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ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21

BUREAU STAIRÉ MILITARY

No. W.S. 1084

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,084

Witness

James O'Toole,
McCurtain Street,
Gorey,
Co. Wexford.

Identity.

Lieut. 3rd Batt'n. Staff, North
Wexford Brigade, 1921.

Subject.

Activities of 'A' Company, 3rd Battalion,
North Wexford Brigade, 1918-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S. 2405

Form B.S.M. 2

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STATEMENT BY MR. JAMES O'TOOLE

McCurtain Street, Gorey, Co. Wexford.

formerly of

Clonee, Camolin, Co. Wexford.

About the month of April 1918, a meeting of the men of Clonee, Camolin, Co. Wexford, was held. The meeting was addressed by D.P. Walsh, who explained the aims and objects of the Irish Volunteers and appealed to the men to join that organisation. At another meeting held on the following Monday night I joined the Irish Volunteers with about fifteen or sixteen others. The oath was administered by John J. O'Reilly who at that time was adjutant of the 3rd Battalion, North Wexford Brigade. We became a section of the Ferns Company, which was officially known as A/Company, 3rd Battalion, North Wexford Brigade. Paddy Doyle (since deceased) was captain of the company, and Myles Breen was in charge of our section. Parades were held every Monday night and there was a levy of 6d per man per week to company funds. Training consisted mainly of drilling. We had only a few shotguns.

All the Volunteers took a very active part in the 1918 general election campaign on behalf of the Sinn Fein candidate, Roger Mary Sweetman. We canvassed the electors, posted up election bills and distributed election literature. We also helped to organise public meetings in our area and attended public meetings in many parts of the constituency in order to make them as big as possible and so impress the people.

On polling day the Volunteers acted in various capacities, some as personating agents in the polling booths and tally clerks outside. They also helped to bring the voters to the poll and arranged to have the people ready when the transport called for them. Others acted as police and helped to quell minor rows which were usually associated with elections in those days.

After the election, training was continued, but things were somewhat quiet. Towards the end of 1919 we were told that there was a quantity of electric cable and electric detonators at Ferns railway station. We went to the station and seized them as we would not be known; if Volunteers from Ferns or its immediate neighbourhood carried out the raid they might be recognised.

Following the establishment of the Dáil Courts in 1919, we acted as guards for the courts while they were sitting. Most of the cases were civil actions for trespass and other minor affairs. In criminal cases we arrested the persons accused of the crimes and brought them before the court. When the accused were found guilty we ensured that the sentence was carried out, or if a fine were imposed, that it was paid. One case was that of a man who was charged with robbing a schoolmistress who lived alone. He was found guilty and sentenced to stand outside the church gate the following Sunday morning during Mass with a placard on which was printed in large letters "Found guilty of attempted robbery". This sentence was carried out and a Volunteer stood on either side of him. This man left the district a couple of months afterwards.

The judges in our area were: John Byrne, an extensive farmer of Raheen, Camolin; Andy Brien, also from Camolin; Morgan Lacy and Mogue Bolger, Chairman of the Gorey Board of Guardians.

In the autumn of 1919, Myles Breen was elected captain of A/Company, and headquarters of the company was transferred from Ferns to Kilthomas.

About the end of that year Myles Breen, captain of A/Company, was elected O/C. of the battalion, and John Kelly was elected captain of the company.

Early in 1920, training was intensified and parades

were held two nights weekly. Later, this was increased to four nights weekly. About this time we captured a small barrel of gunpowder at Inch Station, and also a large box of empty cartridge cases. About the same time Tim Foley of Monasootha gave us a cartridge filling machine. It removed the used cap and inserted a new one; it measured the powder, put in the pads and tamped them; it measured the shot, put in the cover and sealed it.

The company paraded on an outfarm known as Carton's of the boycott. It became company headquarters. Members of the company went there every night and when there was no training we made buckshot cartridges. A local blacksmith - Edward Brennan - who was a Volunteer, made a tongs for the purpose of making buckshot. All the cartridges for the battalion were filled here and later the brigade column was supplied with cartridges from here. This work was done nightly and continued right up to the truce.

