with having to clear themselves in court will necessarily give thought to "covering up" in advance. Newspaper reports of trials would very quickly get the whole country affected by this "defensive" mentality unless it were

stopped with a jolt. We felt the people were ripe for an "offensive" attitude and that we might manage to give them a lead. A very important factor was the financial one. If our lead was followed and there were widespread arrests, the legal costs of defending the thousands who might ultimately be involved would be stupendous and might well wreck the whole movement. We felt this question of finance was critical. Finally we came to the question of the attitude of men sentenced. We considered that men in prison should still continue actively in the fight although of course along different lines, and it was decided that sentenced prisoners should go on hunger-strike for the status and treatment of political prisoners. None of us knew what political prisoner status meant, but all that really mattered was that it provided a casus belli which was what we needed.

The three phases of the new programme to come into force at the end of the election were therefore:

1. Volunteer units to hold drill parades in public - preferably in the presence of the R.I.C.
2. When arrested and charged before a British court the men were to formally refuse to recognise its authority to try them and they were not to plead nor to make any attempt to defend themselves.
3. When sentenced they were to go on hunger-strike for political prisoner status.

During the election we paraded and drilled openly without interference, but we were well aware that this would not continue after polling day, which was July 11th. Public drilling for every unit was ordered for the following Sunday.

On that day I paraded and drilled about 100 men on the street in Tulla. My brother, Paddy, took charge of a

parade in Ennis, and my brother, Austin, did likewise in Meelick.

Very soon afterwards we were all three arrested on a charge of illegal drilling and removed to Cork Military Detention Barracks where we were joined by Peadar O'Loughlin of Liscannor, Clare. Within a few days we were visited by Mr. O'Brien-Moran, a Limerick solicitor who was sent to arrange for our defence. He was astounded to learn that we were not going to defend ourselves and that we did not require legal assistance.

Early in August we were brought before a courtmartial, formally charged and asked to plead. We replied that we refused to recognise the right of a British court to try us and we would take no part in the proceedings. The consternation of the court was ludicrous and they tried hard to get us to behave "reasonably". When they found we were adamant they called the R.I.C. witnesses and proceeded with the "trial", ending up by sentencing us to two years' hard labour. (Being a courtmartial, the sentence was of course not announced until later).

When the sentence was promulgated we were removed to Cork Prison and there proceeded to put the third part of our programme into operation. Somewhere we had got the idea that if we could weaken ourselves sufficiently before it was discovered we were on hunger-strike, we could not be forcibly fed. As we learned subsequently, this was not correct, but the information we had been given (I think by Tadhg Barry of Cork) led us into a peculiar and very difficult course of action to avoid the unknown horrors of forcible feeding. We took no food from the time we arrived in Cork Prison, but we kept this secret. As a result we

had to accept all our meals and take them into our cells, keeping them there until an opportunity arose to get rid of the food. At first, we disposed of the food in lavatories and when we got out for exercise, but the strain of sitting beside cooked food and getting its odour sometimes for hours became so bad after nearly a week's starvation that we used to pitch it out through the cell window and chance its being seen. After a week we were surprised to find we were not noticeably weaker and we decided that further steps were needed. When we got out for exercise we used to run round the ring instead of walk, and this certainly used to make us very shaky. We were having difficulties with the prison doctor who persisted in increasing our rations on the grounds that we looked as if we weren't getting enough to eat. After eight or nine days he ordered us weighed and on finding we had lost over a stone each in a little over a week, he saw at once that we were on hunger-strike. We were removed to the prison hospital and we learned there from the Chaplain, Father Fitzgerald (who had been given a message for us by Tomás McCurtain) that G.H.Q. had adopted our new policy and issued it as a directive. Next day we were removed to Dublin under an escort of R.I.C. At Limerick Junction we were given a message from Michael Collins to the effect that large numbers of men had just been arrested and we were to call off our hunger-strike until they joined us, as four of us was too small a number to make a resounding fight. We were told that all these men would follow our lead at their trials and Collins had information that they would all be collected into Mountjoy so we would have a strong party. Seán Milroy got us tea baskets and we took food at Limerick Junction, following this up with fruit and several more tea baskets. The sudden break had

unpleasant results for all of us and rather serious ones for two of the party as the Mountjoy doctor found next day. When we reached Dublin we were lodged in Mountjoy Prison Hospital.

About a fortnight later we were transferred to the body of the prison and there found ourselves amongst about forty Volunteer prisoners, the great majority of whom were from Clare. They included Austin Stack, Seán Treacy, Fionán Lynch from Kerry, Tom Ashe from Dublin (though also a Kerryman), Joe McDonagh from Dublin, J.J. Walsh from Dublin (or Cork). We had refused to wear prison clothes and the others followed suit, though the clothes were forced on some men from Galway.

We found it was essential to discuss and agree on a programme, so we carried on a pretence of breaking firewood in the wood-yard. Under cover of this and with the connivance of most of the warders, a series of demands were drawn up which would define the status of political prisoners. We elected Austin Stack as Commandant, and he was empowered to present these demands to the Governor on our behalf. During this interval I had pencilled a number of copies of the Morse Code on toilet paper and distributed them amongst the prisoners with a view to their learning it and being able to send and read messages on the prison hot-water pipes. These pipes ran through each cell and I found that a sharp tap on them anywhere could be heard right through our wing.

When everything was ready we were impatient to start, but we found Stack very hard to move. Possibly he was waiting for more prisoners, but actually many of us were

nervous about the holding powers of big numbers in a long hunger-strike and we weren't anxious for any more. Nothing would move him, however, and we could only hope for some incident which would start a "blow-up". It came quickly.

One day the Chief Warder came into the wood-yard just as I left my cubicle to speak to another prisoner. He ordered me back very truculently and I promptly refused. He said he'd make me go back and he walked towards me in a threatening fashion. I picked up a hatchet and invited him to come along. He retreated at once and gave orders that we were all to be locked in our cells. As we marched in shouting and singing it was obvious that the "blow-up" had come and calls went round to smash up the cells. A wild uproar broke out in our wing of the prison as windows, bedboards, shelves &c. were smashed to the accompaniment of shouting, singing and cheering. Dinner was brought round by the warders and "old lags", but the tins were either refused or pitched out into the corridor. We learned later that Stack did not approve of our methods and would not break anything in his cell. This didn't worry us, as things had gone too far now to be stopped and the hunger-strike was on. As far as I can remember, the date was September 20th (1917).

Some time that evening our cells were invaded by warders and all blankets and bedding were removed. The nights were very cold and this was a bad blow, but it only annoyed the prisoners, which was good for morale. Those of us who had retained our own clothes weren't too badly off, as we had overcoats. A Galwayman named Miko Fleming, who was in the next cell to mine, had nothing but a shirt and trousers, as he had torn his prison coat

and vest to pieces. He talked to me through our broken windows and I learned he was miserable from the cold. I searched round the wreckage in my cell until I found a nail and with this and a piece of board I started picking out the mortar round a brick in the wall dividing our cells. I started work about 8 p.m. and at midnight I had broken a hole through to Fleming large enough to enable me to pass my overcoat through to him.

The noise we made was heard outside the prison walls and a crowd collected on the canal bank to whom we were able to convey news by shouting. Some of the warders were regular messengers to Collins and a full report quickly got into the newspapers. For three days we were left more or less alone and hunger and cold calmed down the noise, but seemed to have no effect on the men's spirits as they all remained as gay and aggressive as on the first day. Then forcible feeding commenced and the gaiety was replaced by bitterness and truculence. We were carried down by force twice a day, strapped into a chair, gagged (to keep our mouths open) and a stomach pump tube forced down our throats. Liquid food was then poured (or pumped) down. It was an unpleasant experience, but as a compensation, our bedding was returned and we could get warm again. I was removed to a dark underground cell with two or three others and kept there for a few days. No reason was given. When we came up we learned that Tom Ashe had died and that there was wild excitement in the city with thousands of people massed around the prison. We were pretty certain we were winning, but we were taken completely by surprise when the Governor came down to Stack and told him our demands were granted. We were to be kept separately from

all ordinary prisoners with the right to wear our own clothes, write and receive letters, have numerous visits, receive parcels of food, etc., get a special standard of food and, most importantly (from the point of view of training, organising and planning) we could associate all day and until 10 p.m. None of the details mattered though - the supreme fact was that we had won our fight and forced the British to establish a political prisoner status. This was bound to have a terrific effect on the morale of Volunteers all over the country.

The Ashe inquest was now held and full use was made of it by G.H.Q. and Sinn Féin as a propaganda platform. Ashe was given a national funeral which was probably the biggest and most impressive demonstration so far in our movement.

We found no particular ill effects from the hunger-strike, but I made the astonishing discovery that I had lost 21 lbs weight in the 10 days, despite the forcible feeding.

All through October and for about half of November we "lived in luxury" in Mountjoy Prison, thoroughly enjoying the classes and games with which we filled in our time. We were of course considering the next step to keep up the pressure, but as everything we demanded had been agreed to we were rather at a loss. Striking for release was ruled out, as this would be more for ourselves than for a principle, and we didn't think it would awake the same support amongst the public as the fight for a status.

All this time public drilling was going on all over the country and the numbers of arrests for it had now

run into hundreds mostly confined in Cork and Mountjoy (where they were kept separately from us).

About the middle of November we were transferred to Dundalk Prison where we found some of our Mountjoy privileges were withdrawn. In actual fact, they were unimportant, but they gave us the excuse we sought and we immediately went on hunger-strike again. The British took a different line this time and all the prisoners in Dundalk were released under the "Cat and Mouse Act" after fasts varying from four to six days. I got out after five days. The prisoners in Mountjoy and Cork also struck and they were all released.

When I got home I proceeded to pick up the threads without delay. I found the rather nervous enthusiasm of six months previously which was anxious to do something but was frightened of consequences had almost completely disappeared - in Clare anyway. Everywhere I found an urge to do something and damn the consequences.

At the end of January my brother, Paddy, was sent by G.H.Q. to S. Armagh to take charge of Volunteers there during the election. I was sent after him with about 100 Volunteers from Clare and we provided protection for meetings during the election and at the booths on polling day.

There was much agrarian discontent in Clare and we decided to "Cash in" on this. Cattle drives became very popular and all over the county Volunteers took part in them as organised units. The Government reacted violently and excitement grew as fights developed between Volunteers and R.I.C. Woods were being cut down near

O'Callaghan's Mills to provide props for the trenches in France. The local Volunteers prevented this and about 30 of them were arrested. They hunger-struck in Limerick Jail, but they were brought to Ennis Courthouse for trial (Feb. 8th). I was in the gallery with a number of other Volunteers and when the Court opened we "raised Cain". The prisoners joined in and the din was so great that neither the Resident Magistrate nor the police officers could make themselves heard. The R.I.C. armed escort looked completely bewildered and, seeing an opportunity, I gestured to the men in the dock to get out of it. For a moment they just stared, but they caught on, and climbing up they jumped on and through the R.I.C., breaking clean away and out of the courthouse. The R.I.C. were so "flummoxed" that they made no attempt to follow and all the men went free. This particular episode was valuable as it brought much ridicule on the Government. It is worth recording that it was entirely unpremeditated.

I was again arrested on Feb. 26th and about the same time the British issued a proclamation declaring Clare a military area.

I was removed to Dundalk Jail where I was joined by Seán Treacy and Seamus O'Neill from Tipperary. We found we were back under the regime against which we had already struck in Dundalk in the previous November, so we went on hunger-strike at once. Ten days later we were visited by Austin Stack late at night with instructions to call off the strike as agreement had been reached in Dublin on conditions for prisoners. Strikes in Mountjoy and Cork were also called off.

After the hunger-strike prisoners were brought in

from all over the country up to a total of 100. They included Ernest Blythe, Diarmuid Lynch, Oscar Traynor, Paddy Sweeney, Dick McKee and Frank Henderson.

I was elected Commandant by the men, but I had very little to do as the Governor made it a point to keep clear of us and we ran our classes and drills without interference.

Diarmuid Lynch was Sinn Féin Director of Elections and also Director of the Belfast Boycott. He had annoyed the British quite a lot and they decided the handiest way to get rid of him was to deport him to America, of which country he was a citizen. He was engaged to be married to a Miss Quinn of Dublin and he at once applied for release on parole to get married so that his wife would accompany him to America. He was met with a peremptory refusal and a request for permission to get married in prison was also refused. There was no hope of a passport for Miss Quinn, as only American citizens could enter America at the time. If she were married to Diarmuid Lynch she automatically acquired citizenship - hence the urgency. If the marriage did not take place it would be years before they even met.

Steps were taken to meet the situation and one day Diarmuid Lynch, Frank Thornton and I were called out for a visit from friends. The friends were Miss Quinn and her sister accompanied by a priest. The visiting room was divided by a sort of counter, at one side of which our visitors stood and we on the other. The warder stood near the door and as usual in Dundalk, he looked away most of the time. The priest conducted what appeared to be a low-toned conversation with Diarmuid and Miss Quinn and

they made occasional monosyllabic replies while the sister and I chatted "brightly" and loudly about everything and anything. When the priest had finished he produced a document which the second Miss Quinn and I signed certifying that we had witnessed the marriage of Diarmuid Lynch and ..... Quinn.

We finished our visit and the priest left with the girls and took the necessary steps to have the marriage legally registered. There was, of course, a storm in official circles but the country had another good laugh at how the Government had been outwitted. Diarmuid was removed next day on his way to America where he was joined some weeks later by his wife.

Most of the prisoners in Dundalk were in for short terms and our members dwindled gradually until they reached about 25 (after three or four months). We were then removed to Belfast Jail where we found about 150 prisoners already installed with Austin Stack as Commandant. Others there were Kevin O'Higgins, Eoin O'Duffy, Jim Burke.

At this time, most of the energies of the Volunteers and Sinn Féin were directed to the campaign against conscription. It was of course intended to resist this Act by force if it were put into operation. We had been allotted our part and in Dundalk we had an escape plan ready. In Belfast Jail we just fitted into the plans already prepared for there. The end of the war on November 11th altered the situation, but plans for escape remained and were being developed.

The "Spanish 'Flu" which swept Europe at the end

of the war reached us and brought down most of us. I spent weeks in the prison hospital until Christmas Eve when, to my astonishment, I was released. I wasn't in very good form and travel would have been difficult, so I was collected by our friends the Bradys and kept at their home in Belfast for about a week.

Shortly after coming home I met Seán Treacy in Limerick (early January 1919) and we had a long discussion on the general situation. We came to one definite conclusion - that we had had more than enough of prison and that we were not going back there again. Next time an attempt was made to arrest us we would fight and consequently we would always be armed in future. Seán pointed out that this was in effect a declaration of war on the British Empire and he laughingly suggested an examination of our financial resources. The examination disclosed that I had 1s. 6d. and he had 4d. and this was in fact the total amount of money we controlled. (All British propagandists for over two years had asserted over and over again that we were all provided with large sums from "German gold").

While I was away in prison I found that because of differences with G.H.Q. my brother, Paddy, had resigned Brigadiership. Clare was now divided into three brigades and I had been appointed O/C. East Clare Brigade.

