

W.S. 1075

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21  
BURO STAIRS MILITARY 1913-21  
No. W.S. 1075

**ORIGINAL**

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

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Witness

Thomas Shalloo,  
Parliament Street,  
Ennistymon,  
Co. Clare.

Identity.

Vice O/C. 5th Battalion Mid-Clare Brigade.

Subject.

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STATEMENT BY THOMAS SHALLOO,

Parliament St., Ennistymon, Co. Clare,

formerly Vice O/C 5th Battalion, Mid Clare Brigade.

I was born on 12.1.1895 at Caherclough, Ennistymon, where my people were farmers. At present I carry on business as a publican and as a commercial traveller, having a number of agencies for the counties of Clare and Galway.

I joined the Irish Volunteers on their formation in Ennistymon early in 1914. My recollection now is that the unit was under the control of a committee, and that it contained about 150 men from the town and the surrounding districts. Drilling, which took place in the Town Hall, was under the control of three instructors, Andy O'Brien, Christy Doyle and Ambrose Kelligher, all ex British Army men. We drilled twice a week, timber guns being used for musketry instruction at first, and after some months the unit got a dozen Martini Henry rifles through some source of which I'm not aware.

The instructors were very competent men and by the summer of 1914 they had moulded the Ennistymon unit into a smart military body well versed in squad, company and musketry drill. Though the Town Hall was then the headquarters of the unit, we did most of our training in <sup>Dronney's</sup> ~~Downey's~~ field outside the town and also got some practice in skirmishing and manoeuvres on the surrounding countryside. Everything was going well until the division occurred between John Redmond and the Irish

Volunteer Executive. In this crisis the vast majority of the Ennistymon Volunteers supported Remond and only about twenty or thirty remained loyal to the Irish Volunteer Executive.

The outstanding men in the Ennistymon district who opposed Redmond were the veterans Tomás O'Loughlin, a native of Carron in North Clare, who was a foundation member of the Sinn Féin organisation, an old I.R.B. man and Land Leaguer; Eamon Waldron, then a Gaelic League teacher, and a young man named Martin Devitt, afterwards Vice O/C Mid Clare Brigade and killed in action in February 1920. At that time Devitt worked as a shop assistant in Roughan's drapery stores in Ennistymon.

Devitt was a native of my own district and he had not much faith in the townspeople. He always regarded a countryman as being worth a dozen of them. When the majority of the Ennistymon Volunteers sided with Redmond Devitt was very disgusted with them, and, on the advice of Tomás O'Loughlin, I believe, he immediately formed a new company in his own parish of Cloonagh. It was from this company that the Irish Volunteer movement in North Clare spread. At first it did not contain more than twenty men, and I was one of the original members.

I would say that the Cloonagh Company was formed in September 1914. At first most of its members were from that parish, but in the course of the next few months men residing up to ten miles away joined it. By Easter 1916 the strength of the company had increased to about 50. I'm not too clear as to who the first officers were, but I know that in addition to Martin Devitt

others prominent were Seamus Conneally, Cullinagh, Peadar O'Loughlin and Autie Rynne. As a result of the Redmondite split we had lost the services of the ex British Army instructors, and the men in charge had to rely on military training manuals for guidance. The Martini Henry rifles which had been in use in Ennistymon were the first guns which we sought to acquire, but when an effort was made to secure them it was then learned that they had been transferred to Carrigaholt in West Clare.

Between September 1914 and Easter 1916 the Cloonagh Company met regularly twice a week, and while the week night might vary we always mobilised on Sunday. We were not long established when target practice was introduced. For this purpose two .22 sporting rifles were used and the targets were erected in an isolated place adjoining Ardmore House, which was then vacant and subsequently became known throughout North Clare as "Liberty Hall". Target practice took place almost every Sunday, each man getting about half a dozen shots.

At each Sunday mobilisation Martin Devitt usually made a short speech, the theme of which invariably was the importance of being ready for the forthcoming fight. His remarks and the articles in weekly newspapers like "The United Irishman" and "The Spark", which were distributed among the members, were the only indications that I had that a Rising was contemplated in 1916.

On Easter Tuesday night I met Martin Devitt at Ennistymon railway station and he asked me to go with him to Seamus Conneally's house in Cullinagh. I did, and from there Devitt and myself went on to Thade Hogan's

in the same townland where we seized a shotgun. We continued on this errand, seizing two more shotguns on our way towards Cahersherkin where we met men from the Kilfenora side under Peadar O'Loughlin of Tullaha. With them we went on collecting shotguns. Altogether we took nine guns that night. Only in one instance did we meet any opposition, when the houseowner, mistaking us for youthful miscreants, fired through the door, wounding Peter Barrington, Caherclogh, in the fingers. The guns were divided among the party, and after getting orders to hold ourselves in readiness for instant mobilisation we were dismissed and sent home.

On the following Thursday or Friday night Andy O'Donohue, Lickeen, Kilfenora, brought word to the company leaders that he had received verbal notification from Tomás O'Loughlin, Ennistymon, through a local school teacher, who was not a Volunteer, that they were to attack the Ennistymon R.I.C. barracks. O'Loughlin was then the I.R.B. Centre for North Clare, and it was through him that Devitt expected orders might come to begin armed activities. I was present at a discussion among the company officers at which the message brought by O'Donohue was considered. It was decided to ignore it, as it was felt that if O'Loughlin wanted the police barracks to be attacked he would come along himself or at least send some reliable person with the order. O'Loughlin was arrested a few days after this incident and he was kept in custody for about a month. On his release he was asked about the message, but he denied all knowledge of it.