A special parade of the company was called for the night of the 14th August 1920. Willie O'Leary, who was brigade adjutant at this time, attended and gave instructions to raid every house in the company area for arms. We set off in parties, six men in each party, and carried out the raids. We collected a large number of shotguns; most of them were given voluntarily by the farmers. There were only a few cases where we had to search for the guns. A short time later the battalion supplied us with a list of hostile houses in the battalion area where it was believed there were arms, and instructed us to raid these houses. We raided all the houses on the list and collected eight shotguns. We were armed with revolvers as we had four in the company at this time.

A brigade active service column was formed in November 1920. I was not a member of this column. Phil Lennon was O/C. and Tom Doyle was second in command. Early in January 1921

the column was surprised by British forces while resting at Kilmichael, and following this, the brigade ordered that the column be disbanded.

The R.I.C. were continually raiding for Paddy Kenny who was captain of the Ballycarney Company. We decided to ambush them so as to make them cease their activity. The Kilthomas Company on the 14th January occupied positions at Clohamon and remained there for two days but none of the enemy forces appeared.

Early in February 1921, the Boolavogue, Miltown, Kilthomas, Camolin and Ballycarney companies combined under the command of Myles Breen and occupied positions on the Newtownbarry (Bunclody) - Ballycarney Road, the Enniscorthy-Ballycarney Road, and the Ferns-Ballycarney Road. These were the three principal roads leading to Ballycarney and along which the enemy was most likely to travel. We dug two trenches on the Ballycarney Bridge which spans the Slaney. We remained in position all night, but no enemy forces came.

Soon after this some members of our company (Kilthomas) were trenching the Newtownbarry-Ferns Road. While the operation was in progress a motor car - an open tourer - with four or five police came along. We opened fire on it. The driver accelerated and continued on at a fast rate. They did not return the fire. We did not hear if they suffered any casualties.

About the middle of February 1921 another brigade column was formed. There were about 32 men in the column at its formation. Our company (A/Company, 3rd Battalion) supplied 12 men. There were six men from the remainder of the 3rd Battalion, 6 from 1st Battalion and 8 from 2nd Battalion. I was a member of the column from its formation until the truce. The following is a list of the members of the column at its formation:-

Myles Breen	Commandant. O/C.
Patrick Kenny	Captain. V/O/C., deceased.
Richard Humes	Deceased

John Kelly & James M. Kelly (brothers)

Patrick Carton

James Mythen

James Kenny

Aiden Kelly

Michael O'Brien

John Kinsella

Luke Byrne

Patrick Murphy

James O'Neill

William Cosgrave

Matt Flynn

James Kelly

Laurence Doyle

Thomas Dwyer

Aiden Murphy & Edward Murphy (brothers)

James Barrett

Patrick Fitzpatrick

Andy Nolan

Thomas Maher

Maurice Spillane

Markie Kirwan

Thomas Doyle

Michael Maguire

John Quirke

John McGuire

James O'Toole

Myself, and

John Lawless, who was Q.M. 3rd Battalion.

After a few weeks he was returned to
the battalion to continue his duties
as Q.M.

Later the following joined the column:-

Michael Mahon

James Lawless

Peter Hughes

Stephen Pender

Tom Roche

Frank Gibbons

As I mentioned before, Myles Breen was O/C., but Paddy Kenny /^{who} was second in command, took charge very often, as Breen continued to be O/C. of the battalion and, therefore, was very often away on battalion duties.

We were instructed to assemble at 12 o'clock midnight at Lar Murphy's of Clonee. When all had assembled we moved off to Bill Murphy's, Monasootha, known locally as Murphy's of the Bleach. As will be seen from the following account of the activities of the column, Murphy's, The Bleach, Monasootha, was used a column headquarters. We returned there after most of our exploits to rest, etc. There was always someone staying there, men on the run, brigade officers or officers from other areas who were passing through. We were always more than welcome and the Murphys could not do enough for us. They were one of the best families in Co. Wexford. They fed us at their own expense. Coming towards the end some of the local farmers assisted in this respect by sending some food-stuffs. We remained at The Bleach for about two days, which were spent organising and equipping the column, as some had come without equipment of any kind. At this stage we had only one or two rifles, the remainder had shotguns, but we had a good supply of buckshot. I had a shotgun and a .45 Webley revolver. Later, we had eight rifles - long and short Lee Enfields. We had 30 to 35 rounds of ammunition for each rifle. We also had a Mowth Mauser but it was discarded after the first engagement because, when it was fired, it gave a tremendous flash and therefore was likely to show up our position.