I found that the end of the war and the removal of the anti-conscription stimulus had taken much of the "kick" out of the Volunteers, and it was difficult to hold them together. On paper we had large numbers, but it was unusual if more than 25% of these reported for any parade. In many places no organised unit remained and

all I could contact were two or three individuals. Obviously this needed action and I got going without delay. I visited every parish in East Clare in a few weeks, held meetings or parades and got a unit established in every parish. Unfortunately I was still not very well and I fell off a bicycle in some sort of a weak fit near Scariff one night and got badly cut. This put me out of action for a while, but it also probably gave me a needed chance to pull up after the 'flu.

With the exception of a few revolvers and some shotguns arms were practically non-existent in my Brigade and I gave instructions that all privately held arms were to be collected. Most of these were in Unionist houses and their collection involved widespread raids. Except for a few shots which hit nobody they were carried out quietly and with success. This helped morale, as I anticipated.

I had about 25 companies now organised and by careful timing I found I could drill about four units each night. This enabled me to see every company once a week and as a consequence I not alone knew the unit and the district but I became intimately acquainted with individual men. This was valuable knowledge at a later stage.

On April 6th, Limerick Volunteers attempted to rescue Bertie Byrne from an R.I.C. guard in a Limerick hospital. Byrne was fatally wounded and one R.I.C. man was killed. The British proclaimed Byrne's funeral and said they would fire on any military formations. In Limerick at this time a Second Battalion had been organised in opposition to the existing First Battalion which was officered by the men who had surrendered their

arms after the Rising. There was quite a lot of bitterness between the two outfits and neither would march under the command of the other. They apparently compromised on me and I took command of a parade which numbered some thousands. Large parties of British troops with fixed bayonets were drawn up all along the way, but to everybody's surprise, they didn't interfere.

Martial Law was now proclaimed in Limerick and the local Labour organisations decided to fight it with a General Strike. I was asked to act on the Strike Committee and I remained on it until Martial Law was withdrawn in about three weeks and the strike ended.

All through the summer I continued organising and training the men with occasional raids for arms of which we got news. I felt that something desperate would have to be done to secure some rifles as the moral effect of one rifle at the time was greater than that of 100 shotguns. I arranged for a general onslaught on the R.I.C. all over the Brigade for one night. As nothing like this was anticipated it would almost certainly have been successful, but there probably would have been heavy casualties. I did not inform G.H.Q., but two days before the date of the attack I was summoned to Dublin and handled very roughly by Dick Mulcahy who was Chief of Staff. His point was, of course, that the people had to be educated and led gently into open war and what I proposed doing might scare them off. I disagreed and anyway I knew that the R.I.C. rifles would no longer be available for the taking when the open war came. However, I obeyed orders and I called off the operation. I had no idea how he had learned of the intended attack.

On May 13th Seán Treacy and Dan Breen had been wounded in rescuing Seán Hogan at Knocklong. They came along to me a little later accompanied by Seán Hogan and Seamus Robinson and they stayed around East Clare for some weeks. During their stay (as they were casualties) we "soft-pedalled" and any activities which would result in raids by the British were suspended.

I made many trips to Dublin, mostly endeavouring to persuade G.H.Q. to let us have some arms. The only result was a few revolvers occasionally. Neither then nor later did I ever succeed in extracting even one rifle from G.H.Q. This was much resented as we knew that a certain number of rifles were going to Cork. We had the feeling that Collins was using his influence in favour of his own county. We were quite sure that the rifles would be used in Cork, but we were also sure that if we got some of them we could also put them to good use. I learned however that if I had money there were ways and means of getting revolvers and possibly an odd rifle. We had very little money in the East Clare Brigade and we decided on taking some steps to remedy this.

On Armistice Day 1919 I was in Ennis. British soldiers, ex-soldiers and their women folk were demonstrating to celebrate the victorious end of the war and Union Jacks were flying in a few places. We didn't interfere until an English flag appeared on the Co. Infirmary. I went at once to the hospital and demanded an explanation as to why an enemy flag was flown on a hospital owned and maintained by the people of Clare. I learned that it had been done on the Matron's orders.

I pulled down the flag and burned it on the street in the presence of a crowd which had collected.

I anticipated reactions and they came quickly. I went to the Old Ground Hotel and I was talking in the garden with Canon O'Kennedy and some other members of the Clare Sinn Féin Executive when a shrieking and apparently drunken mob of soldiers and civilians arrived. Somebody slammed and bolted the high garden door, but they started to climb over it. I fired three shots over their heads and they disappeared hurriedly. It was, of course, obvious at this stage that official action would follow and I made a "strategic retreat" being guided over various walls until I reached the convent where the nuns kept me until it was dark. Two of the local priests called then in a motor car and I went with them to St. Flannan's College just outside the town. I learned from them that "the hunt was up" and the town was being "combed" for me by military and police.

A day or two later I left St. Flannan's and motored to Cork dressed as a woman, complete with the flowing motoring veil of those days. It must have been an effective disguise as I was ogled by R.I.C. men who held up the car to examine the driver's permit to travel. (The car was owned by Ernest Corbett of Bunratty). I stayed a few days at Healy's in Bandon and, after long discussion as to ways and means of getting to Dublin (I had been summoned up for some meeting), I decided to travel on the ordinary train wearing the very simple disguise of a British officer's cap. As my normal dress at the time consisted of riding breeches, brown boots and leggings, khaki collar and shirt and a trench

coat, the addition of the cap (worn in the British army by one of the Healys) made my dress apparently British. As an additional precaution somebody provided me with glasses.

The Healys drove me to Cork Station where I was saluted by several R.I.C. men, one of whom insisted on finding a seat for me. I had an uneventful journey except for some uneasiness after Mallow where an old gentleman got in accompanied by a young British officer, who, I learned, was his son. As they were both very talkative I foresaw difficulties and I tried to ignore them. They persisted in talking about the war and they were very anxious to know where I had served &c. In desperation I snapped that I had got bad shell-shock and any talk about the war upset me. I appealed to them not to make things hard for me and instantly they were full of the most abject apologies. From that on war and service was taboo in our carriage while they plied me with teas and cigarettes.

Some days later I returned to Clare via the Limerick train using the same disguise. The train was searched twice by R.I.C. who each time apologised to me for disturbing me and backed out at once.

Just before Xmas I raided the G.P.O. in Limerick with a party of about 20 Volunteers and removed about £1,500 which was being sent out to local offices. The raid was carried out late at night. As we needed money for arms we could see no objection to having it provided by the British. I had been fully posted on the internal arrangements by Jack Coughlan who worked there. Men were posted to control all vantage points in the rather

extensive building while the money was collected from the Sorting Office. We came and left on bicycles and all the men were masked while in the Post Office except myself. At this stage we operated mainly under cover, but as I was already very much "wanted" identification didn't matter in my case.

I left for Dublin at once and through Tom Keogh and some other members of the Special Unit I opened negotiations for revolvers. I collected quite a number at rather high prices and dispatched them to Clare by messengers. Later on, I learned that many people, including in particular Oscar Traynor and the Dublin Brigade, resented my activities as I was alleged to be cutting across their sources of supply and "spoiling the market" with high prices. They complained to G.H.Q. and I was informed that they asked that I be ordered out of Dublin. As Keogh and the Special Unit were on bad terms with Traynor and his entourage this only resulted in renewed efforts on my behalf.

G.H.Q. completely disapproved of my raid on Limerick G.P.O. They paraded me and announced that I was being removed from my position as O/C. East Clare Brigade. To make this decision look even more extraordinary, I was informed we could retain the money for the purchase of arms. It was, of course, obvious to me even then that the post office raid was only one of the causes for my removal. The various instances in which we had acted first and sought approval afterwards (or not at all) had apparently created in their minds a feeling that we had been "forcing the pace" and might let them in for a situation

they were not prepared to meet. I was disappointed, but, surprisingly, I felt in no way embittered, and I found myself quite willing to go on working as best I could. I continued picking up arms in Dublin wherever they became available and, as activities developed, I joined in occasionally. I was very closely associated with Peadar Clancy and Dick McKee and when strangers were required for any particular job they would ask me to collect a bunch of country fellows and come along. We joined in a raid on a train one night at Newcomen Bridge and, on another night, we raided the B. & I. Stores on the South Wall for ammunition. I was coming away from this with Peadar Clancy and George Plunkett when we were stopped by two detectives in Marlboro' St. They pulled guns and we did likewise and both parties opened fire. Although we weren't 20 feet apart, nobody was hit on either side. When their magazines were empty the detectives turned and ran round the corner into Talbot St. We followed them, but on finding a large party of armed troops outside Peadar Clancy's shop, we hastily retreated. We stopped a hack and got him to drive us as far as Leeson St. Bridge where we "vamoosed" along the canal bank. Next day we learned that in a similar encounter in Westmoreland St. one of the McGrath brothers had been wounded and one policeman killed. Curfew was imposed after this and, as I didn't know the city well, things were occasionally awkward for me. I left McGilligan's house in Hatch St. one night and caught a tram for Leinster Road where I intended staying the night at Morris's. At Portobello I noticed the tram in front of us was stopped on the bridge and, becoming suspicious, I slipped off and walked up carefully. I saw that

military were searching everybody and just as they finished on the tram they all ran down the canal bank after somebody who didn't halt (probably a drunk). As the bridge was clear for a moment I slipped across and, almost immediately, I heard them back on the bridge again challenging. I walked on but before I got to Leinster Road I heard challenges in front. I learned from a passer-by that everybody was being stopped and searched. He sensed I didn't want to be searched and he advised me to dump "anything" I had and I'd get through all right. This didn't appeal to me as I was not willing to go unarmed any more. He assured me there was no way of getting to Leinster Road except through the cordon and, as it was near curfew hour, I hadn't much time. I thanked him and moved on until I found a little road running up to the right. I followed this until I met a big door in a high wall. From the general direction I estimated that by climbing walls I might be able to get out at the back of Leinster Road. I jumped and swung myself on to the top of the door. The night was very dark and all I could make out were the dim shapes of extensive buildings from which I assumed the place was a factory of some sort. Before I could get down inside, several dogs came charging at me and they raised such a row that I felt they would bring the patrols on Rathmines Road after me. I dropped back outside and found my way into a field running along under the high wall. I found a small shed in it and as curfew was now in force I stayed there shivering until curfew went off in the morning. When daylight came I discovered that my supposed factory was Portobello Barracks and that I had been trying to climb over its back gate, leading probably to the married quarters.

I often stayed at Mrs. Murphy's house "An Grianán" on the North Circular Road. One night George Plunkett, Seán Hogan and I had just gone to bed when troops surrounded the house and broke in the back door. We grabbed our clothes and revolvers, got up through the skylight, crossed over and got down into the house next door. We stayed quietly waiting for two hours until they finished searching "An Grianán". When they left we followed and walked down to Martin Conlon's, where we learned that there had been widespread and mostly unsuccessful raids. Collins had got the list and sent warnings to everybody including me, but the message didn't reach me.

I returned to Clare early in March. My brother, Austin, had been appointed Acting-Brigadier and I found him and the whole Brigade Council very resentful of the G.H.Q. action against me. They were aware of a similar situation having arisen in another Brigade which ended in the Brigade refusing to accept the authority of G.H.Q. and carrying on as an "independent army". This course appealed to them, but to me it meant the beginning of chaos and I wouldn't have it at any price. None of the officers could see how it could be right to destroy British lives and property, but wrong to take British money and use it to put us in a better position to destroy. I declined to argue this but insisted all the time that the decision of G.H.Q. must be loyally accepted. This view prevailed eventually.

We still had only about four rifles in the whole Brigade and we were in the peculiar position that the big British posts which threatened us were outside our Brigade area - Limerick and Ennis. As a consequence they

only came where we could hit them in strong parties against which action was impossible without rifles. Revolvers were quite effective in close work against, for example, a patrol on foot, but worse than useless against strong parties in lorries or armoured vehicles. At this period we didn't possess a single grenade. Practically all outlying police barracks had been evacuated and the R.I.C. were now concentrated in large groups in a few centres such as Tulla, Scariff, Killaloe and Sixmilebridge.

When G.H.Q. so directed we burned all vacated R.I.C. barracks. The mail trains were held up regularly and all official British correspondence removed. A number of ambushes were laid near Tulla, on the Scariff-Killaloe road, and at other points, but the expected parties failed to appear. As our armament usually consisted of two rifles, four shotguns and revolvers, it may have been just as well.

In May, we arranged for an attack on Sixmilebridge Barracks. The plan was to blow a breach in the wall with gelignite and also to attack the roof with percussion grenades. If we breached the wall we counted on going in behind grenades - if we didn't, we could hole the roof with the grenades, pitch in petrol and set it on fire by throwing flaming bundles of sacking into it. None of us had any experience or knowledge of the use of high explosives, so I called in Ernie O'Malley who was in Mid Clare at the time. He proceeded to prepare a mine at Cratloe on the afternoon of the proposed attack. The grenades had been promised by G.H.Q. and I had sent a messenger to Dublin for them some days previously. Under O'Malley's direction a number of

us spent hours softening and moulding gelignite with our hands and fitting it into a long shallow wooden box which was thickly coated on the inside with adhesive clay. Before the job was finished we all got violently ill, including O'Malley, who then remembered that he should have warned us about the danger of poisoning from gelignite fumes. The whole party was in a state of collapse and quite obviously incapable of attacking anything. The most serious aspect was the fact that the mine had not been finished nor fused and with O'Malley out of action we had nobody capable of doing it. About 6 p.m. my messenger returned from Dublin without the bombs and reporting that none were yet ready. This of course made the project impossible and it was called off.

Practically all privately held arms in the Brigade area had now been collected, but in a few remaining "awkward" cases I accompanied the local men to get them in. The R.I.C. Sergeant in Scariff had a very fine gun of which he was particularly proud. He was very aggressive and the Scariff Volunteers "ached" to get his gun, but as his married quarters were part of the barracks occupied by 30 or 40 R.I.C. men, they could see no way of getting at it. They appealed to me and I again resorted to my British officer cap disguise. I cycled to his door just after dark, passing about 20 R.I.C. talking in groups round the barracks. I knocked and when the door was opened I asked for the Sergeant. He got up from the kitchen fire and stood to attention. I unrolled some papers and read out his name and his possession of a D.B. shotgun. He agreed this was correct and I informed him

I was the Ordnance Officer from Tulla out checking arms and I wanted to see his to check the particulars. He collected it in separate pieces from different parts of the house and handed it to me. During this, another of our men had come up to the door and I turned and called sharply "Sergeant". He replied: "Sir" and clicked his heels. I handed him the gun and he pretended to examine it as the R.I.C. outside the barracks could see us, although indistinctly in the poor light. I turned back to the old Sergeant and told him I was taking his gun to the Ordnance Store in Tulla for a few days, but I would send it back again. He assured me it was quite all right and we parted on the best of terms.

The whole country-side knew what happened by the following night and the incident caused wild hilarity. The domineering attitude of the Sergeant was well known as were his many boasts that the "..... I.R.A." would never lay hands on his fine gun.