When O'Loughlin had repudiated this message a number of the Volunteers came to the conclusion that the

schoolteacher was an "agent provocateur" and deserved to be shot. This question was brought before officers and I was again present when they considered it. It was decided that as the culprit was the father of a large family and very much addicted to drink, that no action be taken against him. This did not satisfy some of the Volunteers, who some nights later fired into his home. Nobody was injured by this action.

The Easter Rebellion finished without orders of any sort having come from our headquarters, which were then in Limerick. After its suppression the only other person arrested in North Clare along with Tomás O'Loughlin was Eamon Waldron, who, I believe, was interned in England. The Cloonagh Irish Volunteers kept the organisation intact, and though they did so secretly and lost a few members, they continued to drill and even have target practice now and again until the general release of the prisoners arrested during and after the Rising.

On the release of these prisoners in July 1917 public drilling commenced again in Cloonagh as elsewhere. Recruiting into the ranks of the Irish Volunteers also started. In less than a month the Cloonagh Company had become so large that a number of new companies had to be created. In this reorganisation I was appointed a Section Commander in the Cloonagh Company. Of course the East Clare by-election campaign in July 1917 was a great help in causing the large increase in strength of the Volunteers throughout the whole country. In that election campaign men from Cloonagh played a prominent part in protecting the meetings of the Sinn Féin candidate from attacks by supporters of his opponents.

None of the officers in the company were arrested when the public drilling began. Though their names were noted by the R.I.C. and arrests were expected, the men concerned got very careful about their movements and managed to evade apprehension.

A Sinn Féin Club was formed in the parish of Cloonagh in June or July 1917. I was a member from the start but I do not remember having attended many of its meetings. I paid subscriptions into it now and again.

The conscription threat early in 1918 brought additional recruits into the Volunteers, and at that stage, as a consequence of further reshuffling of the company areas, I was elected O/C of the Cloonagh Company. On official orders that each Volunteer should provide himself with a pike, I arranged for the forging of pike heads by two local blacksmiths - both named Maloney. The provision of the shafts was left to the individual Volunteers themselves. As matters turned out no use was ever made of these pikes. Coinciding with their manufacture came orders from Brigade H.Q. that the Volunteers should back up any agrarian trouble against landlords and grabbers. The Cloonagh and Kilfenora Companies co-operated in putting this order into effect in the cases of Roche's and Cahir's farms in Ballylane, Kilfenora, and Burke's of Kilfenora. On these lands, of which forcible possession was taken, about twenty or thirty acres were ploughed by the Volunteers and I was one of the <sup>Volunteers who were present.</sup> ploughmen. A couple of months later orders were again received from headquarters, this time forbidding Volunteers to take part in agrarian trouble, and subsequently this order was rigidly observed by us.

Towards the end of 1918 it was decided to collect all the guns in the area which were held by the civilian population. While I have no idea of what arms were obtained by this means, I am certain that they were all surrendered voluntarily. As a result of a few attacks on the R.I.C. in which I was not involved, a couple of carbines came into the custody of the Cloonagh Company, which enabled us to acquire a knowledge of the use of the rifle.

Early in 1919 the Clare Brigade, which covered the entire county, was broken up into three different brigades, and, in turn, new battalions were formed in North West Clare. Up till then there was only one battalion for the area from Inagh to Miltown Malbay, northwards to the Co. Galway border. Under the reorganisation the area from Inagh to Miltown up to Ennistymon and eastwards along the Cullinagh and Inagh rivers, became the area of the 4th Battalion, while anything north of that as far as the Galway border and eastwards to within a mile or so from Corofin, came under the control of the 5th Battalion. I was appointed <sup>Vice</sup> O/C of the latter battalion, the O/C being ~~Andy O'Donoghue~~ <sup>Peadar Loughlin</sup>, the Adjutant Peadar O'Brien and the Quartermaster Peadar Considine. I remained in that rank up to the date of my arrest on 29.6.1921. Later the 5th Battalion area was further divided and a new battalion, 6th, created in February 1921 to cover the areas of Lisdoonvarna, Morrough, Toorahera, New Quay and Ballinalacken.

The first occasion in which I came into conflict with British troops was on 21.12.1917. On that evening I was travelling home by train from Ennis to Ennistymon. A military sergeant armed with a rifle was in the same



compartment. I made up my mind to disarm him, and thinking that he was only going as far as Corofin I decided to make the attempt at that station. He did not alight, and learning that he was bound for Ennistymon I waited until we arrived there.

At Ennistymon station I saw two local Volunteers, Seamus McMahon and John Healy, and asked them to join me in the attack, to which they agreed. After the soldier had left the station and got out on the main road I rushed him and grabbed the rifle. I overpowered him without much difficulty but in the struggle the rifle strap got entangled in his arm. In endeavouring to get the rifle free I twisted it in the wrong direction, with the result that the strap twisted round his arm and could not get the rifle released. The commotion of the struggle was getting so loud that there was a danger that it would attract the attention of a party of thirty or forty other soldiers who at that time were unloading supplies on the other side of the station. Reluctantly I had to give up the attempt and contented myself by giving him a shove which knocked him. We then cleared away.

The death of Tomás O'Loughlin, to whom I have referred already, took place in the home of his trusted friend Kitty McCormack, Ennistymon, in December 1918 as far as I can remember. His funeral, a military one, to Carron graveyard was attended by Volunteers from every part of Clare and from outside the county too. It was probably the most impressive ceremony that had ever before been held in the district. Peadar O'Loughlin, who succeeded Martin Devitt as Vice O/C of the Mid Clare Brigade, was in charge of the parade, and the firing party

at the graveside was in charge of Pat Powell, alias Cahill. Two R.I.C. men from a nearby police hut in Ballydoura came into the graveyard to watch and report on the proceedings. Before the firing party fired the last volleys or produced their guns Cahill called aside myself, Paddy Devitt, Joe Maloney, Ballyagh, Ennistymon, and a fourth man whose name I can't remember, and asked us to hold up the police and make them face the graveyard wall while the firing party were discharging their volleys. We got close to the police without exciting their suspicion and then, feigning to be armed by sticking our hands through our coat pockets, we gave them the order "About turn". The firing party then did their job.