After two days at The Bleach we marched by night across country to Keating's farmhouse at Coolboy, about 3 miles on the Gorey side of Tinahely, and stayed there for the day. Three of the Keating sons were in the Volunteers. That night we marched to a by-road near Tinahely locally known as Cobbler's Lane. We had information that a patrol of R.I.C., usually one sergeant and seven constables, passed that way daily. We took up positions on one side of the road and remained there for two days, but the patrol did not come. At night we retired to a farmhouse. The local Volunteers supplied us with food. At dark on the second day we withdrew from the position in Cobbler's Lane and moved into a field beside the town. We had been told by the local Volunteers that a patrol of from 4 to 6 armed R.I.C. men passed that way every night. As the patrol had not come at 10 o'clock we left our position in the field and moved into the town and sniped the R.I.C. barracks for about 15 minutes. The R.I.C. returned the fire and sent up Verey lights. They continued firing for over half an hour after we retired.

We marched across country to Aughlamaumeen, about 10 miles from Tinahely. We billeted at Kavanagh's, Kinsella's and Carton's, Coolthawn; they were large farmers. The three families were very strong supporters. A son of Kinsella and a son of Carton were priests in the diocese of Ferns - Father Martin Kinsella, then C.C. Ferns, now C.C. Crossabeg, and Father Carton, C.C. Ferns. We also took over a vacant house as a number of the column had contracted severe colds. We remained there for 3 or 4 days while the men were being treated by Dr. Connolly who was then doing temporary duty in Carnew. He is now dispensary doctor in Gorey. We then went to Corcoran's of Brideswell and Dr. Connolly continued to attend the men there. After a few days when the men were sufficiently recovered we went to the main Gorey-Ferns road

and took up position about one mile outside Ferns at a place known locally as the "Palace Lands" with the intention of attacking any enemy forces that might come that way, but nothing came. Later that night we went to the 'V' road on the Enniscorthy side of Ferns to attack a patrol of R.I.C. who usually passed that way. We waited until midnight but the patrol did not come.

At midnight we retired to an outfarm - Hendrick's of Ballybeg. The following night we went to a place locally known as the 'New Line' - a road leading from Ferns to Tombrack and Newtownbarry (now called Bunclody). We lay in ambush position all day but nothing came. That night we went to Ferns and sniped the barrack.

A few days later we were called to a special training camp at Corrigeen - a valley between the Blackstairs and the White Mountains. Our headquarters here was at a farmhouse named Coady's - another great family. Here we underwent three weeks' intensive training under Thomas Lawless (Blue Ball, Offaly) who had been sent down by G.H.Q. The training included instruction in the use of arms, drill, field exercises and rifle practice, using a service rifle fitted with a Morris tube.

At the conclusion of our training, another course was started which was attended by all company captains and lieutenants of the North Wexford Brigade. The column was held at the camp to act as guards, etc. This was considered necessary as the Carlow Brigade Column had some short time previously been surprised by Auxiliaries on the Carlow side of the Blackstairs Mountains and suffered severe casualties.

While we were at the training camp we got information that a troop train would be proceeding on the Waterford-Macmine line. The column left camp and proceeded to a spot near Killurin where there was an embankment on both sides of

the line. We removed some railway sleepers and placed them on the track and then took up position on top of the embankment. When the train came into the ambush position the driver, on seeing the sleepers on the line, stopped the train. We opened fire. Then, to our amazement, we saw that the train carried civilians as well as soldiers. Our information was that only troops were on the train. From my position I saw a soldier pushing a civilian up against the carriage window, and the soldier taking cover behind him. Other members of our party told me afterwards that they saw the same thing happening in other compartments; in fact, ⁱⁿ some cases the soldiers took cover behind women. Under the circumstances we had no option but to call off the attack, although the soldiers made no attempt to leave the train or return the fire.