The British adopted a plan of sending out strong detachments at night and dropping them at strategic points on the roads. Sometimes they moved on bicycles but more often they came in lorries which left them and drove on. In either case they remained absolutely silent along the side of the road waiting for anything which might turn up. In our area they had very little success, but they made things awkward and the uncertainty the practice caused meant that when moving at night we had to be always ready for instant action. My general movements were pretty well known to my own men and if lorries had been heard or cyclists

seen on any road at night, I was always stopped by somebody and warned. Sometimes the local Volunteers weren't expecting me and then it was a case of "the quick or the dead". One morning about 2 a.m. I was cycling to Scariff along the main road from Tulla. Just before we reached Tuamgraney I heard what sounded like the clink of a chain. I slowed up and asked Seán Griffey, who was with me, if he had heard it. He thought it was caused by two goats chained together, but I remained very much on the alert and I must have been subconsciously expecting the sharp challenge which came out of the darkness. I snapped at Griffey: "Into the field. Bring your bicycle". We literally flung ourselves at the bank along the side of the road and tumbled over it dragging the bicycles with us. In the field we jumped on the bicycles and pedalled as hard as we could away from the road. A few shots were fired, but we were hopeless targets as it was quite impossible to see us. We couldn't see the fence bounding the field either and we discovered it by crashing into it and being pitched right over it. When we recovered ourselves we realised to our astonishment that we were not being pursued. We left our bicycles and a careful reconnaissance revealed that a very large party of cavalry was halted on the road and the fact that the men were holding their own horses had saved us from pursuit. We waited until the troops moved off and we then continued our journey. In Scariff we learned that the cavalry party numbered about 70 and that they were moving from Ballinasloe to Limerick.

Later in the summer I was cycling along the Limerick-Ennis road near Cratloe at about 3 a.m. when

I got a faint scent of cigarette smoke. We stopped at once, as peaceful citizens were very unlikely to be out smoking at that hour. Two of us moved quietly up along inside the fence until we heard low voices. Further investigation disclosed a large party of troops sitting on the side of the road beside their bicycles. As we had a local man with us we had no difficulty in circling them through the fields and regaining the road further on.

Probably my narrowest escape arose from too many precautions against accidental shootings. I had acquired a German parabellum pistol which created much interest amongst my comrades. One night while it was being examined it went off and the bullet knocked over a chair on which one of our most prominent men was seated. Fortunately, he wasn't hit, but the shock made me determined on being ultra cautious with this weapon. Next day I went home to see my mother and sister and while having tea I unloaded the pistol and left the magazine on the table beside me. There had been heavy rain, and after tea I went out on the road to see what the weather prospects were like as the locality was very dangerous and I was anxious to get away. I walked up the road and just as I turned back I met a man and a girl on horseback. I took no particular notice of them, as it was a common sight there, but just as I had passed the man said: "Excuse me". I stopped and looked back to find myself staring at the muzzle of a Webley revolver. I was dressed as usual in riding breeches and leggings and as I had my coat open and my hands in my breeches pockets, I had exposed not alone the lanyard, but the pistol butt in a

holster on my belt. I only realised then that the pistol was useless as I had left its magazine on the tea table. The military field boots worn by the rider and the Service revolver showed me that I was up against a British officer. The girl walked her horse away and the officer questioned sharply: "Who are you?". I must have hesitated as I had to consider various possibilities before replying - running was out of the question as I was in the middle of the road and the gun was not more than six feet from me. I couldn't get at the gun as he kept it on the far side of the horse's neck - but, judging by the results, I apparently answered at once. I replied: "I'm a policeman" and, as he must have known my home and suspected my identity, I added "I'm on duty here watching that house". He was somewhat disconcerted and in a slightly less snappy tone he said: "I presume you have a permit for that gun". I was anxious to give him no time to think of the absurdity of a plain-clothes policeman advertising himself by publicly displaying a gun and snapped back: "Why the hell should I have a permit? I told you I'm a policeman on duty. You're only attracting attention to me". Very, very slowly the muzzle of his revolver dropped and he mumbled "I-I-I thought you were somebody else", but he stayed staring at me. I turned and walked quickly away. I knew he was still uncertain, but I also knew that he was unlikely to shoot without a further challenge and every step was bringing me nearer to a turn which would give me cover. I reached the turn safely and then I heard his horse being walked off. I recovered the pistol magazine and I decided to hold him up on the way back to get his gun. Unlike him, however, I didn't want

to risk the girl"s life, so I decided to get a rifle which would put him at such a disadvantage that shooting would be very unlikely. I crossed some fields and borrowed a rifle from Frank Ryan, but when I returned, I learned from boys on the road that my quarry had come back and questioned them about me. He had then left at a gallop in the direction of the large military camp at Ballycannon which was less than a mile away. I promptly "hit the breeze" on getting this news. Next day, I learned that a large party of troops had arrived and searched the house and district about a quarter of an hour after I had left. This was the last time I ever carried an empty gun - accidents or no accidents.

I had very close contacts with the West Limerick Brigadier, Seán Finn, and his staff, and we constantly were in each other"s areas. I had heard from him that the East Limerick Brigade was attacking Kilmallock R.I.C. Barracks and I would be welcome if I cared to come along. On May 27th I crossed the Shannon from Cratloe and Finn met me at Pallaskenry. We stayed around there that night and the following evening with two or three others we went on to Kilmallock where we joined up with the East Limerick party in a field outside the town. They were led by an old prison comrade of mine, Tomás Malone of Tyrrellspass, under his nom-de-guerre of Seán Forde. Malone tried to force me into taking charge of one of the attacking parties, but I positively refused as I was a complete stranger to the men and I felt this would be unfair to them. He told me then that the success of the whole operation depended on keeping a particular window clear as this window covered the roof from which he intended throwing percussion grenades on to the barrack

roof. Somewhere he had heard that I had a German sniper's rifle firing high-powered bullets and he looked on the arrival of this rifle as "a gift from God". He assumed (correctly, as it transpired) that these bullets would pierce steel shutters and so prevent any firing at him as he worked on the roof. I of course agreed to take on this "chore" and I joined a party under Jack McCarthy which took up position in the windows of a house directly in front of the barracks.

Fire was opened about midnight and I confined my attentions to the dangerous window, with an occasional shot at the windows near it. Forde appeared on his roof and pitched his grenades on to the barrack roof where they exploded and tore a hole. Into this he flung opened cans of petrol following it up with blazing tow which at once set the roof on fire. No shots had come from the windows which threatened Forde for some time and when the flames reached this room we saw the reason - the light of the fire shone through a number of bullet holes in the steel shutters. The room must have become untenable very quickly.

The fire spread across the roof first and then began working its way down, but the R.I.C. showed no sign of surrendering. When the flames drove them from one room they fought from the next and so all the way down and then along the ground floor of the barracks. Once my particular job had been done I husbanded my ammunition and lay in my window just watching the fight. At one period I apparently fell asleep and was awakened by a crash of glass on to me when bullets finished the upper part of the window. After dawn (probably about 4 a.m.) I left my position and crossed the street to see

what was happening. I was met by Liam Scully who asked if I had any ammunition left. I replied in the affirmative and he asked if I would come round to the back and fire on the steel-shuttered windows of an annexe to the barracks while he worked in two grenades which he had in his hands. This discussion took place in the middle of the street in full view of the burning barracks, but as all shooting from there had ceased precautions did not seem to be necessary. Seán Finn and the others of our party were waiting for me and I asked Scully to wait until I explained our intention to them. I turned to go but I hadn't taken a full step when he fell. I picked him up and moved him to the side of the street where we found he had been shot through the centre of his neck. While we were talking I had stood between him and the barracks so the shot was probably aimed at my back. Later it was learned that the Sergeant had come in through a passage in the burning building to a window in front and had fired at the first person he saw on the street. We got a priest and doctor for Scully and the doctor said the case was hopeless. Seán Forde called off the operation at this stage and asked us to take Scully in our car. He was placed on a stretcher which was laid on the tops of the seats (the car was open). He didn't recover consciousness and he died in the car about an hour later.

As we passed through a village a few miles from Kilmallock men and women rushed out of their houses and cheered us. They had probably been up all night as they were within sight and sound of the fight. We continued across Co. Limerick until we came to the

vicinity of Newcastlewest. There we left the car and took Scully's body on our shoulders across some hills and left it in a house. We continued to Father Dick McCarthy's house in Ballyhahill where, as always, we were warmly welcomed. I had gone for over 48 hours without sleep (except for what I got during the fight) and the others were little better off, so immediately we sat down we all fell asleep and we had to be waked up for breakfast. After breakfast we got to bed somehow and slept until the following day.

On my return to Clare I learned that an R.I.C. man named Buckley from Newmarket-on-Fergus Barracks was anxious to see me. Collins had sent us this man's name, so I had been expecting to hear from him. A meeting was arranged and Buckley told me he wanted to get out of the R.I.C. and would like to do something helpful before he left. He told me that the window over the front door of the barracks was never bolted and if we got in through it quietly we could easily surprise the garrison late at night. A few nights later, about six of us came along with a ladder which had both ends wrapped in sacks. Outside the village we removed our shoes, came quietly up to the barracks and planted our ladder (at about 1 a.m.). We had unfortunately picked on a Sunday night when a constant stream of cars passed returning from Kilkee to Limerick. There was no means of knowing whether any particular car contained military until it passed, so we were disturbed several times. However, I got up the ladder and got the window open, but found the shutters inside closed and barred. I tried to force the bar with a knife, but I couldn't move it. A dog rushed into the

room barking and he was followed by a policeman who spoke to him and flashed a light on the window. I crouched down until he left the room and then tried again. All the time I could hear cars approaching while my companions whispered appeals to come down and take cover. Just as the cars entered the street I slid down and we dashed across the road with the ladder and got over a wall. (They were in fact military cars this time). I sent a local man then to Buckley's house (where he lived in married quarters) and told him what had happened. He said it was a pure chance that the shutters were bolted as he had never seen it happen before, but it would be quite impossible to move the bar from the outside and we would have to postpone the attempt. We had been suspicious of him up to this and we were still not very happy about him, but nothing would be lost by waiting, so we went away.

Two or three nights later we returned (on June 13th) and forced a door as arranged with him. I sent my three or four companions to capture the guard and two men in bed and I went along to the Sergeant's quarters myself. On Buckley's plan I found his room easily and the light of my torch on his face waked him. He ignored an order to put up his hands and when I repeated it he snatched a revolver from a table beside him and levelled it at me. I found it impossible to fire at a man in bed, so I took a chance and hit his gun hard with my own. I was lucky and his gun rolled on to the floor. After this he surrendered. I had been warned that he was tough and he certainly was.

We spent about two hours in the barracks searching it thoroughly and collecting some valuable

intelligence instructions and reports. Our main capture was, of course, the armament which consisted of six rifles, six revolvers and ammunition. Before we left we made tea. We left the garrison tied up and when the Sergeant was freed he cut his throat.

Local elections were held at this time all over the country. I was nominated for the Clare Co. Council and was elected unopposed. At the first meeting of the new Co. Council I was elected Chairman.

Liam Lynch had captured a British Brigadier General named Lucas near Fermoy. Early in July Seán Finn and some of his men crossed the Shannon near Bunratty and handed over Lucas to me for "safe keeping". This was a frightful imposition, but they promised it was only for a few days, so I couldn't refuse. We kept Lucas for some weeks in Cratloe (at Ernest Corbett's) in Clonmoney (at Brennan's), at Tullyvarriga (now the Shannon Airport), at Hastings' and in Doonass at Hartigan's. His presence completely immobilised us as we daren't do anything which would involve raiding by the British. In addition, he was an expensive luxury as he drank a bottle of whiskey every day which I hated like hell to pay for. I was very sorry for him and more so for his young wife in England, who was very ill partly after a baby, but mostly, I imagine, from shock. Through Jack Coughlan, who worked in Limerick Post Office, I arranged a system whereby Lucas wrote to his wife and got a letter from her every day. I put him on his honour that he would make no use of this facility to harm us or to escape and I gave him his letters unopened. He could understand being able to send letters, but receiving them impressed him

very much with the machine we appeared to control. He was keen on exercise and he spent most of his day saving hay, while he played bridge every night until about 2 a.m.

Getting some signs of activity, we moved suddenly to Doonass and we only escaped being caught in a general "round up" by a few hours. They had no knowledge of Lucas being in the district, but that wouldn't have made any difference if we hadn't moved.

I kept appealing to G.H.Q. to get rid of our prisoner but all I got was news that East Limerick would take him over soon. In Doonass the same routine held and the hold-up of the Brigade continued. Hartigan's house was on the bank of the Shannon and the local men offered to take Lucas "stroke-hauling" for salmon some night if he wished. This was apparently poaching and his strait-laced English mentality was at first horrified at the suggestion. He raised it with me again, however, and he seemed keenly interested but uneasy at the possibility of being caught poaching. I gave him positive assurances against this and eventually he decided to risk it. Late at night we got into a boat and Seán Carroll of Castleconnell and some of his men pulled us out into the middle of the rapids. Both banks of the river were of course strongly guarded. The boat was held in the strong current for about two hours while Lucas cast for salmon, but without result. Every now and then he expressed anxiety as to the possibility of the river bailiffs discovering us, but Carroll reassured him. When we got back Lucas said he could understand our feeling of security from police interference as he presumed we had taken the necessary

precautions, but he would like to know why "Seán" (the only name he had for Carroll) was so certain that we were safe from interference from the bailiffs. I didn't know, but I promised to find out the next day. I got the information and passed it on to Lucas. "Seán" was the Head Bailiff. This seemed to be about the most astonishing bit of information Lucas had ever got.

We had brought Lucas to Doonass on a promise to have him taken over by East Limerick. After another week's appeals they asked us to bring him to Caherconlish which would be more convenient for them. We took the road again one night in a horse and trap escorted by cyclists, but when we reached Caherconlish no arrangements had been made. The local Commandant, Dick O'Connell, put us into the doctor's house near the village (the family were away in Kilkee) and asked us to stay for a few days. We had realised by now, of course, that nobody wanted Lucas, as his presence held up all activities. We also knew that G.H.Q. and the Dáil Government were very embarrassed by him. Threats had been made publicly that he would be held against other prisoners and obviously we couldn't play this game indefinitely against the British. When a Dublin visitor commented: "Why the hell doesn't he escape?", I saw the solution of the difficulty.

We spent three days in Caherconlish and then moved to a vacant house near Herbertstown, Bruff. We took Lucas for long walks across country and I noted with satisfaction that he studied the topography carefully from every hilltop. Up to this we had always left a man on duty outside his bedroom window at night

and now when the room was on the ground floor we withdrew this man. At first nothing happened (he may have suspected a trap), but when we got up on the second morning our prisoner was gone. Later, we learned he had gone straight across country until he met the main Limerick-Tipperary road where he waited until lorries came along. He hailed them and was picked up and a few minutes later they ran into an ambush laid by Dan Breen. Lucas was wounded there, but only slightly.

When I got free of Lucas a good deal of time had to be given to Co. Council work. We realised it was now an all-out fight and the Volunteers were only one arm of it. The Council had formally repudiated the authority of the English Local Government Department and declared allegiance to the Dáil. Detailed arrangements were made for the collection of rates by the Volunteers and their transfer to trustees. Poundage was to be paid to the three Brigades instead of to the existing Rate Collectors who were afraid to act - they were, of course, nearly all fairly old men and we didn't press them. As the Council was proclaimed an illegal body its meetings would all have to be held in secret.

Months of appeals to G.H.Q. for percussion bombs to enable us to attack an R.I.C. Barracks had brought no result. Early in September they sent me a dozen large ordinary time bombs and I decided to make an attempt on Scariff Barracks with these. I reckoned that if they could be held on the roof for a few seconds they would blow a hole through which I could set the building on fire and I evolved a simple scheme

for this.