Though the occasion was a solemn one everyone who witnessed the hold-up of the police could not help laughing at their plight, and it became the subject of "song and story" far and wide. The R.I.C. were never popular in Clare but had the reputation of being almost invincible. They were more feared than respected. It was astonishing the effect that small incident had in helping to lessen the people's fear of them in North Clare at least.

On the next occasion that I took part in an attack on the enemy <sup>it</sup> was when an attempt was made to disarm R.I.C. at Cahermore on 5.7.1919. A man named Dwyer living in the Island, Kilshanny, had police protection on account of land trouble. A party of four R.I.C. men visited his place each night and it was decided to disarm them at Cahermore Cross  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles from Kilfenora. The following were selected to take part:

Andy O'Donoghue, Battalion <sup>officers</sup> ~~etc~~ (rifle)

Terry Coughlan, O/C Cloonagh Company (.38 revolver)

Paddy Ward, O/C Kilfenora Company ( " " )

Peadar Considine, Battalion Q/M

Austin Geraghty, O/C Lisdoonvarna Company

and

myself who had a shotgun.

Due to the fact that the police came along earlier than expected Considine and Geraghty did not arrive in time for the attack. At about 10.30 that night the police arrived at the ambush position, but there were only two men instead of four. One carried a rifle and the other a .45 revolver. When they reached the cross O'Donoghue shouted "hands up". The policeman who had the rifle made an effort to use it, but as soon as he did so we fired. The police ran towards Kilfenora, and though both of them were wounded they got back to the barracks. The man with the rifle was shot through the wrist by O'Donoghue and he dropped the rifle on the road. We collected this gun, which had five rounds of .303 in the magazine, and went off that night to Cloonagh.

None of the men actually concerned in the attack was arrested in widespread police riads which followed it, although two men who were detained on suspicion had to be released soon after for want of evidence.

A sketch of this attack is shown on Appendix 1 to this statement.

On 2.12.1919 a shooting party given by H.V. McNamara, Ennistymon, a most unpopular landlord and a bitter enemy of Sinn Féin, was attacked at Sessiaghmore, Carron, following their refusal to surrender their guns to a party of Volunteers lying in ambush.

I learned that this attack was in contemplation when I received word to report to the Vice O/C. of the Brigade, Peadar O'Loughlin, Tullaha. I went to Tullaha on the night of 1.12.1919 where O'Loughlin, Pat Powell (alias Cahill), Daniel Tarpey, John Joe Markham and Paddy Ward were assembled. Powell, a deserter from the British Army and a native of Birr, was the only person outside the district among us. Arms were issued and the purpose of the assembly was explained. Cahill was given a rifle. O'Loughlin and myself had revolvers and the others shotguns.

We reached Sessiaghmore about daybreak and then took up our positions, which are shown in sketch on Appendix 1. The road to Carron along which the shooting party was to travel was blocked by a barricade erected about 20 yards from the crossroads.

The shooting party came along in two motor cars about 9 o'clock in the morning. It was made up of four or five military officers, Lady Beatrice O'Brien, H.V. McNamara and one of his gamekeepers named Osborne. When the first car reached the barricade it halted and the second car, then at the crossroads, pulled up simultaneously. The occupants were ordered by O'Loughlin, our commander, to put up their hands and surrender their arms. Their reply was a volley of shots, to which we answered vigorously. The exchange of shots lasted about a quarter of an hour. By that time McNamara and his friends had managed to get from the cars to the house of a herdsman nearby. There they barricaded themselves and we did not attempt to press home the attack. We searched the cars and found a box of shotgun cartridges and a supply of refreshments which the party

had for the day's outing. Having put the cars out of action we moved off.

Every member of the shooting party, including Lady Beatrice O'Brien, was wounded. She took an active part in the fighting which took place and had to be treated as a dangerous combatant. On our side O'Loughlin was wounded in the eye and Geraghty in the arm. Neither of them were taken in widespread police and military raids which were made for several weeks after. The whole affair got a lot of publicity in the Irish and English daily papers at the time. Curiously enough the only person charged in connection with the attack was the herd in whose house McNamara and his friends found refuge. Gannessy, the herdsman, was not at home at the time and he bore a strong similarity to Peadar O'Loughlin. Members of the party who appeared as witnesses for the prosecution positively identified the accused as being one of the attackers, but despite this he was acquitted.

It is only fair to add that Gannessy was a supporter of the Sinn Féin movement and I believe that he was actually the man who furnished the Vice Brigade O/C with the information that McNamara and his associates were coming to the Carron district on this shooting outing.

Geraghty, who was the more seriously injured of our two casualties, had later to go to Dublin for treatment. I arranged to get him there.

After the creation of the three separate brigades in Clare exception was taken in certain quarters by the appointment of members of the Barrett family to the higher posts in the Brigade Staff. Frank Barrett was made Brigade O/C and his brother, Joe, Brigade Adjutant.

The decision to form the new brigades was made by G.H.Q. I am not sufficiently conversant with all the reasons which gave rise to objections to their appointments, but I do know that an attempt was made to form a rival brigade within the Mid Clare area. This splinter organisation was not recognised by General Headquarters and it was styled the "Independent Brigade". Apart from a couple of Volunteers none of the men in the 4th and 5th Battalions had any association with it, and its adherents were mainly drawn from the ranks of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Battalions.