When the camp broke up the column moved off to Bill Murphy's, The Bleach. We stayed here for two days while a land mine was being made by Dan Byrne. From there we went to Doyle's, Buckstown. That night went by the fields to Erritty's outfarm at Ballyconlore, Inch, and rested there during the day. We had information that a tender of Auxiliaries travelled the Inch-Gorey road on the first Saturday of every month bringing the pay to the various R.I.C. barracks, so it ^{our} was intention to ambush them.

The spot selected for the ambush was a short distance outside Inch on the Gorey road where there were some sharp bends. The tender, therefore, would be compelled to reduce speed and give us a better opportunity of a successful attack. The ground on both sides was higher than the road and was well wooded, but the bends limited somewhat our fields of fire. Dinny Allen, T.D., then captain of D/Company, arranged accommodation and food for the column. Two men from Inch, Peter Kavanagh and John Sheridan, members of D/Company, acted as guides going to the ambush position and returning from it.

We moved into the ambush position about 3 or 4 a.m. - just before dawn - on the 7th May 1921. There were 26 men and we occupied positions at intervals of 5 to 10 yards apart, thereby covering the road for a distance of from 150 to 200 yards. We occupied one side of the road - the west side, i.e., the right side as one travels from Inch to Gorey. When we got to the ambush position, it was decided not to use the mine, as the people were beginning to go to Gorey fair and as the road had recently been resurfaced it was feared that if we opened it up it might create suspicion.

About 12 midday a cycle patrol of R.I.C. approached our position from the direction of Inch. First came two cycling abreast. About 60 or 70 yards behind them were three more also cycling abreast, and another two 60 to 70 yards behind them. Bringing up the rear was another R.I.C. man. We heard afterwards that this man had stopped on the road to talk to a girl, otherwise he would have been with the last pair.

When the leading two reached about 30 yards, the end of the ambush position (the Gorey end), we opened fire. Unfortunately, at that moment, a herd of cattle came round the bend coming from the Gorey fair. The police dismounted and ran among the cattle and in the stampede that followed they escaped. Two of the next three were wounded with the first volley. The third man took cover under an overhanging rock and opened fire on us with a parabellum. From our high position he had complete cover from our fire. The third pair had not reached the ambush position and took cover. The lone man at the rear was seen going into Inch Post Office. His intention, we knew, was to 'phone for help. The fight lasted only a few minutes. We knew that we would have to get out of the area as quickly as possible or otherwise .

we would be surrounded by enemy forces as there was a strong garrison of military and police in Arklow, about $4\frac{1}{2}$ miles to the north of us, and about 35 R.I.C. Black and Tans and Auxiliaries stationed in Gorey, about $5\frac{1}{2}$ miles to the south. We suffered no casualties. One Black and Tan named Duprez was killed and a sergeant named Flanagan was wounded. We did not capture any arms or ammunition.

We retired to a wood on the grounds of Ballinastraw House, the property of the late Sir Thomas Esmonde, where we remained during the remainder of the day. While there, several lorries of military passed by. After dark we moved across the fields to Paddy Kenny's of Ballydarragh, Cranford, (he was O/C. of the local company), arriving there about midnight. After the meal we continued to Bill Murphy's, The Bleach. We arrived there about 5 or 6 on Sunday morning, completely exhausted after crossing 10 miles of very rough country including two hills - Ballydarragh and Corriglegan. We had been on the move practically all the time since we left Doyle's of Buckstown on Thursday morning until we reached The Bleach on Sunday morning, with the result that all the members of the column were suffering from sore feet, cuts, etc. In my own case I sprained my ankle at Murphy's, The Bleach, when setting out for Inch and did the whole journey in that condition. The pain was so intense that several times I had to put my foot and ankle into running water so as to numb the pain.

We remained at The Bleach for a week, during which time the local company acted as guards for us. We then went to Kenny's, Brideswell. From there we had a forced march to the outskirts of Tinahely where we took up position along the roadside waiting for an enemy patrol which did not come. That night we moved to the Dublin side of Tinahely and stayed the remainder of that night and next day at Kavanagh's,

Ballinavogue, Tinahely. That night we moved to a position just outside Tinahely on the Shillelagh-Tinahely road. The following evening a woman who was gathering firewood saw us in position. We were then advised by the local Volunteers to clear out. We left the position and intended to travel by night 14 or 15 miles across country to Pat Keogh's, Ballyduff.