On September 18th all roads to Scariff were blocked at many points at about 10 p.m. We took up position around the barracks and with four or five others I entered a house separated by a laneway from the barracks. Just as we went in the back door I heard a shot and then the sound of running feet. I ran through the house and out the front door to find a big crowd of R.I.C. (at least 30 men) turning down the laneway to the back entrance of the barracks. The front door was permanently closed with sandbags and barbed wire. One of our men had fired an accidental shot and the police sensed what was happening and ran for their posts. Nothing I could do would stop the rush, but I fired two or three shots at them, wounding two men badly.

We broke a hole through the roof of the house we had occupied and brought up our grenades and petrol. A light rope had been tied around the neck of each grenade under the firing pin and lever. I hurled the heavy bomb across the laneway and over the barrack roof letting it drop over the ridge. I had of course pulled the firing pin before throwing it. I held on to my end of the rope, but I stooped inside my own "funkhole" hoping for protection from bomb splinters. The fuses were for five seconds, but when no explosion came after a wait of a minute I let it go and tried another, again without result. I threw eleven bombs but none exploded and I then tried throwing petrol on to the barrack roof and setting it on fire. It blazed for a minute and then died down, but though repeated until all our petrol was used up, no damage was done to the roof. We had no other means of forcing an

entrance so we withdrew.

The failure of the bombs was reported to G.H.Q. and they replied that we mustn't have detonated them properly. They asked if one could be returned for examination and we sent up our only remaining specimen. They wrote to say the examination had disclosed that the striking pin had been made too short on all this lot and the detonator couldn't be exploded. Consequently the bombs were useless. They were very sorry, but we had lost Scariff. The barracks was evacuated two days later.

On the day following the Scariff attack strong reinforcements arrived for the police accompanied by two armoured cars. The garrison as usual threatened reprisals and we decided to try some checking action. The local town hall was a pretty sure mark as it was a mainly wooden building. I sent messages to 8 or 10 men to meet me near the town hall after dark, but earlier movements by Black and Tans and armoured cars made it impossible for these to get across the river and join me. When I arrived with my brother, Paddy, and Paddy McDonnell, a number of Black and Tans were already in the town hall. It is a long one-storey building and we could see them moving around inside from our position. It has a line of windows all long its front, but there is neither door nor window in the back or sides, so the party of Black and Tans were nicely placed for a bad fright. We had apparently arrived just as petrol had been spilled over several sections of the floor, as within a few minutes, flames appeared in different parts of the hall. There was no point in waiting for the others of our party and we fired five

or six shots through the windows of the hall driving the police instantly on to the floor. They were now faced with the position that the hall was on fire and there was no way out except straight against the fire of our rifles. They did the only thing possible - keeping flat on the floor (we were on a hill about 100 yards away and we could almost fire on to the floor through the windows) they crept around and beat out the fire. We dropped an occasional bullet through the windows to make matters more complicated, but, as always, we had to be very sparing with our ammunition. We intended crossing the bridge to look for the others, but just as we left our position an armoured car arrived on the bridge and fired Verey lights. We were only 50 or 60 yards from the car in the open field and as our only chance, we dropped flat and lay perfectly still. The car party opened fire across where we lay with a machine gun, but as the bullets were clearing us, we concluded we weren't seen. When the light and the firing died down for a moment we sprinted for a low loose wall, jumped it and took cover behind it. The Verey lights and machine gun fire continued for some time, but it was wild firing and our only real danger was from splinters of stone broken by bullets off our protecting wall. We didn't reply to the fire as our rifle bullets would have been useless against the armour plating of the car. The fire in the Town Hall had been completely extinguished and the Black and Tans had sneaked out under the protection of the "barrage" from the car. Having done its job the car moved away up the street and we walked off.

This very small incident was given prominence out of all proportion to its importance, probably because it was one of the few cases where Black and Tans were caught in the act of reprisals, attacked and driven off. Very little damage had been done to the Town Hall - a few holes burned in the floor and some broken windows.

A week later (Sept. 25th) I took a small party to Broadford after an R.I.C. patrol in the village. We remained in ambush for some time, but no patrol appeared, and then we walked down the village street to look around. I walked in front with James Hogan (Professor in Cork), and just below the barracks we met two men. It was very dark, but they stepped in front of us and peered into our faces. As they did I saw a reflection of light from a window glinting on the peak of one of their caps and I realised they were R.I.C. men. I pulled a gun at once and fired at one of them and James Hogan followed suit. Both men turned and ran down the street. We followed until an over-enthusiastic youth in our party started blazing after them with a shotgun from behind us. We were in much more danger from him than the men he was firing at. We learned next day that one of the policemen had died of a wound.

On September 29th, six of us left Bodyke in the afternoon and crossed over the mountains into Kilbane. We continued from there and reached O'Brien's Bridge about 8 p.m. We searched the street for an R.I.C. party which was usually active at that hour, but we found no sign of them. One of our lot (Jack Ryan, who was local) suggested that they might have

finished up in a certain publichouse. We parked our rifles outside and I pushed in the door armed with a revolver. As I did, two R.I.C. men swung round from the counter and faced me. I fired at once and there was a burst of firing and I found my right arm numb. We retreated, collected our rifles and moved out of the village. I couldn't use my right hand and I could not understand what had happened it. Our way led along beside the Shannon for some distance and it was only when I proceeded to walk straight into the water that the others realised I couldn't see. It was then obvious that something had happened to me and an examination disclosed that all my clothes on my right side were covered with blood. I wasn't very clear about things at this stage and I couldn't walk without help. The wound was traced to my right forearm and they took me across some fields to a friendly house where the wound was washed and bandaged tightly in the hope that this would stop the rather heavy flow of blood. A number of lorries of troops had been stopped in the village of Bridgetown about a mile away and they had apparently heard the shooting as they arrived in a few minutes. A general search was a certainty and we had to leave at once. I was given my first (and last) glass of whiskey and it certainly shook me up. My head cleared at once and I stood up ready to move off. My arm was put in a sling and we set forth.

There was considerable activity on the roads and we had to keep clear of them with the result that we had to make many long detours. Crossing close country at night is a difficult business at the best

of times, but for a party burthened by a wounded man it's just plain hell. My arm hurt quite a lot and the blood continued to drip, so a halt was called at a friendly house in Kilbane about 1 a.m. Jack Ryan told the very nervous man and his wife that I had fallen off a fence and hurt my arm and they'd like a cup of tea for me. While the tea was being prepared the wound was examined and, just as the bandage was being unwrapped the man of the house came across to look. The sight of all the blood shocked him and after one horrified look he turned and ran up the stairs which led directly from the kitchen. He reappeared in a minute and came down with an earthenware jar in his arms. A broad grin appeared on the faces of my comrades as they looked forward with relish to something to help them on their way. Our host solemnly placed the jar on the table, pulled out the cork, tilted the jar against his cupped palms and dashed what he got in my face. It was holy water.

Whether from the holy water or from the tea, I felt better, and we continued our trek. Somewhere around dawn we reached the top of the mountains and shortly afterwards three of the party dropped out unable to continue any further. The remaining three of us kept going until we reached P.J. Hogan's house near Bodyke about 6 a.m. We had walked continuously for about 15 hours.

During the morning Dr. Holmes of Scariff came to see me and he found my arm was broken. It was terribly swollen and painful and he found it impossible to probe it - with unfortunate consequences later. Nervous energy of some sort had kept me going all

night, but when we stopped I collapsed and found myself quite helpless.

When the daily papers arrived we learned that two R.I.C. men fired at in O'Brien's Bridge the previous night had been killed.

Hogan's house was dangerous, but they insisted on my staying there, and pretty extensive precautions were taken by the Volunteers. All roads for miles were made impassable for motor transport and guards were posted in every direction. About 10 miles away the Feakle Company attacked a police patrol killing and wounding a number of them and this concentrated attention on that district for a few days.

In about 10 days I could move around again with some help and, as everybody for miles knew I was wounded and at Hogan's, I insisted on changing to another house in the district. About two hours after I left, a strong party of troops, which must have come on bicycles or on foot, raided Hogan's. I wandered round now from place to place in East Clare for some weeks, always having to be transported in a pony trap, as cycling or walking was too much for me. Because of my slow and difficult movements I never undressed and except for two or three nights, I always slept in a hayshed or barn. Late in October I arrived at the house of some cousins (Brennans) in Smithstown near Newmarket-on-Ferus. Four of the sons were doctors and two of them, who had served in the R.A.M.C. were at home. They said they didn't like the look of my arm and considered an X-ray essential as they were almost certain that something

was wrong inside.

I thought an X-ray would be impossible, but Seán Murnane, the local Battalion Commandant, thought differently. He got in touch at once with the Limerick Volunteers and asked them to make the necessary arrangements with a hospital. On the following evening, as soon as it was dark, I was taken down to the Shannon at Rinanna and on to a boat which was waiting. The rowers were armed and the night was very dark, so there wasn't much danger, especially as we moved almost silently and the patrol boats which had begun to infest the river were motor powered and very noisy. The river trip was very cold and we reached Limerick about midnight feeling just about frozen after our 12 mile voyage. We pulled in to the bank at Corkanreigh just below Limerick docks and some of the Limerick men took me to a closed carriage nearby. We went then to St. John's Hospital where I went to bed.

Next day the medical report on my general physical condition seems to have been pretty bad and the Rev. Mother and several of the nuns spent hours trying to persuade me to remain in the hospital for a week or two. I couldn't agree to this as the British knew perfectly well by now that I was wounded and raids on hospitals were certain. (The hospital was raided and searched for me on the following night, as were several other Limerick hospitals). The nuns were positive they could hide me from any raid, but I was sceptical - I knew more about Black and Tan methods than they did. In the evening the carriage arrived again and I was taken down to the private house of Dr. Fogarty - a wellknown Protestant (and reputed Unionist) doctor. Dr. Fogarty

had his own X-ray installation and on examining my arm he found that part of my sleeve had been driven in by the bullet. Fortunately it had nearly worked its way through and he thought it could be easily removed very soon with immediate benefit to the wound. He also discovered that the arm had not set straight and he considered it would have to be broken and re-set. I would have none of this and he protested that it was essential, as the arm would be crooked. I told him it would be handy for shooting around corners and anyway it would do me all right for the short time I expected to need it. That finished the argument.

The carriage took me from there to the Shannon where I rejoined my boat and was rowed back to Rineanna. I wandered around there from haybarn to haybarn for a week or two while my medical relatives treated the wound and at last got it clean and less painful. More trouble came now as the muscles of my hand had become limp and I couldn't use my fingers. Prolonged and daily massage was apparently absolutely necessary at once or I was in danger of having a useless right hand.

A skilled masseuse was traced living near Ennis and she volunteered to help. She had been matron of a British Army hospital, so her movements were unlikely to attract police attention. I stayed for a few days in Dr. Garry's quarters in Ennis Mental Hospital and she treated my arm every day. My presence could hardly be kept secret in such an institution and I moved out to Lalor's of Doora, about three miles from Ennis. Just after I left the Mental Hospital was raided, an unfortunate patient being

shot during the operation. I moved from house to house within a radius of a few miles of Ennis - Michael Lynch's of Magowna, Wm. Crowley's of Kilmorane, Mrs. Killeen's of Clonfeigh, Mick Hegarty's of Kilnamona, &c. &c. Every day my nurse came on her bicycle carrying her heavy battery charged massage equipment with her and, after about a month, I could open and close my fingers though I couldn't hold a gun.

On November 16th three of the men who were with me when I was wounded were murdered by Auxiliaries on the bridge at Killaloe. This Auxiliary Company had recently occupied the Lakeside Hotel on the Tipperary side of Lough Derg, just across from Killaloe. They had gone up the lake in a boat and surprised Alphie Rogers, Brud McMahon, Martin Kildea and another Volunteer in a house near Mountshannon on the edge of the lake. They took the prisoners to the Lakeside Hotel and next night took them out on Killaloe Bridge with their hands tied behind their backs and riddled them with bullets. The British issued a statement that the four men were "shot trying to escape", though their hands were still tied behind their backs when the bodies were found.

The work of the Co. Council and its Committees was very important and to ensure that it would go on, meetings had to be held regularly. The Council met one night in a barn situated in a wilderness of rock and scrub about three miles north of Ennis. The only furniture available was a large box and two smaller ones. The large box supported the Council's minute books and records and two candles stuck in bottles. As chairman, I sat on one side of it on one box and

Michael Carey, the secretary, occupied the other seat. The members of the Council sat around the walls on bundles of hay with (in nearly all cases) their rifles across their knees. Jack Deighan represented the Press and the meetings were always fully reported in the newspapers.

Some time in December the Galway Co. Council passed a resolution calling for peace and Father O'Flanagan made some advances to the British Government. As was inevitable, this foolish action gave the impression that we were being beaten and couldn't hold out much longer. Many well-meaning people in England and elsewhere joined in and by January an atmosphere of defeatism was becoming evident.

The Galway resolution was circulated to all Councils with the usual request for its consideration. Hoping to anticipate further weakening I hurriedly summoned a meeting of the Clare Co. Council. The resolution came up on the agenda and instead of considering it, the Council ordered it to be burned. The unanimity of this decision had a certain amount of tonic effect on the rather bewildered country.

However, I was satisfied that something more than talk was needed to show we weren't beaten and on Jan. 20th I arranged for an ambush at Meelick (near Cratloe). The main road from Limerick to Ennis had been made completely impassable by now and a secondary road had to be used and the ambush was prepared on this road. The problem was rather tricky as I had to direct that lorries travelling to Limerick were not to be attacked. They always had a few prisoners, probably

using them as hostages, but I counted on seeing any such lorry returning to Ennis later in the day when we could always hit it. As we were only two miles from Limerick, we had to get into position before dawn and the slightest lack of caution during the day would bring many hundreds of troops after us. We took up position just before dawn and I warned the men to keep well hidden when lorries from Ennis were signalled. The main party was posted in a large empty house which gave a clear field of fire straight on to the road and only about 20 yards from it. A smaller group was located in a stable which was at a bend and directly facing a straight stretch of road from Limerick. No lorries could possibly pass the fire of seven or eight men in this position. I was still unable to make any use of my right arm or hand, but a German Mauser pistol mounted on its wooden holster made a fair substitute for a rifle and I could use it with my left hand.

About 10 a.m. the outposts signalled a lorry coming from Ennis. (Trees were used as vantage points by scouts and they passed signals to each other and by runner to me). "Heads down" was ordered at once and the whole party went under cover. As the lorry passed through the position something (a hurried peep by somebody or a rifle exposed) gave us away and some shots were fired by the police. I shouted an order to return the fire, but there was only time for a few men to get off a total of five or six shots. The lorry shot forward round the bend and got away. We could see that a number of them were hit but the only tangible result for us was one revolver collected from an R.I.C. sergeant who was killed and fell off the lorry. Next day we

saw in the newspapers that another man had been killed and two wounded.

Our position now was very dangerous as the lorry would be in Limerick in five minutes. The Shannon ran along one side of our position within a few hundred yards and our only possible line of retreat was straight away from the river heading for the roadless boggy country beyond the Clare Hills. The great danger for us was the Windy Gap road which ran directly from Limerick and parallel with the road on which the ambush was placed. It was about three miles from us and if the British acted intelligently it was humanly impossible for us to reach it before they did. It would, of course, be obvious to them that we had no other retreat route open to us. Some of the officers favoured getting into Cratloe Wood as it is very large, but I would have none of it as I felt if we could be pinned in one place they could dig us out at their leisure.