In the Kilmaley district between the village of Connolly and Ennis, which formed part of the 2nd Battalion, the majority of the Volunteers joined the "Independent Brigade". They were not under the same discipline then as they were before and, as frequently happened in the past when dissatisfied elements refused to recognise the authority of the supreme body, they soon developed into nothing better than a mob. Land trouble was rife in that district the same as in many parts of Clare, and in the upset state of the times it was a simple matter to start an agitation against any farmer who had not the goodwill and protection of the official Irish Volunteers. Around Kilmaley when most of the Volunteers gave their support to the "Independent Brigade", some farmers who disapproved of this action or whose sons remained loyal to the official organisation soon became objects of attack by the dissentient element, who also had under their control all the arms which had been collected in the district. Houses were fired into and assaults were made.

The state of affairs which existed in Kilmaley

was brought to the notice of the Brigade Council, and at a meeting held in the first fortnight in February it was decided that a column comprised of members of the 4th and 5th Battalions should be sent into the district to disarm the trouble makers and to warn them as to their future behaviour. The operation was entrusted to the charge of the Vice Brigade O/C, Martin Devitt.

I was one of the column which totalled about 35 men which went with Devitt about 14th February, 1920, to carry into effect the decision of the Brigade Council. The column was armed with rifles, revolvers and shotguns. Having completed our mission, seizing eight or nine shotguns in the process, we returned home in a convoy of outside cars and traps which had been placed at our disposal by friendly people around Kilmaley and Connolly. Some members of the column lived over 20 miles from these districts. As the convoy was approaching Crowe's Bridge about 4 o'clock in the evening, some of the occupants dismounted from their vehicles without taking their guns with them. Suddenly a lorry or van carrying military came along the Cloonanaha by-road towards Crowe's Bridge. The leading Volunteers had no time to get their guns off the cars and they retreated towards the men coming after them. Devitt, as far as I remember, was at the rere of the convoy and had no warning of what had happened. Some of the party took shelter behind the road fences.

The military were taken as much by surprise as ourselves. However, seeing the guns abandoned on the leading vehicles they proceeded to take possession of them. They did seize some guns from the first car, including one rifle, an R.I.C. carbine too, and were in the process of going on to the next car when fire was

opened on them from our men who had taken shelter. The military fired back but only to divert attention while they were reversing their lorry, which they quickly did and drove off towards Ennis.

Considering it to be unsafe to proceed further along the roads, Devitt sent back the cars and traps with their drivers to their own homes and took the column across country, via Cloonanaha and Derrymore, to Cloonagh where the men were dismissed.

It so happened that in the military lorry was the O/C of the British troops in Clare, either Colonel Murray White or Colonel Cotton. He came to the conclusion that the column which he had encountered was on its way to attack an R.I.C. or military post, and at once ordered a big round-up of the area around that part of Clare. Hundreds of troops and R.I.C. from all over Clare were rushed into it, but by that time we were safely outside the ring in our own area miles away.

It was this particular encounter at Crowe's Bridge that indirectly led to the death of Martin Devitt in an attack in almost the same place a fortnight later. He had determined to make good the loss of the guns, a carbine and, I believe, two or three shotguns, which the military had captured, by disarming a patrol of four R.I.C. He was shot dead in the attempt, but I was not with him on that tragic occasion.

I heard of Devitt's death on the night on which he was killed and learned that his funeral was to take place on the following night from Inagh to Cloonagh. On my arrival at Inagh the next night there was a big



congregation of Volunteers there from all parts of the brigade area, including the officers of the Brigade Staff. The body of our deceased leader was uncoffined, and though I was told that it was the intention to secrete his body away in some hiding place until a more suitable opportunity arose later on to give him a proper christian-burial in his family grave, I was amazed when I ascertained that no arrangements had been made to provide a coffin. I brought the matter to the notice of the Brigade O/C and a few other prominent officers, and prevailed on them to delay the funeral until I came back with a coffin from Ennistymon.

In Ennistymon, to which I had to travel by <sup>car owned by Miss Nolan</sup> ~~bike~~, I arranged with Michael Henchy, Undertaker, to get a coffin ready, and then had it conveyed in a side car past the military post in the Workhouse to Blackwells. After that a motor car, supplied by Mahony's garage and driven by Michael Kennedy, came along, also as per prior arrangement. We transferred the coffin to the motor and drove to Inagh, arriving there about midnight. The body was immediately coffined and, followed by hundreds of Volunteers, the funeral cortege reached a sparsely populated part of the Cloonagh district known as Russia between 3 and 4 o'clock in the morning. Here Volunteers were dismissed. A small party remained behind to convey the coffin to its secret hiding place - a rick of turf convenient to the road.

Devitt was buried temporarily on <sup>25<sup>th</sup></sup> ~~28<sup>th</sup>~~ February, 1920, and three weeks later R.I.C. and military from Ennistymon found the body. I have never heard a satisfactory explanation as to how this occurred, and

whether the location of his coffin was wilfully betrayed by some of the men who buried him or whether it reached the ears of the authorities through loose talk or otherwise is, so far as I'm concerned, merely a matter of speculation. An inquest was held on him and his remains were then handed over to his people. The verdict of the jury was that Martin Devitt died while fighting for the freedom of his country, and the funeral which then followed was one of the biggest ever seen in Clare.