We moved out at once and very soon the party must have been in full view on the bare mountain side of scouts with glasses on King John's Castle (a British Barracks) three miles away in Limerick. In any event, this was of very little importance as they could know without seeing us the direction we would take. I had about 25 men but I kept the local scouts with us for some time to make the party look bigger and I learned later that the British had estimated our strength at some absurd figure like 100 men.

About midday a woman was brought back to me by one of the scouts. She was out of breath from running and she brought a message that great numbers of troops had taken up position along the Windy Gap road.

The delivery of this message was a fine example of how well the people generally worked in with us.

A large number of troops (estimated at 500 men) had arrived at the Windy Gap about 11 a.m. and deployed facing west. Two men working in the fields observed this and discussed it. They decided as the troops were staying "put" that it wasn't a round-up and they soon reached the stage of wondering if "the boys" were around anywhere. They went to the nearest house and it was quickly decided there that the best thing to do was to send out a warning in every direction and if we were anywhere within miles we'd get it. Men, women and even children set off at once, calling at houses and passing the word along north, south, east and west. Within an hour I knew what was before us so I called a halt.

We were now cut off on the west by the Shannon, on the south by Limerick, and the Shannon, on the north by a road occupied by troops and on the east by the main body of these troops. The east was still our only hope, but the situation required reconsideration.

A fight with odds of 20 to 1 against us appeared to be unavoidable, but I declined to make the odds even worse by attacking. I selected a fairly good defensive position on the hillside and moved the men to it. I explained the position to them, not concealing its gravity, but pointing out that if we could hold it until dark many (if not most) of us would get through. Messengers were sent to the nearest houses (mostly nearly a mile away) for food and we settled down for the day. Quantities of food arrived including a roast goose from one house. The British were kept under close observation and as the day wore on we got more and more amazed

at their failure to attack. Towards dusk I decided that as the British were so badly handled we would have no great difficulty in getting round them and we moved off. Long before we reached the road our scouts brought the astonishing news that the troops had packed up and left. Our route was clear and we marched through.

Exactly a week later, on Jan. 20th, we laid an ambush at Glenwood on the road between Sixmilebridge and Broadfort along which a lorry of Black and Tans was expected about 11 a.m. We took up position before dawn just where a straight stretch of road ran through a cutting and up to a bend. The low flanking wall of a gateway just on the bend provided an excellent position for enfilading the roadway and I located myself there with five or six men, partly because I could use my "one-handed rifle" more effectively when I could rest it on the wall. A big convoy of lorries was always a possibility on this road, so a good and well-covered line of retreat up through woods into the mountains was available.

We waited all day but nothing appeared and about 4 p.m. I called in the outposts and we prepared to move off. Just then we heard the sound of a lorry and I sent the men back to their positions along the road. There was no time to get the outposts posted, but as it sounded like only one lorry, it seemed a fair chance. Several civilian lorries had passed during the day so, in the absence of signals now, we would have to wait until they were literally on top of us before moving. Fire would be opened on a whistle blast from me.

The lorry moved into the position and I saw it was occupied by Black and Tans. The whistle brought a

burst of fire from front and side. My party all aimed at the driver, but though they knocked off his cap and hit nearly everybody else on the lorry, he was unscathed. His steering column was broken though and the lorry went out of control, rolling in against the wall where we were standing. The driver jumped clean over the bonnet and bolted, pursued by one of our men. Very few shots were fired at us as most of the R.I.C. men were down and the survivors threw away their rifles and ran for it. They were being pursued, but I recalled all our men as we had the rifles. A check-up showed that a District Inspector and five of his men were dead, four got away, but two of them were wounded. One of our men was slightly wounded. We captured 10 rifles, 7 revolvers (the driver divested himself of belt and revolver, greatcoat and tunic in his sprint for his life) and a good quantity of .303 and .45 ammunition. We burned the lorry and retreated back into the hills. Most of the men were from units within a radius of seven or eight miles and they went to their home districts. The rest of us got some food in the scattered houses and arranged to sleep in the usual barn.

The British struck quickly and harshly at the country around Glenwood. Within a few hours of the ambush we counted 36 burning houses from our position up on the mountain.

The East Clare Flying Column had been developing for some time and as it was now well established some explanation of its growth is desirable. A great deal of nonsense has been published on the origins of the Flying Columns of 1920-21 and I must clear up the position, at least as far as East Clare is concerned. I have

read in many places of how the Flying Column idea was originated and elaborated by different officers, of how men were trained for it in camps held years before and of how training and organisational instructions for it were issued in advance. If these things were done none of us in East Clare ever heard of them - no instruction of any sort to form a Flying Column ever reached us and in actual fact we ourselves did not consciously organise a column. It was a purely spontaneous development which arose directly from the prevailing conditions.

In the early part of 1920 only three or four of us in East Clare were definitely "wanted men" and, as a rule, we wandered about individually. As the year wore on the pursuit became tougher and we were inclined to drift together, partly for company, but mainly because the "safe areas" were now fewer and we usually met in them. The local Volunteers always posted men at night to warn of raids and it was as easy to warn four as one and much easier than to get a message to four widely separated men. When we billeted in empty houses, barns or haysheds, one of the party could remain awake on guard, whereas alone one was liable to be surprised asleep. As far as we were concerned, the trend towards the Column was interrupted when I was wounded and during the months of October, November and December the increasing number of men "on the run" moved around near their own districts in small groups. When I returned to active duty companions were a necessity for me as I couldn't use my right arm and my general physical condition wasn't very good. I needed help fairly often and three or four men always remained with me. We very quickly discovered that moving around in a group gave much greater security and

without any actual orders being issued other men "on the run" drifted to us and our numbers grew. Quite a number of men whose houses had been burned by the British came along. All the best-known men were certain of being shot by Black and Tans if they were found, so they naturally preferred to be always armed and in a position to hit back. The column was the only place they found these conditions so they added to our numbers. The problems of food and billeting prohibited a very large group and it was necessary to keep the regular column men down to about 20. When an operation was intended, as many extra men as were required were summoned from the nearest battalion area, e.g., about 10 men from the Newmarket-on-Fergus area joined us at Glenwood; for a later trip to Galway extra men from Scariff-Feakle district went with us.

Our strength seldom exceeded 30 men unless reinforced for some very special reason. Each man was armed with a rifle and revolver and carried a haversack with socks, shirt and shaving equipment. One of our comrades created much merriment by his habit of carrying pyjamas with him. As we scarcely ever got our clothes off when sleeping, his pyjamas weren't overworked. Ammunition was our most serious problem and I don't think we ever possessed as much as an average of 30 rounds per rifle. Captured ammunition was, of course, shared out at once, but a fight in which no ammunition was captured was in effect a calamity. The be-all and end-all of every proposed operation was arms and ammunition, but particularly ammunition. For example - in a fight at Kilrush we inflicted fairly severe casualties, created consternation in the British garrison of West Clare and

boosted the morale of our own people around there, but because we captured neither arms nor ammunition (except one revolver and some .45) we went home disappointed.

In the early stages protection of the Column or any part of it consisted of a few of the local men wandering round during the night. As a result we had some lively experiences. When I returned to active duty in East Clare I dismounted from my pony trap in Bodyke and three or four of us went into Gleeson's house for tea at about 10 p.m. When tea was about half through one of the Gleesons rushed in to say he thought he heard the squeak of brakes coming down the hill. He said he had heard no sound of engines and he was sent back for a further report. Almost immediately he returned and shouted "Auxiliaries". We jumped from our seats and ran for the back door just as a terrific hammering started on the front door. We crossed the yard in minus a second and just as I got through a fence I saw the "Auxies" swarming over the road wall into the yard.. I wasn't particularly steady on my feet and with one arm in a sling and the other hampered with a heavy haversack and a Mauser pistol I tripped and fell. The fall may have saved me from being seen but unfortunately I fell on the injured arm and it was painful for weeks afterwards. We stayed quietly in the field and when the raiders had left we came back to inquire into the extraordinary silence of their approach. We found that engines and lights had been switched off at the top of the hill outside the village and the lorries had coasted silently down to the very gate of Gleeson's house. (Michael Gleeson was Captain of Bodyke Company and his house was an obvious mark for raiders). It was one of

the first appearances of Auxiliaries in East Clare and they announced that they had made a bet of a case of champagne with the Tulla officers" mess that they would get me within a week. Their first attempt had gone near enough, though it was, of course, a pure chance, as I wasn"t expected in Bodyke and nobody could have known I"d be at Gleeson"s that night. The tactics adopted by the Auxiliaries showed that we were now up against a tough problem.

On the following evening I was at Paddy McDonnell's house in Kielta. We left there about 6 p.m. and walked up the road to P.J. Hogan's. When we were a few hundred yards from Hogan"s we were stopped by Eilis Hogan (aged 7) who told us her house was full of soldiers who were looking for me. As we had heard no lorries we found this difficult to credit, but the child assured us that it was so and that nobody would be allowed out of the house. She had chattered from one to the other until she got to the door and then had slipped away unnoticed. We sent her home and decided on precautions as she was so positive. We crossed through the fields until we got near the house where we could hear low voices and, on coming close, we could distinguish English accents. This of course settled the question and we remained where we were until the Auxiliaries left in three lorries. We then paid our delayed visit to find that the Auxiliaries had helped themselves to the elaborate tea which Mrs. Hogan had prepared for us. They said if they couldn"t get me I wouldn"t get the apple-tarts. A few hours later we learned they had gone straight to McDonnell"s from Hogan's and spent another hour or two waiting there for me.

Next night I got out through the back door of Duggan"s in Scariff as the Auxiliaries came in through the front door

and a few nights later, a little boy stopped me on Scariff Bridge with a warning that large numbers of Auxiliaries had just come off a boat and were all over the town. We found next day that they had gone up the Tipperary side of Lough Derg, crossed over above Scariff, switched off the engine and drifted silently into Scariff Harbour.

It was obvious that the Auxiliaries were well-informed as to my usual haunts and detailed investigation pointed to a local R.I.C. pensioner as the probable spy. The local Volunteers were absolutely certain this man was a British intelligence agent and they were insistent that he should be shot. I had very little doubt that they were right, but as we had no direct proof I wouldn't permit his execution, so they had to content themselves with raiding his house and warning him. After the Truce I made the Auxiliary Intelligence Officer from Killaloe drunk in a Kilrush hotel and I learned from him that our suspect was in fact a spy. He went to Killaloe once a week for his pension (ostensibly) and gave his reports to the R.I.C. After the Treaty I had the spy arrested as a suspected "Irregular" and we kept him interned for about two years - just to get some of our own back.

An elaborate system of protection was needed to meet the clever technique of our new opponents and this was now worked out. Its main features were to extend the watching system right up to the bases from which danger would threaten, to introduce visual signals for long distance warnings and to systematically obstruct all roads leading to where the Column was billeted. If the column were anywhere around Scariff men were posted (day and night) in Ogonnelloe Mountains which overlooked Killaloe. The departure of a raiding party towards

Scariff was signalled at once by igniting a prepared bonfire which could be seen far away across Lough Derg in Whitegate, Mountshannon and Scariff. The local scouts immediately roused the column who assembled at a previously arranged mobilisation point. Tulla, Ennis and Limerick were covered similarly when we were in their vicinity. These arrangements worked well and the only occasions on which we were surprised from that time were once or twice when we arrived (or remained) somewhere unexpectedly and there was no time to get the far-flung system operating. A copy of our protection orders was sent to G.H.Q. and they issued it to all Brigades as a model.

Probably the first time the new system was used was for a Co. Council meeting in Quin. We occupied Knoppogue Castle, the residence of Lord Dunboyne, for this meeting. As over 30 County Council members, all the Council officials and a large number of interested people such as contractors and labour representatives were needed at this particular meeting, there was a danger of leakages, and special precautions were needed. Ennis, Tulla and Limerick were all reconnoitred and one of our men on the tower of Knoppogue Castle was in position to warn us of fires on the roads leading from these towns.

The Council met in the extensive lounge hall of the Castle. Sentries were posted on all doors and stairs leading from this hall to ensure that there would be no interference with the remainder of the Castle. The business of the Council took some hours and before its conclusion, signal fires from Tulla and Ennis were reported. Knowing the condition of the roads, I could

count on any raiders taking some hours to get through, so I allowed the meeting to conclude normally. Subsequently we learned the raiding forces were after an imaginary ambush about which we had circulated rumours (where they would be conveyed) to distract attention from the Council meeting.

The Dunboyne family were away from home, so before the meeting, I saw the butler and arranged with him that tea would be provided for the intruders. I told him to keep careful note of all food used and any damage done as we would pay for them. During the following week I wrote to Lord Dunboyne on similar lines. A letter came back from him through one of his men who was a Volunteer, refusing to accept any payment for the food and assuring me that no damage whatever had been done to his house.

Shortly after this, a combined operation with the Mid Clare Brigade was arranged for a place called Hell Bridge on the road between Ennis and Tulla. We were to ambush troops who were to travel from Ennis to Tulla. I left Bodyke on the previous evening with about a dozen men and we walked all through what was, I think, the wettest night I have ever seen. We reached Hell Bridge at about 6 a.m. and after a wait there a messenger from Mid Clare informed us that the expected troops would not be travelling, so the operation was off. Several of the men were near their home districts, so I sent them off there, and four or five of us climbed into a hayshed nearby and burrowed down in the hay. It was January and we were sopping wet, but we fell asleep at once and woke up about 2 p.m. feeling fresh and well.

We got food locally and that night I walked with three others (I think they were Jackie Ryan, Jim Tuohy and Brud Flannery) to Rossroe, near Sixmilebridge, where we called to Gilligan's (?) house. Gilligan (?) was the local Coy. Commander and he thought his house was too dangerous, so we only had a meal there. He arranged billets for us in a neighbouring house and we slept comfortably there in beds put up in a barn. We were called for breakfast about 9 a.m. but we were slow in getting up. A little later a girl called to us to get up at once as the Black and Tans were coming. We took this as a trick to get us up quickly and we didn't move, but after a few minutes I went across and peeped through the door. The road ran along by Gilligan's (?) house less than 100 yards from where we were with only an open field between. Directly in front two lorries crowded with Black and Tans were halted with more police coming out of Gilligan's (?) house. I called the others to get up at once and I watched until the Black and Tans jumped into the field and headed down towards our house.

We had slept nearly fully dressed, so we were ready to move in a few moments. The door was the only exit from the barn and the Tans were coming straight towards it, so I decided to await developments, counting on the probability that they would pass the barn door and investigate the dwelling house first. The barn was just a continuation of the house and once they had gone in we might outmanoeuvre the party on the lorries. They tramped solidly past our door and when I heard their voices in the kitchen I sent the first of our party off, warning him to walk slowly and as if he were

working round the place, until he got into the field at the end of the yard where he was to wait and cover the others. He was followed by the other two and nothing happened. I came out then and strolled along but my progress wasn't quite so smooth. I had seen the Black and Tans leaning on their rifles watching the others, but by the time the fourth man appeared, they had probably started wondering where the devil all these men were coming from. I tried to keep my tell-tale sling and bandage covered with a raincoat draped over my shoulder while I managed my Mauser pistol and stock (plus a Webley revolver I found under one of the pillows in a last check around) in the left hand which was on the side away from the lorries. The distance to the wall around the field was 30 yards or so and I was ordered to halt when I had gone about halfway. I pretended not to hear and I walked on without any appearance of hurry. The challenge was repeated several times but I reached the wall safely and climbed up on it with some difficulty. The police opened fire as I reached the top and then the loose stones slipped from under me and the wall and I arrived in the field somewhat mixed up. A cheer went up from the Black and Tans, apparently under the impression that I was hit. They jumped into the field and ran down towards us, but a few shots from us drove them to cover. Things were looking better now, though I was in more trouble with my arm which had been hurt again in the fall off the wall. We started up a hill behind the house exchanging shots with the police who followed at a respectful distance. We were pretty certain that I had been identified at this stage, as my wounded right arm had long been common knowledge and we anticipated tough going. When we got to the top of the

hill, we found the whole country beyond and round it flooded for miles with no way open except back through our enemies. The terrible rain had overflowed some river and we had no idea where that river was located under the vast expanse of water. Our only chance was to pick the narrowest point to cross and hope for the best - none of us could swim. First we had to deal with our pursuers and we swung back and opened fire on them coming up the hill. They broke and ran for shelter and after firing a few more shots to make it look as if we were "staying put" we ran down the hill at the other side and headed into the water. Knowing what perfect targets we presented in the water we tried to move fast, but our speed was more imaginary than real. We had to stop constantly to fish each other out of trenches and other deep spots, but to our growing amazement no shots came from behind. We floundered and tumbled through the water for about a mile and reached high ground on the other side safely. We were pretty certain the Tans would have gone around by road and that we would still have a fight on our hands but everything was calm and peaceful when we reached dry land. An old lady (named Corbett as far as I remember) invited us into her house and thawed us out with a blazing fire and hot tea. During the day we learned that the party of Black and Tans had remained where they were for an hour after our last shots and then had got on their lorries and driven away. The whole business was inexplicable, and not the least puzzling part of it was that they didn't even wait to burn the house. The local theory was that the Black and Tans believed we were only a bait to draw them into a strongly held position along the hill.

The civil adminstration side of the war required a great deal of attention and every week I had to attend several conferences of one sort or another. Canon O'Kennedy was in charge of a committee of the Co. Council which was working out a scheme for the reorganisation of local government in the county and I met them at intervals. Their scheme proposed changes such as the abolition of workhouses and their replacement by district hospitals, and I think they also proposed calling lunatic asylums mental hospitals. The Co. Council approved of their scheme and the Dáil adopted it for the whole country. I also met Canon O'Kennedy regularly on the collection of the Dáil Loan and on the handling of the huge sums collected as county rates. He was one of the trustees and he arranged for the safe keeping of tens of thousands of pounds rates and their instant availability for Council purposes. I was a member of some of the Council committees and I made a point of always attending the meetings. The Secretary of the Council was Michael Carey and he always called himself a man of peace, but no veteran ever showed more cool courage and resource than he did in keeping the Council and its institutions functioning under almost impossible conditions. He spent many of his nights tramping through the bogs and mountains with his dispatch case full of papers for me to sign. On many occasions he narrowly missed being shot by Volunteers as he wandered through their lines on his way to me and we all knew certain death faced him if he ran into any British forces on his way back. The signatures would finish him as Michael Carey would not save his life by revealing where he had got them. He attended every Council meeting in barns, schoolhouses and castles, bringing with him the huge

pile of Council papers and minute books. He collected probably hundreds of thousands of pounds from the rates trustees and supervised its payment so well that an inquiry held in after years showed that every pound was accounted for. John D. Molony, as vice-Chairman of the Council, and Seán Scanlan, as Chairman of the Finance Committee, were both men of exceptional ability and there is no doubt at all that their skill and initiative were prime factors in defeating the war which was being waged against local government in Clare. The Co. Surveyor was a Protestant and reputed Unionist named Dobbyn. As was natural, he and I treated each other with suspicion at first, but after some time we developed a rather amusing friendship. In the wildest and bitterest part of the conflict he came to me with what seemed an extraordinary proposal. He said he had a friend in the Treasury in London and if I would permit him, he thought he could get a grant from the British for the relief of unemployment amongst their ex-soldiers. He would have to use this grant on roadwork, but he promised not to interfere with our obstructions. He added that as practically all the ex-soldiers were Volunteers, the British would in effect be financing us and relieving the Council of a heavy strain. The peculiar methods of government departments were at that time unknown to me and I thought it a fantastic idea, but I gave him the necessary permission. He returned with about £50,000.

Early in 1921, our Brigade funds were exhausted and the supply of clothes, boots, cigarettes and, occasionally, food began to present difficulties. Wounded men also involved us in some expense though I

have no recollection of any doctor, nurse or hospital ever charging for services. I issued a signed appeal for funds and this was distributed all over the Brigade area and a collection was made, principally at the church gates. In a little over a week the astonishing total of about £1,500 was turned in - about three times the size of our most optimistic estimate. We had brought misery and terror on nearly every parish in East Clare and none of us had anticipated a vote of confidence of this nature. It made clear at once that the British reprisals, instead of turning the people against us as the cause of their miseries, had thrown them strongly behind us. We had always paid for anything we required and this was our first appeal to the people for financial help. That may have had some effect on the contributions, but I was certain that the real driving force was a determination to back us.

I held strong views on the question of drink, mainly based on bitter experience. Several of our men had been captured and killed under conditions which left little doubt that their carelessness had resulted from too much drink. Most of the column men were not interested in drink, but there were a few bad cases and I was fully aware of the dangers of their example. I first attempted to deal with it by a flat prohibition, but I soon discovered that I had only driven it "underground" and men were sneaking away from billets at night to the nearest "pub". I concluded that an order which men apparently found it almost impossible to obey and which could in fact be easily broken was an incitement to indiscipline. It seemed likely that a little might ease the longing for

a lot and I introduced a scheme which permitted every man two drinks before we dispersed into billets. Tom McGrath, who was my second in command, stood by, saw that each man got two drinks (if he wanted them) and then paid the bill. Most of the men took "soft" drinks, but the thirsty ones had their "two pints" or whatever it was and they were satisfied for the night. The scheme created a lot of amusement, but it worked and we had no more trouble from drink.

The British now cancelled all regular patrols or movements but we only learned this after wasting a great deal of time and trouble in attempting to ambush parties of military or police which were expected on particular days.

Attendance at Mass was of course dangerous, but I doubt if we ever missed Mass on a Sunday from the time the column was formed. As we might have to fight our way out we always attended fully armed while all the local Volunteers covered the surrounding country. As far as possible, we attended churches where Mass was said quickly, but sometimes we slipped up. Once in Bodyke, we attended the Parish Priest's Mass at 11 and he finished at 1.30. After that we avoided Bodyke on Sundays.

Confessions were a simple matter as the priests everywhere were most helpful. On one occasion the Curate of Broadfort heard our confessions in a field on the mountainside. It must have been a curious sight - a large body of heavily armed men stood at one side of a field while a priest sat on a low wall some distance away. One by one the armed men walked over

to the priest, removed their hats and knelt down. But next morning witnessed a still more striking scene.

We had marched across the mountains and we were billeted in Cooleen Bridge a few miles north of Scariff. I met there a wellknown priest, Dr. Clune, who was home on a holiday. As an operation was on next day's programme, we were starting early and he offered to say Mass for us before we marched away. His offer was, of course, gratefully accepted and at 4 a.m. he said Mass at an improvised altar in the kitchen of his home. It was long before dawn and the kitchen was lighted by an oil lamp and the candles on the altar. The whole column crowded in and most of us received Holy Communion. It was the most impressive Mass I have ever attended.

After Mass and breakfast we marched to Ayle on the Tulla-Feakle road and waited in ambush all day for a party of Black and Tans due to pass through from Tulla. About 4 p.m. we got a message from Tulla that our quarry would not appear as the trip had been cancelled and we assembled and marched northwards towards the mountains. We had had no food since breakfast and there was no prospect of any until we reached our billeting area seven or eight miles away and across the mountains. The district we were marching through was very thinly populated and offered little facilities for feeding about 40 hungry men (including local scouts). The local Company Captain marched with me and when I saw a very big house in front of us I suggested it might be possible to get some food there. He demurred and told me the owner was a fanatical Redmondite who hated us. In his view, no food could be

got from this man, Mr. George Walsh, except by force. Force was, of course, out of the question and I decided we'd have to make the best of it and carry on. As we neared the gate I saw two men standing there and my companion told me one of them was Mr. Walsh. I looked rather interestedly at this violent opponent and to my surprise he saluted me in a very friendly fashion. I stopped and as the column closed up they halted some distance away. Mr. Walsh suggested we looked tired and I agreed. He inquired when we had eaten and when I told him he presumed we were hungry, with which presumption I heartily agreed. He inquired how many men I had and the number didn't frighten him as he asked me to bring them all into his house. I protested - rather weakly, I'm afraid - but he was certain something could be found for all of them. As we walked in his avenue I found he knew who I was and, on his asking me if his attitude had surprised me (he, of course knew the local man who was with me) I told him we were going on for hours in our hungry condition rather than risk the refusal we anticipated if we asked him for food. He stopped and faced me, saying "Your information was correct. I was opposed to your policy. You have destroyed the Party I revered. You have wrecked the Home Rule that I have worked for all my life. I didn't agree with your ideas or with yout methods, but, by God, you are backing your ideas with your lives and that is enough for me. You can count me with you". By some extraordinary process the house had enough bread, meat, eggs and tea to provide every man with a hearty meal.

Late that night we came down the other side of the mountains to Lough Graney (of "The Midnight Court") and we billeted in Caher and Flagmount.

A number of Galway men (particularly Laurence Kelly of Loughrea and Jim Reilly from near Portumna) had come to me in Clare on several occasions with appeals to bring the column to Galway. They said the Volunteer organisation had collapsed there and a show of armed force would be a magnificent organising agency. James Hogan (Professor) was one of our best men and his home was near Loughrea, so I consulted him. He agreed with Kelly and I promised to go. We were now on our way and Kelly and Reilly were waiting for us in (I think) Derrybrien, to which we marched through Sliabh an Óir. We spent the day in Derrybrien and in the evening we marched to Dalystown House which we occupied. The owner was a Colonel Farrell, but he was away, and again we dealt with the butler. I asked for food on a payment basis and it was provided. The column and local men were confined strictly to one room and they got what sleep they could on the floor in clothes dripping from another very wet march. The main gate of Dalystown House offered an ideal ambush position at a bend on the Portumna-Loughrea road and we took up position there at dawn to await a Black and Tan patrol expected from Loughrea. I had been warned that we could trust nobody around there as they were all so terrified by the Black and Tans that they wouldn't hesitate to convey a warning to save themselves from reprisals. In consequence of this, anybody who happened to see us was seized and held prisoner in the lodge and as the day wore on we collected quite a large party. In the afternoon, a messenger from Loughrea told us that in spite of all our precautions our presence in the district seemed to be known, as all police had been hurriedly called in and the barracks were barricaded.

In addition, he had seen R.I.C. scouts with field glasses on a hill some miles away obviously examining the countryside. As there were strong military forces in Galway, Athenry, Gort, Ballinasloe and Portumna and we were rather neatly located between them all, quick movement was needed. To aggravate the position we learned that practically all roads were clear so rapid troop movements were feasible.

All our prisoners were released and Farrell's house was evacuated. The butler was told to check all food used and any damage done as we would pay for it. Concealment was of no further use so we marched away in broad daylight, reaching Derrybrien without incident. Next day we crossed into Clare and continued through the following day past Feakle, Scariff, Bodyke and over the mountains to Kilbane. We laid an ambush on the main road for troops from Limerick, but they failed to materialise and in the evening we moved on by Oatfield and Sixmilebridge to Rineanna where we halted for two days.

I wrote to Col. Farrell the following week asking for an estimate of the food used and damage done. He replied that no damage was done and he would not accept payment for the food. He added that he had been a Unionist all his life, but the excellent discipline and fine conduct in his house of my men had upset many of his ideas and would force him to reconsider his whole position.

I had always emphasised to Volunteers that armed action was only one arm in our fight for independence. I maintained that good propaganda was the other arm and the most important part of this was our own conduct.

It was easy to behave well to our friends, but I argued that our critics and political opponents might become friends if we impressed them by our standards of conduct. The Brigade adhered loyally to this and any tendency towards roughness against the public was checked at once. For example, when some visitors from East Limerick Brigade seized motor-tyres from the Protestant Rector of Kilkishen, a party followed them that night, recovered the tyres and returned them. The fact that, despite all their difficulties, Volunteers in East Clare behaved better than the forces of the Crown had quite an effect on even old Unionists and it brought several of them to our side - e.g. Colonel O'Callaghan-Westropp.

Seán Liddy, the West Clare Brigadier, had asked me to visit his area with the column as he had only a few rifles and the Black and Tans were making things very unpleasant. The Carrigerry Company included a number of Shannon fishermen and he suggested the simplest route was across the Fergus from near Rineanna. The necessary arrangements were made and we crossed near Kildysart. We were met there by the local men and billeted in the usual way. We were informed that a strong party of Black and Tans patrolled the streets of Kildysart every night and we visited the town that night in search of them. We waited for hours, but they didn't appear and we tried to get them out by sending two of the column men up and down the street in front of the barracks "drunkenly" singing "rebel" songs and shouting for the Republic. They even went as far as throwing stones and breaking windows in the barracks, but nothing would induce the police to put in an appearance. An attack on the barracks would have been sheer waste of ammunition as we had no means of forcing an entry,

so we gave up and returned to our billets. Next morning we laid an ambush at Cahircon for a party of R.I.C. who were "certain" to pass there that day. They didn't - but in any event, we had a rest as we waited all day.

We were joined by Seán Liddy and about ten of his West Clare men, mostly, but not all armed with rifles. There seemed no possibility of finding any British parties in the open where we could attack them on more or less equal terms. The only course open to us was to try and induce some of them to come out from behind their solid walls to help some of their own forces. The position in Kilrush offered opportunities in this direction as it was garrisoned by about 100 troops, forty or fifty Black and Tans and about 40 marines in the Coastguard Station. All these parties were located in different parts of the town and we calculated that a feint attack on the R.I.C. would result in Verey light signals for aid which we could assume would be acted upon by the military. We would ambush the military when they left their barracks.

We marched through Tullycrine to Kilrush arriving there shortly before midnight. From the map and local information I had satisfied myself that there was a very strong position available for ambushing the military. They were quartered in the old workhouse and the gate opened on to a narrow road running between two high walls and dead straight for about 100 yards up to a road running directly at right angles to it and bounded on the far side by a wall four feet or so high. Riflemen behind this wall would sweep the road down to the workhouse gate. I detailed about ten men for this

position with Bill Haugh, the West Clare Vice-Brigadier, in charge, pending my arrival after the feint attack. Their instructions were to allow the advance guard through and fire no shot until the main body was within twenty yards of them. Even though I would be there myself the orders were made clear in advance as it was advisable that each man understood fully what he had to do and I knew how difficult it was to get men to hold their fire when an enemy was closing on them. Haugh had served for many years in the U.S. Marines and I had confidence in his coolness and control.

The Coastguard Station was out on the river and the best we could do was to contain it. I sent about a dozen men to occupy the causeway leading from it and hold the Marines inside until the operation finished. A few men accompanied by locals were posted on protection duty at various points around the town. I retained about four men who were to make the feint attack and then join the party waiting to ambush the military. All groups were accompanied by local guides who were fully instructed as to movements and, above all, how to reach the assembly point outside the town when we withdrew. This was essential, as none of the column men had ever been in Kilrush.