After the death of Martin Devitt attacks on British troops and R.I.C. eased off for a while. In June 1920 an ambush in which the I.R.A. strength numbered about forty, was prepared for a party of Tans and R.I.C., described to us as the "Murder Gang", which was expected would travel from Ballyvaughan to Ennis through the Carron district. The position chosen by us was in the townland of Glenslade. The party took another road and we dispersed on hearing this.

The next engagement in which I was involved was the attack on Ruan Barracks on 18th October, 1920. Under the Battalion O/C, Andy O'Donohue, I was a member of a detachment of about 20 men from the 5th Battalion which proceeded to Ruan. Actually it was the intention of the Brigade O/C that the men who actually would enter the barracks were to be chosen from our detachment. Prior arrangements were made between a friendly R.I.C. man named Bill Carroll and the O/C of the 3rd Battalion, Seán Casey, Ruan, that Carroll would allow the back door of the barracks to remain on the latch so that the I.R.A. could rush in and overpower the remainder of the garrison who would then be asleep upstairs.

When the men from the 5th Battalion arrived on the outskirts of Ruan about 6 o'clock in the morning we were informed that the original plan was changed so far as we were concerned, and that our job would be to guard the road leading from Corofin to Ruan. There was then a strong force of R.I.C. and Tans stationed in Corofin. I cannot now remember how we were armed. Around eight o'clock in the morning a scout came to us and told us the barracks was captured. All the police equipment, a big quantity of ammunition was seized, also their bikes, and the barracks was burned. Our detachment made their way home across country and over by-roads without meeting any interruption.

Towards the end of November 1920 the Brigade Council decided to form a Brigade Flying Column under the command of Joe Barrett, then Brigade O/C Operations. Each of the five battalions was asked to supply nine or ten men, and the district outside Kilfenora between Lickeen and Tullaha was selected as the locality in which the column would assemble and receive their initial training. Some time in the second week of December the men from the different battalions began to report at the appointed place and, as far as my memory now serves me, the only battalions who supplied the full quota were the 4th and 5th. In fact, I can only remember about twelve men altogether coming from the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Battalions. Of course this shortage did not affect the decision of the Brigade Council because the other two battalions, especially the 5th, would of their own accord have been able to provide, through Volunteers, the entire column.

After billeting arrangements were completed

the column was equipped with about 35 rifles and about 15 shotguns. There was a good quantity of .303 ammunition and shotgun cartridges available, and also some Mills hand grenades. A lot of this stuff had come out of Ruan Barracks.

I would say that about 13th December, 1920, I got orders to reconnoitre the road between Ennis and Ennistymon for the purpose of observing enemy movements. I ascertained that tenders of military, R.I.C. and Black and Tans, sometimes two and sometimes three or four, travelled almost daily between the places, and submitted my report accordingly to the column commander. Acting on my report he, after consultation with some of the senior officers who were present, decided to attack this convoy at Monreal.

Monreal, which is about 3 miles from Ennistymon, lies in a south easterly direction from that town on the main road running through Inagh to Ennis. At Monreal the main road is intersected by a by-road. Coming from Ennistymon and turning right the by-road leads across Monanagh Bridge into Ballyvraneen and Skeagh, while if a left turn is taken the by-road runs to Ballyea North and on into the parish of Cloonagh. Monanagh Bridge is 250 yards or so from the crossroads and it spans the Cullinagh river, flowing more or less parallel to the main road most of the way to Ennistymon. On the Ballyvraneen side the Cullinagh river bank rises up abruptly and is covered with a heavy growth of briars and bushes. Between the main road towards the river the land slopes gradually, affording very little cover from fire directed from the roadside.

On the other side of the road, left coming from Ennistymon, the country is relatively flat until Monreal is reached. About half a mile from the crossroads the main road bends for five hundred yards or so and then runs on straight to the crossroads. Near the commencement of the bend and for about 100 yards beyond where it ends, the ground rises sharply and then fairly level for a distance of a mile or so. Troops occupying a position on top of the slope above the road, especially when equipped with machine guns, can make a retreat from the slope very costly and difficult. From the point where the road straightens out after passing the bend a wall about 7 feet high and built of small loose stones runs up the slope and back into the country at the rear for over a half mile. On the east side of this wall and fenced similarly are two shelters for animals. They are rectangular in shape and are roughly 40 yards long and about 15 or 20 yards wide. The shelter nearest to the road is about 25 or 30 yards away and the front wall is practically parallel to the road.

It was in these shelters that approximately half the column were placed for the ambush which took place at Monreal on 18th December, 1920. The other half of the column were on the lower side of the road but as I was with the section in the shelters I can only describe what took place in my own position.

The column left their billets around half five or six o'clock in the morning, which was very cold and frosty, and arrived in Monreal about half past seven. There was a good deal of preparatory work to be done, at least by our section. The stone fences round the shelters were roughly four feet thick and "windows" or

loopholes had to be made by each man. These "windows" were about  $2\frac{1}{2}$  feet from the ground and gave the man using it a view of the road. They were made along the front wall of the shelter nearest the road and also the side of the wall running up from the road. In addition a gap had to be made on the corner of the upper shelter to provide a way of escape into the fields at the rear, as in the event of a quick retreat to scale the walls would be providing sitting ducks for the enemy.

Commandant Seán Casey, O/C 3rd Battalion, was in charge of our section, which comprised about 18 to 20 men, including Andy O'Donohue, O/C 5th Battalion, Seán McNamara, afterwards O/C 6th Battalion, Paddy Devitt, a brother of Martin Devitt, Ignatius O'Neill, Patrick (~~Paddy~~) Costelloe, O/C 2nd Battalion, Austin Geraghty, Joe McNamara, Connie O'Donohue, Michael O'Loughlin, Paddy Ward, Pat Powell (alias Cahill), Paddy Ward, John Callaghan (Kilfenora), Thomas Gallagher, Joe Griffey, Austin Green and Stephen Wall. Most of the men here had rifles, a few had shotguns and a couple were equipped with hand grenades. The Column Commander was in charge of the section on the opposite side of the road.