My guide led us to a street crossing and pointed out a large building at the end of a short side street as the R.I.C. Barracks. I questioned him and he repeated his directions, adding "There it is, straight foreninst you". We fired half-a-dozen shots at the windows and then waited for a reply. When none came I began to have doubts and I again queried the guide.

He repeated his previous directions and I asked him if he meant the building facing us. He said "Yes" and we waited a few minutes, but nothing happened. I again tackled our guide and inquired if it was the big building facing us across the end of the side street. He replied "God Almighty, that's the convent". It then transpired that the barracks was on the side of the street and was in fact not facing us at all. We moved out at once and fired a few shots into it. Almost immediately Verey lights went up and we walked quickly back towards the main party. Just as we reached the Market Square we heard voices and saw a group of men standing in the shadow of a house on the far side. They called to us and they seemed all right, but I thought it safer to investigate. I left my companions in an archway and I crossed to the Market House which stood in the centre of the square. Going around this I surveyed the group, but owing to the dense shadow I still couldn't identify them. They again called to me in what were clearly Irish accents and I stepped out and crossed over to them. It was a very clear moonlight night and out of the shadow the street was almost as bright as in daylight. I walked straight to the group who seemed to number about six. When I was within about fifteen feet of them one of them stepped out towards me with his right hand out. I assumed he was a local wishing to shake hands and I removed my right hand from the small of the butt of my rifle which I was carrying across my left forearm. As the stranger's arm reached the moonlight I saw it was clothed in black with the V's of an R.I.C. sergeant on the sleeve and with a revolver gripped in the hand. I swung my rifle round instantly and fired at him turning at once and making a wild dash for the corner of the Market House swerving and stooping as I ran,

and snapping a wild shot back at them, for effect.

I must have gone 20 yards before a shot was fired after me but quite a number came then. Even as I ran I realised that I must have been mistaken for an Auxiliary and that my shot had given them a much worse shock than they had given me. The first result of this was delay in reacting and the second was the equally valuable one of erratic shooting. I reached the Market House safely and from there fired a few shots at the men on the corner who were just moving to follow me. My own men in the archway were calling anxiously to me as they couldn't see what had happened on the other side of the Market House. I shouted to them that I was all right and to open fire. This fire forced a hurried retreat from the corner and I went up and investigated but only found a trail of blood from where the man had stepped out to me. (It transpired subsequently that there were three R.I.C. and a number of military police in the group).

The others joined me then and the guide led us by a roundabout route towards the workhouse. Later, I discovered we could have gone directly from where we were, but he took us around three sides of a square to bring us back again on to the street leading from where I had the brush with the police. As we reached there I heard steps coming down this street again on the shadowy side and I saw two figures coming towards me. When I challenged them they replied: "It's all right" and came on. I was standing in the moonlight and I repeated my order peremptorily. One of them snapped back: "It's all right, police!" at the same time stepping out into

the light with a revolver in his hand. I fired and he dropped, the other turning and darting away. I called to Tom McGrath and Joe Clancy to get this man's revolver and papers and I set off after the second man, but lost him. I turned back to the others when a wild burst of firing broke out. Our guide disappeared and we were left stranded, having no idea which way to go to the ambush position. The firing died down in a minute or two and we wandered round the town for an hour in the hope of meeting some of our own men, but nobody seemed alive in all that town. We knew the assembly point was in some quarry and eventually we struck out through the country on our own to try and find it. Inquiries at houses brought very little help as the firing seemed to have frightened the wits out of anybody who spoke to us, but one old man directed us across country towards a wellknown quarry on the road to Cree. I carried a shrill whistle which was known in the column and as we moved along I occasionally climbed a tree and blew it. At last I got a faint reply far away and with this to guide us we soon made contact with the main body.

When I came up Bill Haugh formally tendered a request to have one of his men shot for spoiling the whole operation by disobedience to orders. According to his report, the troops came out the workhouse gate in single file and proceeded to form up on the road. Despite the orders, while the troops were still forming up, one of the West Clare men loosed off a shot and the soldiers immediately broke and ran for the door in the wall. Haugh saw at once that an ambush was no longer possible and he ordered rapid fire. A number of soldiers fell near the gate, but under strong covering fire from their

comrades, he couldn't get at their rifles and he had to withdraw in a very bitter frame of mind. I released the prisoner, as his error arose solely from lack of experience.

From next day's newspapers we got the British casualty report which gave an R.I.C. sergeant as killed and twenty soldiers wounded. In no casualty list I have ever seen was the proportion 20 to 1 in favour of the wounded and there is hardly any doubt that four or five soldiers were killed or died of wounds. Local opinion alleges eight were killed. The heavy casualty list shows clearly what a success we would have had if fire had been withheld (as ordered) until the troops were within twenty yards of the ambush position.

We learned locally that the poor nuns were uninjured except for the damage to their nervous systems, and, fortunately for our reputations, the Black and Tans were blamed for the shooting into the convent. I had never seen an Auxiliary up to this time except at night and a description of their dress on service made the R.I.C. error in my identification at least understandable. I wore a grey-green coat cut like a military tunic, khaki breeches, collar and shirt, brown boots and leggings, Sam Brown belt and holstered revolver, field glasses slung over my shoulder, and no head gear. The only difference in our dress was that the Auxiliary tunic was khaki and this would not be very noticeable in moonlight. The previous rifle shots must have been accepted as the usual Auxiliary method of celebrating their arrival - "shooting up" the town.

On leaving Kilrush we marched eight or ten miles to the Cree district. On the way two column men (Joe Clancy and Martin McNamara) cantered up to me riding donkeys they had collected on the road and inquiried if a mounted advance guard was all right with me. It was; so they took post in advance to the cheers of their very tired and probably envious comrades.

Cree must be about the most thickly populated area in all Ireland and the houses were so close together that the whole column was almost within call in their billets. After Mass (Sunday) crowds collected round the men and several dances got going in the houses. We remained in Cree until evening and the music, dancing and singing which went on all the afternoon had more of the atmosphere of a holiday camp than of a small column with strong enemy forces only a few miles away on every side. Seán Liddy informed me that his intelligence reported an atmosphere of panic through the British garrisons in West Clare and a corresponding jubilation amongst the Volunteers and people generally. Our numbers must have been multiplied many times in the military imaginations, as all their forces were apparently closely confined to barracks awaiting the arrival of reinforcements.

In the evening we marched to Lissycasey, a few miles from Ennis, and billeted there for the night. Dancing seemed to be a very popular occupation in West Clare and the column danced through most of the night in Lissycasey also. Next day we parted with the West Clare men. As the column marched away towards Ballynacally I remained behind talking to Liddy and

Haugh. As usual, on such marches, the men were singing the popular songs of the day and I heard a doleful groan near me followed by "Ye may well sing, but we have to creep into our holes and stay in them until ye come back again". I looked round and saw it was Martin Chambers of West Clare. He was a rather startling figure with his tall and very thin figure clad in an ordinary lounge suit topped by a British steel helmet which he had acquired. He hadn't realised I was still around until the general laugh warned him, but he wasn't perturbed. Apparently our visit had been a breath of freedom for him and his comrades.

At Ballynacally we again embarked on the fishing boats and were rowed across to Clenagh where we stayed that night. The tide wasn't suitable for our landing and we had to struggle through about half a mile of the stickiest mud I have ever encountered. The men sang all the way across in the boats, but by the time they had finished with the mud nobody felt like singing.

Next day we moved off again past Sixmilebridge, Broadfort and through the mountains above Kilbane coming down into Cahirhurley where we halted and went into billets. We had arrived unexpectedly so local protection only went into operation, but this seemed safe enough as the mountains were just behind us. About 9 a.m. next morning I thought I heard a shot and I jumped out of bed. Looking out I saw a number of lorries stopped on the road about a quarter of a mile down from me. Just then I heard the rat-tat of Lewis gunfire and I saw it was being directed at a boy who

was running across a field towards my billet. The fire continued and was reinforced by rifle fire, but the boy never faltered. James Hogan had joined me and we watched sparks flying when bullets struck from a wall near which the boy was running and behind which he could have taken shelter. He jumped out on to our road and disappeared from view behind its high banks but in a moment he reached us shouting "The Auxiliaries are here". We only realised then that his magnificently daring run was for the purpose of warning us and he wouldn't seek shelter from the stream of machine gun bullets for fear he wouldn't wake us up in time. His name was John O'Grady and I have never seen a braver act.

The Auxiliary Company proceeded to search the country from the road north. We were billeted south of the road and we assembled without interference and moved back into the mountains.

I am not sure if it was immediately after this, but one morning in Mountshannon we were roused before dawn with a report that one of the far away danger signals was burning. The houses in which the column men were billeted were very scattered and it was full daylight (about 5 a.m. I think) before they were all assembled. In the interval we had heard many lorries in the distance and we knew the British were getting into position for a "round up". Our situation was delicate as we were completely cut off on the south, east and north-east by the broad expanse of Lough Derg which curved round where we were. The British were in force on our west side and were moving towards the north so it looked like a race between us. A few men

were still missing, but I couldn't risk waiting any longer so I sent James Hogan to collect them and moved off with the main body. After a mile or so the country was just completely open and bare moorland offering no cover of any sort. James Hogan and the missing men joined us and we accelerated our pace until we gained the top of an incline. A line of police and military in extended order had by now appeared moving after us about half a mile behind, but we were not worried about these. A much more serious matter was the appearance of troops along a line of hills to the north and north-west. This seemed to finish our last chance of escape and every man there saw that this looked like the end of the road. With a thunderstruck look on his face huge Miko McInerney took his pipe out of his mouth and solemnly announced "Oh, ..., every s.o.b. of a mother's son of us is lost". Despite (or possibly because of) the gravity of the position this dismal prophecy was met with a wild roar of laughter which was quite uncontrollable for a minute or two. Just over the brow of the rise in the ground I found a long cutting where turf had been removed. I moved the column over the hill and into this for cover while I examined the situation. Our ammunition had gone very low and a long fight would have been suicidal for us. In any event, a fight which would pin us down would finish us as our opponents could call in reinforcements in thousands from every side and the addition of aeroplanes and armoured vehicles would make short work of us. A stratagem of some sort was our only hope.

The contours on my map showed a ravine winding through the hills on which the soldiers had appeared.

I called up the local Coy. Captain (Michael Clery) and learned from him that this ravine remained hidden until one was beside it and very probably the troops were unaware of its existence. A shallow drain ran from our boghole to the far side of the hill and I saw that a man creeping along this would be covered from the view of our attackers. Once over the hill the way was open to the ravine and I decided at once to try this route. We were hampered by all the local scouts, numbering about 15, who had been driven in on us and were unarmed except for a few revolvers. They had to keep with us, as capture under the circumstances of that morning meant death for them.

While I was looking round, some shooting had developed and a number of the enemy had fallen and been carried back. This slowed up the attack which suited me. I explained what I proposed doing to Tom McGrath and detailed ten men to remain behind with me. McGrath was to take the others along the drain and into the ravine and so through the hills. The party remaining with me would keep up sufficient fire on the enemy to make them believe we were all still in the same position. When McGrath and his party got to a marked point on the map behind the military line they were to take post ready to cover our retreat. If we heard firing on their route we would join them as we would know they hadn't been able to make it and we would all try and fight our way out.

McGrath and a total of over 30 men slipped off as arranged while we blazed away at any movement from the now slowly advancing military and Black and Tans.

When the last of McGrath's party had been gone for half an hour (the time arranged) I sent our own group away singly until only James Hogan and I were left. We fired a few last shots at the enemy who had warmed things up considerably with machine guns which they had brought into action, I think from armoured cars on the road. The old trick of keeping attention concentrated on one spot while the real action was being taken elsewhere had worked well so far. The sole objective of the closing cordon was our cutaway bog and no shot was heard along the line of the retreating column.

James Hogan and I crawled along the drain until the slope of the hill covered our movements. We sprinted then as machine gun bullets which were just clearing the hill were falling all around us. Just below the hill we reached a small thatched cottage and we took shelter for a moment behind a huge boulder standing in front of it. An old man was leaning on the half door of the house smoking a pipe. When he saw us he took the pipe out of his mouth and saluted us with "Good morning, boys, isn't it a grand morning?". The sun was certainly shining from a clear sky, but the crack of rifles and the chatter of machine guns spoiled the effect - at least for us. While we paused in our rock shelter to recover our breath for the next dash we observed the "strike" of many bullets on the old man's roof and on the walls beside him, but he was completely unconcerned. We hurried on and a little lower down we entered the ravine (or glen) and followed it without incident until we rejoined the column. From the local men we learned that the old man we met was completely deaf and was probably quite unaware of the unusual goings-on.

We were out of the trap but not yet "out of the wood" and speed was essential. I estimated that we had about an hour before the trick was discovered and our route picked up. Roads were few but unfortunately nobody had ever considered it necessary to obstruct them in this practically uninhabited country between Clare and Galway. If we could avoid the roads the enemy would lose a great deal of the advantage of their mobility and even if they used the roads to get in position in front of us we could always change our direction. In actual fact this did happen and we switched our route to conform. Our problem was to keep out of range of armoured cars and strong forces until it was dark when we could easily slip by. This, of course, meant continuous movement for about 16 hours. No definite objective could be decided on at this stage other than getting as far away as possible from the British force. We had a choice of going north-east towards Loughrea, north-west towards Derrybrien or west towards Lough Graney. In any one of these areas we could find food and a fairly safe billeting area, but no decision could be taken between them until we saw how the situation was developing.

The column moved off in high spirits and no sign of the enemy was seen for hours. We couldn't understand their long delay and the first light I got on it was from a story told me in Dublin in 1925 by the late Mr. Coyle, the Dublin tea merchant. Mr. Coyle was in London in the early summer of 1921 and one night in his hotel a party of British officers were having dinner at a small table beside him. When he overheard that one of them was home on leave from service in Ireland he

listened to the conversation. The officer from Ireland described how he had "Michael Brennan's Flying Column" completely surrounded and only delayed closing in while making sure that every avenue of escape was cut off. When he was ready he advanced his line against fairly heavy fire and finally rushed the position held by the "rebels" to find nothing there but a lot of empty cartridge cases. He confessed he was completely bewildered as he had himself seen 30 or 40 men getting into this position and his men had a clear view of the country for miles around this point and had seen nobody leave it. He said the only possible explanation seemed to be an underground tunnel and he spent a long time searching for any such feature. Finding none, he sent parties out in different directions and eventually one such party sighted us far away. He had then to collect his men and get them on lorries, but owing to the distance we kept from the roads he couldn't again get within range of us and in the evening he gave up the chase. He had gone back there again later to examine the ground, but he still couldn't find out the secret of our disappearance.

All through that beautiful sunny day we trudged through the bog and moorland. As there were no houses and breakfast had been scanty and hurried, food was badly missed in the mountain air. The local scouts were of course much less toughened than the column men and during the afternoon they were so distressed that we dropped them here and there in pairs. We assumed (correctly as it transpired) that the main body would continue to attract all the attention of our pursuers and that there was very little danger of a detailed search.

In any event, even if there were such search, these men were confident they could find individual safe hiding-places. We had travelled mainly north, but late in the evening, we swung west and about 10 p.m. we marched down the side of Sliabh-an-Óir to the southern end of Lough Graney. When I measured our route on the map next day I found we had travelled well over 40 miles since the fight at dawn. Despite their hunger most of the men fell asleep along the side of the road while the local guides to billets were being detailed. Some hours before a boy had been sent ahead on a bicycle with a message and by the time we arrived all roads were completely blocked, protection arranged and billets selected.