We heard the hum of the approaching lorries about nine o'clock. There were three of them coming. As the first lorry rounded the bend a single shot rang out. I learned afterwards that this shot was accidentally discharged by one of the men in the other section. Whether it had any effect on the subsequent outcome of the ambush I'm not able to say, but it was followed by a fusillade in which we all joined. I'm positive that very few escaped injury, fatal or

otherwise, in the first lorry, the driver of which, however, was not hit, as he immediately accelerated his vehicle when the fight started and took it outside our view towards the crossroads. The second lorry also came under fire and it halted after passing the bend. The troops on it dismounted quickly and, taking cover, soon made themselves effective by throwing hand grenades by hand and from rifle grenade cups. The grenades besides bursting all round the shelters had a most damaging effect on the loose stone walls, and the flying stones became as big a menace as the bomb splinters. In the course of ten minutes or so our position was no longer tenable. We were also threatened by the troops from the third lorry, which pulled up about a hundred yards short of the bend and escaped the initial burst of our fire. They began moving towards the top of the rising ground on our right. Our Section Leader, Casey, gave the order to retire.

Though we had a share of men who had no experience of being in such a tight corner before, as I now look back on the retreat which was then effected I think our lads behaved splendidly. I saw no panic, and though it was hard going until we got into safe country about a mile to the rear no man lost his head. The enemy had brought at least one and, I believe, two machine guns to the top of the rise above the main road, and with these and rifle fire peppered the ground through which we had to travel. There was very little cover at our disposal until we crossed a by-road running to Cloonagh, but by making short runs and then getting down and returning the fire the groups into which the

section had broken managed to cross the by-road without even having a man wounded. The one casualty which we had, Seán McNamara, who was wounded in the backside, occurred before we had left the shelter at all.

I cannot remember now how many shots I fired in this engagement, but any shot discharged by me was at a definite target. There have been varied estimates of the casualties inflicted on the British forces. However, on this point I can throw no definite light.

The section at the other side of the road also extricated themselves from a very awkward situation without losing a man, though Bill Carroll, Jack Hassett, Bill McNamara and *Paddy Loughlin* were wounded, but not seriously.

Large enemy reinforcements from all over Clare were reaching Monreal before the fighting finished. They made no attempt to try to make further contact with us and contented themselves by burning the houses of                      and a large number of haystacks in the vicinity of the ambush.

After the Monreal engagement, the next time in which I took part in an armed attack on British forces was in the town of Ennistymon. I think this was in January 1921. A party of twelve or thirteen men under the Vice Brigade O/C, Peadar O'Loughlin, got into Monastery grounds before daybreak on a Sunday morning to attack R.I.C. men on their way back from church. The party were all armed with rifles and included Jim Kelliher, Thomas Gallagher, Seamus Murrihy - all from



Caherclogh, Paddy Ward, Tullaha, Andy O'Donohue, Lickeen, and Paddy Devitt, Cahersherkin, all 5th Battalion men.

The distance from the R.I.C. barracks to the spot where we were placed was about 400 yards, and there we had a view of the police returning to the barracks for a stretch of 7 or 8 yards along the street.

The police put in an appearance about half past nine. There were about 6 or 8 of them in the party. We opened fire, discharging 3 or 5 shots per man. Of course the police immediately made a run and got into the barracks but not before one of them was wounded. We made no delay in getting out into the country.

There was instant military and police activity, and though one lorry of troops came close enough to us as we were making our way back to the Kilfenora district they did not see us, and, as we knew there were other lorries traversing the neighbourhood, we did not attack them. We got back to our destination unchallenged.

The Auxiliaries came to Corofin in the spring of 1921. Much as it was desired to have a crack at the other elements who comprised the British Army that garrisoned Clare in those days, it was the special wish of every Volunteer in the county to be engaged in an operation which would teach these Auxiliaries a salutary lesson. There was no question about their fighting capabilities and on that account if it were possible to hit them hard and heavy it would be a big feather in the cap of the Mid Clare Brigade to succeed in doing so. The Brigade Staff had been paying particularly close watch on their movements when it was reported that they

(the Auxies) had left themselves open when they started to run fairly regularly in lorries to Ennis, about 9 miles distant.

The Brigade O/C, Frank Barrett, mobilised probably one of the biggest I.R.A. concentrations <sup>in his Brigade area</sup> during the entire period of hostilities in the Anglo-Irish war at Toonagh, 4 or 5 miles from Ennis on the main Corofin-Ennis road, to attack these Auxiliaries. Men were present from all over the Mid Clare Brigade areas and numbered, so far as I can now remember, about 100. My recollection of that mobilisation is that the big majority were armed with rifles. I was one of about 25 men who came to Toonagh from the 5th and 6th Battalions for that attack. I had a rifle.

The mobilisation of the I.R.A. for this ambush took place at Hegarty's of Kilamona on the night of 16th May, 1921. We were afoot early next morning shortly after daybreak, when we received conditional absolution from Fr. Hamilton, afterwards Canon Hamilton, a big noise in the G.A.A. We marched from Kilamona to Toonagh and got into positions between 7 and 7.30. After lying there until round 4 o'clock in the evening a shot was unintentionally fired by one of our party. We might have waited further but in face of the discharge of this shot the O/C, Frank Barrett, considered it unwise to remain there any longer and dismissed the party, ordering us back to our own districts.