Next day I discussed the situation with the senior officers. It was pretty certain that the British would mount a big operation against us now that they had located us as frequenting the area between Scariff and Galway. (A few days later they surrounded all this area with several thousand men, held it for three days with a permanent cordon closing in around it and searched it systematically). We decided to scatter into small groups until the storm had blown over and to use the interval in attending meetings of the Co. Council committees and also to hold some much delayed Brigade conferences.

I left Caher in the afternoon with James Hogan and we walked south past Feakle and Bodyke. We stopped for food and a rest at Tom Scanlon's of Caherhurley and then continued over the mountains to Kilbane and on to Sallybank where we halted at about 5 a.m. and went to bed. In the afternoon we set off

again and we reached Hogan's house in Cratloe about 11 p.m. We had a meal there, but we couldn't remain as the house was too dangerous. We were to go to Punch's in Meelick, another four miles across country. We were worn out physically by now and I revolted. I insisted on getting a pony and trap and James Hogan, Ned Punch, my brother Austin and I drove for three miles along the main road between Limerick and Ennis, meeting only one lorry which passed us without incident. It was of course foolhardy, as the road was hardly ever free of troops, but the incident is mentioned as an example of the extraordinary choice an exhausted man may make to avoid further physical effort.

At Punch's we went to bed about 1 a.m. and we didn't wake until about 7 p.m. We heard music and singing going on downstairs and a member of the family knocked at the door and asked us not to come down until we were called as they had some visitors they wanted to get rid of before we appeared. We waited for about two hours getting hungrier and hungrier, while the concert under us got livelier and livelier. At about 9 p.m. we were called down and told about the visitors who had just left.

Early that morning large forces of military had arrived in the district. They established a H.Q. at Punch's gate and proceeded to carry out a detailed search of every house for miles. The girls of the Punch family did some quick thinking and acted promptly. They wandered casually out along the avenue and got into conversation with some of the officers at their gate. When they had got friendly a cup of tea or a drink was hinted at and before long

the officers came in in ones and twos and had tea. This went on until the afternoon when, as the cordons closed in, more officers became available and the trek to Punch's for tea continued. Many of them stayed on and the girls played the piano for them. This of course developed into songs and by 6 p.m. Punch's drawing room was crowded with British officers whose laughter and songs disturbed our sleep. Punch's house was, naturally not searched.

Some time before this, a message had come from G.H.Q. informing us that a proposal was under consideration that the war should be carried into the heart of the Empire and their Government be made impossible by attacks on individual Ministers. We were asked to ascertain how many men would volunteer to go to London and live there for such time as would be necessary to familiarise themselves with the details of their assignments. It was to be made perfectly clear to each man that he wouldn't have the slightest hope of escaping with his life and that his sole objective would be a successful attack on a particular man with no regard for his personal safety. I arranged to have the steadiest and most reliable men assembled in each battalion area and I interviewed them, explaining the proposal but withholding the information that the actual attacks were to be made on the members of the British Government. I made it clear that volunteering for this was in effect signing their own death warrants, as no man going to London would come back. Almost without exception, every man interviewed volunteered and G.H.Q. were informed that over a hundred men in East Clare were at their disposal for the "forlorn hope" if required. We heard nothing further about it.

In May we received a G.H.Q. instruction establishing a Divisional Area to include the three Clare Brigades and Galway south of the railway line from Galway city to Ballinasloe. It was to be known as the 1st Western Division and I was appointed Divisional Commander. There had been a certain amount of friction for years between the staff of the Mid-Clare Brigade and East Clare, and I was directed that for the present I was not to assume command over the Mid Clare Brigade. My first instruction was to go at once to South Galway and endeavour to get a Volunteer organisation established there. According to G.H.Q. the old Brigades in South Galway had completely collapsed and I would find very little on which to work. I knew from our march through Galway that the material there was excellent and all that was needed was an organisation with the right men in charge of the various units.

I knew already that Laurence Kelly of Loughrea was an outstanding man with an imtimate knowledge of the position in South East Galway. I wrote to him via the cyclist dispatch line informing him of the new position and asking him to arrange meetings for the various areas such as Loughrea, Ballinasloe, Portumna. To each such meeting he was to bring representatives from all surrounding districts.

I also knew Joe Stanford of Gort to be a man on whom I could rely in South West Galway and I sent him a message on similar lines for that area.

The Column was broken up into three or four parts with instructions to engage in any activities

which offered. I set out for Galway on foot from near Limerick accompanied by James Hogan, Pat Houlihan and my brother, Paddy. We crossed the Killaloe Mountains following the usual Column route, went on past Scariff and Feakle and through the mountains into Galway and on to Kelly's house near Loughrea. Laurence Kelly had already summoned the meetings and we spent four nights attending these meetings, establishing a battalion for each area and appointing battalion and company officers. When the battalions were organised I summoned their senior officers to a meeting near Loughrea and there appointed a Brigade Staff with Laurence Kelly as Brigade Commander. All this tour of S.E. Galway had been uneventful and we had run into no opposition. We lived on lamb for the whole week, as every farmhouse seemed to have unlimited supplies and it was served to us for at least three meals every day.

From Loughrea we moved to South West Galway and there held a similar series of meetings finishing up with the Brigade meeting near Ardrahan at which I appointed Joe Stanford acting Brigadier. This meeting was held in a large vacant house and just as the meeting ended about 2 a.m., outposts reported a squadron of cavalry approaching. The local officers scattered through the country and as our mission was concluded we headed back for Clare. We soon found that the cavalry were searching the country and the noise made by other military parties showed that our route wasn't open. We left the roads and wandered aimlessly, just keeping clear of the searchers until after dawn, when we could find our way through the

close and difficult country. When we reached the railway we made good progress walking along it until a reconnaissance aeroplane joined in and forced us into cover. However, we remained on the railway line for miles, just diving into cover each time the plane was heard approaching and emerging when it had passed. We had hoped to cross into Clare on the east side of Gort, but enemy activities edged us further and further away until in the end we had to make a wide swing around to the west of the town turning back again when we reached its southern side. We got to Geoghegan's near Ballyturin in the late afternoon and stopped there until next day. That evening, we headed off through the mountains, by Ballinruan, east of Ennis and down to Quin. I spent a few days near Quin preparing and sending off my report to G.H.Q. on Galway and my recommendations for appointments, and attending a number of conferences with Canon O'Kennedy, John D. Molony, Seán Scanlon and others on Co. Council business such as the collection and safeguarding of rates, and the proposed changes in the local government system. Actually, I think it was at this meeting we approved of Canon O'Kennedy's scheme for local councils. There were also long discussions on the collection for the Dáil Loan.

The fight at Mountshannon had seriously depleted our ammunition supply and some smaller encounters by the different groups during my absence in Galway had brought it to a critical stage. We were down to about a dozen rounds per rifle and, in face of this, we daren't risk any operation which didn't offer good prospects of capturing ammunition. We decided to await intelligence information of some enemy movement which would give us such an opportunity and to occupy ourselves

in the meantime with such routine activities as holding up mail trains and cars and searching for British mails, making enemy movements more difficult by systematic road blocking, occasional small attacks and sniping shots. The Column remained in small groups and as soon as G.H.Q. wrote confirming the appointments I had made I went to Galway again and held a number of meetings with the Battalion and Brigade Councils.

While I was away one group had a fight with R.I.C. near Newmarket-on-Fergus and were later surprised when crossing a road by two lorries of Black and Tans. In a cross-country fight they had to fire a lot of ammunition and one man (Tom Healy) collapsed and died of heart failure. He was an R.I.C. man and clerk to the Co. Inspector in Ennis, where he worked for us. On the previous day the R.I.C. had become suspicious of him, but he escaped that night and joined our men. The physical strain was too great after his office life and he died in his first fight. At Woodcock Hill in Meelick another group held up a train and were surprised by a party of troops who were travelling on it. In a running fight Michael Gleeson and Chris McCarthy were killed. At Fortane Cross near Tulla, Mat McGrath was halted late one night by a military patrol. He fired instantly, killing the officer and wounding three men, escaping himself unscathed.

Pat Houlihan and Seán Moroney ran into a cavalry squadron one night near Sliabh-an-Óir. On being challenged, they opened fire and retreated across a bog. One soldier was killed.

Three of our men were surprised by troops in the

village of Kilkishen. The usual running fight resulted in their escape but with one man badly wounded.

A British plane made a forced landing in Cratloe and a strong guard was posted on it at once. Two or three of our men "sniped" them, killing an N.C.O. and wounding some of the men. This resulted in great military activity and late that night my brother, Austin, and four others (returning from an operation in East Limerick) cycled into troops holding the road. Owing to a storm no challenge was heard and heavy fire was their first warning of trouble. They escaped over the wall with their bicycles, but returned later to search for a missing man (Seán O'Halloran). He had disappeared, but he was found later at a house over a mile away to which he had crawled. He was terribly wounded but against all medical expectations he survived. (Later: I think this happened during the winter, as O'Halloran was back in the column before the Truce).

Early in July I sent two small Columns to the Galway Brigades. They were to be joined by some of the local men and look out for opportunities which wouldn't require much ammunition.

I was in the Kilmaley district (in Mid Clare - probably on Co. Council business) when the orders for the Truce reached me, on the 9th or 10th of July. Just after midday on July 11th I went into Ennis with some comrades and when our car stopped at the Clare Hotel we were surrounded by an almost hysterical crowd. One of the most excited was a British sergeant (named Doyle, I think) wearing the ribbon of the Victoria Cross on his tunic. We were, of course, fully armed and equipped and our appearance was tangible proof that

"the Terror" was ended. This was probably the real cause of the emotion. In Limerick next day we had similar experiences every time our car stopped. Meeting Black and Tans and Auxiliaries also armed was at first rather a nervy business and we circled rather than walked past each other, both parties becoming adepts at watching sideways and over their shoulders and keeping a right hand ready to pull a gun. Near Lisdoonvarna about 15 Auxiliaries ran into three of us unexpectedly. Guns were drawn on both sides, but nobody fired and after a tense few seconds they started their lorry and drove on.

I went to Dublin on July 12th or 13th and reported at G.H.Q. Collins, Mulcahy, Gearóid O'Sullivan and others all emphasised that they didn't expect the Truce to last very long and that it must be used to improve our organisation and training. I left them quite convinced that we had only got a breathing space and that a resumption of the fighting was an absolute certainty. In consequence my great anxiety was how and where I could secure arms and, above all, ammunition.

I met many old friends of the A.S.U. and they all pressed me to accompany them to Howth that night for a party in celebration of Dan Breen's wedding. Dan had been married just before the Truce, but the celebrations had, of necessity, been postponed. I started with Tom Keogh and two or three others in an A.S.U. car driven by Paddy Kelly. The car had no lights and in Raheny Kelly mistook a long pile of stones for the road He ran up on the stones and overturned the car on to the road. I got a bad blow on the side of my head and a doctor who came along in his car took me to McGilligan's

house in Leeson St. where Mrs. McGilligan had invited me to stay.

Next day was Sunday and an expedition to Glendalough had been arranged for me. I was a bit shaky, but I went off for the day with several of the McGilligans and Mr. and Mrs. Ernest Blythe. As the day wore on I got worse and in the afternoon they cut short the trip and we returned to town. My eyes were now almost closed with blood which had collected and caused swelling under them. Dr. O'Hea, who lived next door to McGilligans, was brought in and he diagnosed a fracture of the base of my skull. He said I should have been dead hours before after the day's driving. He ordered me to bed at once in a darkened room where he said I would have to stay for weeks in complete quiet.

After a few days visitors started coming to see me, amongst them being Arthur Griffith, Ernest Blythe, Dick Mulcahy, Mick Collins, Cathal Brugha, Eoin O'Duffy. Cathal Brugha came several times and we had long talks on the organisation and arming of the 1st Western Division. He was annoyed when he learned that the Mid Clare Brigade was still not formally included in the Division under my orders, as he said he had given a direction (as Minister for Defence) for its inclusion some time previously. He noted my anxiety about arms and ammunition and he asked if I had any hopes of being able to get some myself. I thought I could if I had money, but our small funds were now almost finished. He said he might be able to help and I promised to call and see him before I left town.

I remained in bed for a week and then went

around seeing people, as I felt all right. Dr. O'Hea was displeased and he foretold headaches all my life as a result. (He was right). I saw Cathal Brugha and he gave me a cheque for £1,000 (one thousand pounds) to help in getting arms.

I returned to Clare and attended an inquiry held in Ennis by Eoin O'Duffy into the objections raised by the Mid Clare Brigadier, Frank Barrett, to the inclusion of his Brigade under my command. O'Duffy found the differences were mostly imagination (many of the complaints were about men who wouldn't remain in Mid Clare and had been allowed to serve with the East Clare Column). As a result of his report the Division was completed at once and Frank Barrett was appointed my second in command. Joe Barrett was Adjutant and James Hogan, Intelligence Officer.

I sent Michael Hogan (brother of James) and Ned Lynch of Miltown Malbay, to London with Cathal Brugha's thousand pounds to buy arms. Lynch had lived in London for years and knew all the Irish group there. We knew that there were many agents in London who would sell anything for cash and the only problem was how to get in touch with them. Lynch was certain he could make the necessary contacts through his acquaintances.

A completely distorted version of this mission has become current and I have seen it published again recently in the "Irish Times". It is to the effect that Cathal Brugha sent Michael Hogan to London to raid the Guards' Barracks for arms. This contains the ugly implication that while Cathal Brugha's colleagues were discussing terms for a treaty with the British,

he deliberately embarked on a course of action which could have caused the British to denounce the Truce and which in any event put Collins (as Chief Liaison Officer) in a most embarrassing and delicate position. In justice to Cathal Brugha, I must clear this up. Cathal Brugha had never met either Michael Hogan or Ned Lynch and when he gave me the money there wasn't even a suggestion of getting arms anywhere except by purchase. My instructions to Michael Hogan were that he was to make contacts with agents and buy arms from them. I did not report back to Cathal Brugha on my arrangements and I am absolutely certain he was completely unaware of my having sent men to London until "the storm broke".

Hogan and Lynch made the acquaintance of a sergeant in the Irish Guards who came from Feakle, Co. Clare. This man was sure that with outside assistance he would be able to remove a large quantity of rifles and ammunition from the Guards' Depot. Hogan and Lynch accepted the proposal at once and proceeded to make the arrangements, but did not inform me. Their plans miscarried and my first news of their scheme was the newspaper reports of their arrest for attempting a raid on the Guards' Barracks. It was treated as a major sensation by the newspapers and by the British Government as a very serious breach of the Truce. Collins rushed back to Dublin and paraded me to get at the facts. I told him, of course, that I had got the money from Cathal Brugha, but that neither Brugha nor I had any knowledge of the scheme to get arms out of a military barracks in London. When Collins had heard the whole story he was less worried, as his anxiety had been that the British might be able to show that I,

as a Divisional Commander of the Volunteers, was involved in such a serious breach of the Truce. I heard afterwards that he convinced the British that only the men directly involved had any knowledge of the attempt. To our great surprise, he also managed to secure the release of Hogan and Lynch and even the Guards" sergeant was released when the Treaty was signed.

Signed: M. Brennan Comdt.

(M. Brennan)

Date: 11/1/55

11.1.55

Witness: M. F. Ryan Comdt.

(M.F. Ryan) Comd't.