I had not been staying at home very much since the Cahermore ambush, though in order to look after the farm ~~there~~ I frequently had to go back there during the

daytime. On the night of 28.6.1921 I stayed at Corry's, Lisive, Ennistymon. Next morning at half-past six the house was raided by about twenty soldiers accompanied by one R.I.C. man named Connolly. They arrived at the place on bikes. I was recognised by Connolly and taken into custody. They provided me with a lady's bike to go to Ennistymon. The military were under the command of a Captain Blake, who was a very decent type of man. In Ennistymon I was handed over to District Inspector O'Meara of the R.I.C., and after about an hour's delay in the R.I.C. barracks I was transferred under an escort of 4 or 5 lorry loads of R.I.C. and military to Ennis. En route the escort noticed in the distance people going to Killamona Chapel to Mass and got the impression that they were the I.R.A. going to attack the escort. D.I. O'Meara, who was travelling with us, came to me and stated that if his men were attacked I would be shot on the spot. However, nothing happened, and when we reached Ennis I was put into the Home Barracks where they were about twenty I.R.A. prisoners. We all got treatment as political prisoners. I was in that barracks when the Truce was declared on 11th July, 1921.

Through my connection with the Volunteers and I.R.A. I became involved in other aspects of the movement for independence which were entirely <sup>militant</sup> ~~political~~ in their nature. I was elected as a member of the Ennistymon Rural District Council and Board of Guardians, appointed a "Brehon" on the Ennistymon Parish Court and a member of the Belfast Boycott Committee.

The Ennistymon Rural District Council and Board

of Guardians after the Local Government election in June 1920 was composed solely of Sinn Féin or I.R.A. nominees, all of whom were returned unopposed. The meetings of the bodies were held fairly regularly in county schools and houses in the rural parts of North Clare, as a good many of the members were "on the run" at the time and could not come into Ennistymon Workhouse where the Council's offices were situated. We were very much facilitated in this respect by the clerk, who, though a legacy <sup>from</sup> of the British administration, was favourably disposed towards us. He fixed the meeting places to suit the conditions which obtained at the time. While the council meetings were in progress the Volunteers acted as scouts to guard against surprise raids by British troops. On no occasion were the meetings interrupted and, to the best of my recollection, the business to be transacted was always finished.

*The Ennistymon Parish Court* was set up at the end of 1919. The members were: Rev. Fr. Ruane, C.C., Chairman, Paddy Devitt, Seamus Conneally and myself. There was a fifth whose name is now gone out of my memory. The registrar was James Murphy, Glen, Ennistymon, whose brother, Francis, was shot dead in his own home under very mysterious circumstances. This court functioned until the end of 1920 when, owing to interference by the enemy forces, it had to abandon its sittings, which were mostly held in Lahinch Town Hall about once a month. They were resorted to by all classes of people, supporters and opponents of Sinn Féin alike. The decrees were enforced by the I.R.A., whose members also acted as summons' servers and policemen.

There was a branch of the Belfast Boycott Committee set up in the Cloonagh district of which I was a member. On my instructions the train was held up by Volunteers on six or seven occasions as it passed through the Cloonagh district. Belfast goods were seized on the first few raids but after that the shopkeepers throughout North and West Clare ceased to have any dealings with the boycotted firms. In fairness it should be said that most of the shopkeepers abstained from buying Belfast goods because of their loyalty to the Sinn Féin movement.

The Dáil Loan floated in 1920 met with a fine response in the area of the 5th Battalion. Only a very few householders failed to buy a share. I assisted in the supervision of the sale of and in the actual collection of money for Dáil bonds.

As an I.R.A. officer I officially destroyed the Income Tax records for North Clare. There was no question of having to seize them, due to the fact that the collector's son was sympathetic to us and handed them over privately to Peadar O'Loughlin and myself on 3rd April, 1920, after which we destroyed them.

In compliance with orders from Brigade headquarters I seized the rate books from the local rate collector in Kilfenora, a man called Connell, on the same night as the Income Tax records were destroyed. After that the Volunteer officers in the area collected the rates themselves and handed the money over to Brigade headquarters in Ennis.

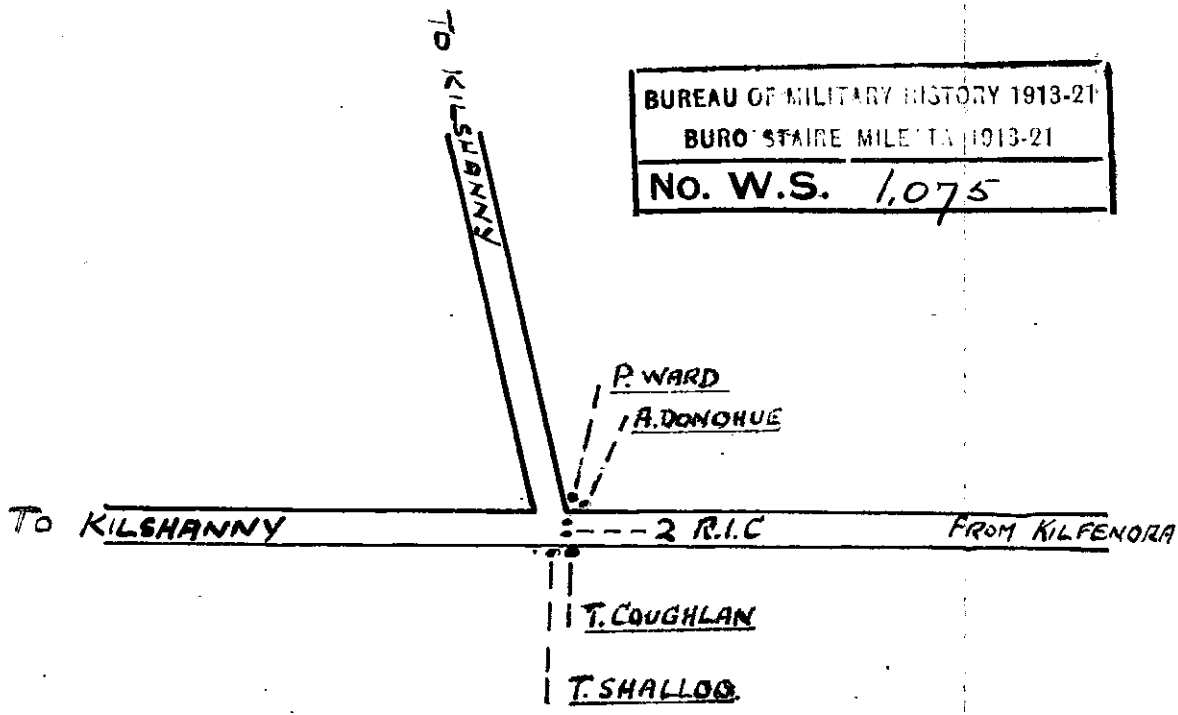
Signed: Thomas Shalloo  
(Thomas Shalloo)  
Date: 14-1-55

Witness: D. Griffin  
(D. Griffin)  
(Investigator)

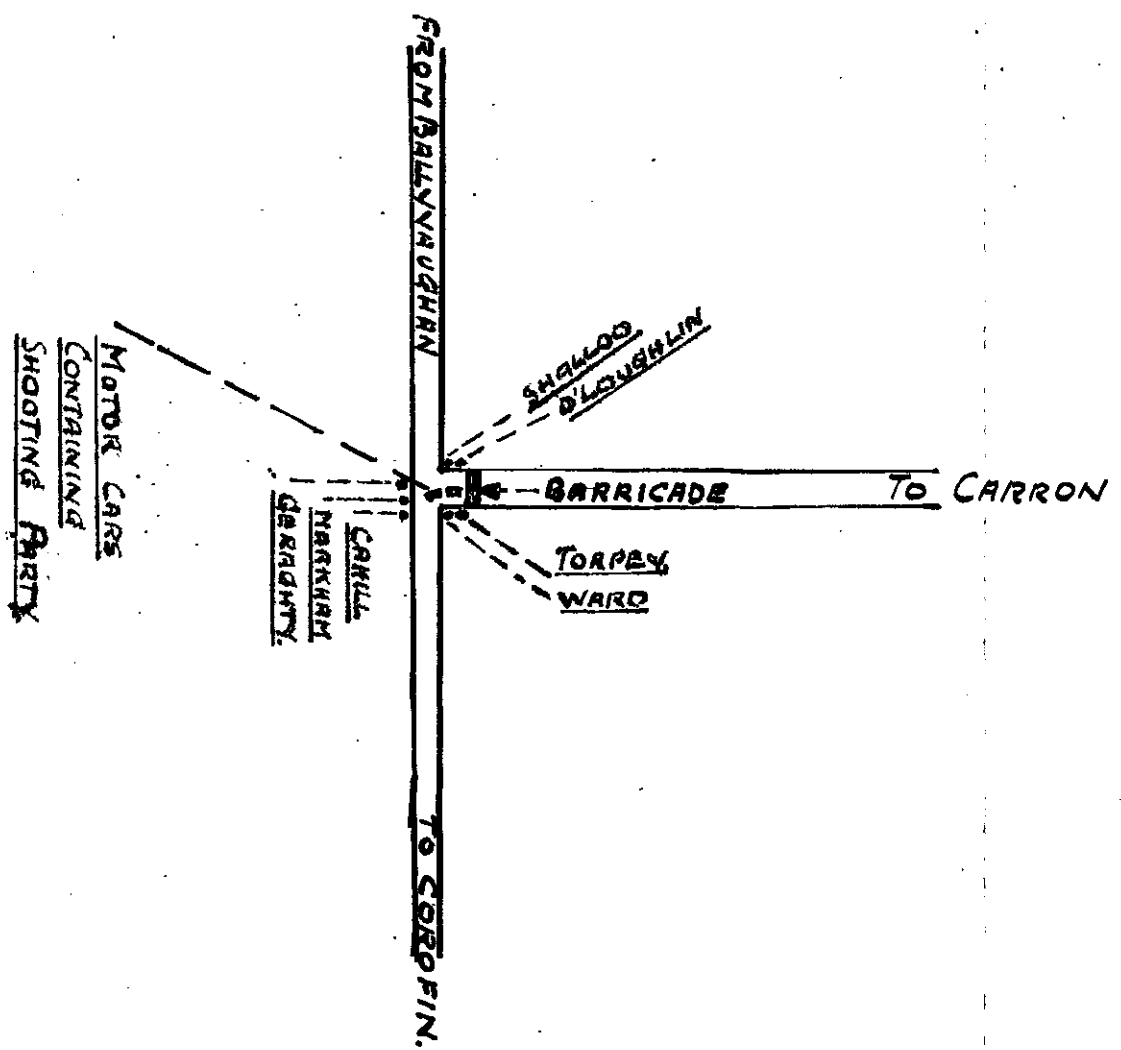
BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21  
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21  
No. W.S. 1075

APPENDIX "A."

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21  
BURO STAIRS MILITARY 1913-21  
NO. W.S. 1,075



CAHERAMORE AMBUSH - 5<sup>TH</sup> JULY, 1919.



SESSIAGHMORE AMBUSH - 2<sup>ND</sup> DECEMBER, 1919.