When passing through Askamore I heard that a cousin of mine - John Nolan of Clonee - had died. He was a Volunteer and had been out in the Rising in Enniscorthy. I asked the column for permission to go to the wake. This was granted, and James M. Kelly came with me. On the way we called to Carton's of Coolnaleen, and they refused us a meal. We had to leave Carton's and take a chance and go to my own home on the Ballyduff-Camolin road to have a meal. While we were having it a brother of mine went on guard on the road outside the house. We made no delay as the house was situated beside a main road. We proceeded through the fields in the direction of Nolan's (where the wake was) and, as we were passing close to James M. Kelly's home, he decided to call to see his parents, and I continued towards Nolan's. Kelly had just entered his house when two lorries of Auxiliaries and Black and Tans pulled up at his gate. When Jim saw them coming towards the door he made a dash for the back window and got out through it amidst a hail of lead from one of the lorries. When I heard the shooting I climbed a tree and had a full view of what was happening. Jim Kelly had to cross two fields before he had cover of any kind. The Black and Tans followed him and before Kelly reached the ditch out of the second field the Tans had arrived at the first ditch and took up position there waiting for him to cross the second ditch. When he did so the eight Black and Tans fired at him and shot him in the elbow and Kelly dropped his revolver. The Tans continued to follow him and fired at him every time they sighted him for two long miles

until he reached the cover of Camolin Park Wood. He continued another two miles to Orr's of Coolnaleen. They were Protestant and big farmers. Kelly sent William Orr on horseback to tell his parents that he had escaped and was all right. I saw the horseman and went towards him. William Orr told me that Kelly was at his place and that he was worn out and very weak. I told Orr not to go to Kelly's house as the police were still in the locality and if they saw him go to the house they would suspect where Kelly was. I told him to return home and that I would see to it that the message was sent to Kelly's parents. I went to Orr's and, when Kelly had recovered sufficiently, he started out for Askamore accompanied by Mogue Bolger, Bill MacClean and Dick Donoghue. He was brought to Fr. Brown's house, Askamore, where he was attended by Doctor Connolly and where he remained until he was fully recovered. Fr. Brown was a great supporter of ours.

When I parted with the column at Askamore, it continued to Ballyduff where it remained that day. At night it moved to Ballindaggin, and remained there about four days. It was at Ballindaggin that I rejoined the column.

We then went to a crossroads leading from Newtownbarry (now Bunclody) to Ballindaggin and Enniscorthy. We remained in position for several hours but nothing came.

Our next move was to Grennan's on the Carlow side of Newtownbarry (Bunclody) where we were met by Pat O'Leary, brother of Willie O'Leary, brigade adjutant. We had information that some of the R.I.C. stationed in Newtownbarry went to a publichouse in the town every night. Pat O'Leary guided us into the town and we remained there until the pubs closed, but the R.I.C. did not come out that night.

The R.I.C. in Ballindaggin had been getting a great deal of information regarding Volunteers and their movements. The I.R.A. had information that a Constable Jones was responsible

for it. He was stationed in Newtownbarry for a considerable time and knew the area and people very well. He was shot by the first column in a pub in the town. After his death the R.I.C. in Newtownbarry continued to get information about us. Eventually we came to suspect two brothers named James and John Skelton, who lived with their father and younger brother named Patrick, in a small cottage at Templeshambo. They always seemed to have plenty of money which they spent very freely on amusements, etc.

About this time we held up the train at Scarawalsh and seized the mails. We brought them to Ballinahallen Wood where we sorted them, taking only the mails addressed to the R.I.C. at Enniscorthy and Newtownbarry. The civilian mail was not interfered with. In a green bag addressed to the District Inspector, Enniscorthy, was an official letter addressed to Sergeant Torsney, R.I.C., Newtownbarry, informing him that arrangements had been made for one of the Skelton brothers to be taken into the R.I.C. I am not sure which of them was to join, but I think it was James. The letter also contained a sum of money for James and John. I cannot remember who sent this letter; it could have come from the County Inspector's office in Wexford or from R.I.C. Headquarters, Dublin.

This information concerning James and John Skelton and other information, which our Intelligence officers had collected was sent to our G.H.Q. in Dublin and permission requested to execute them. At this time there was a hard and fast rule laid down that no one was to be executed without the sanction of G.H.Q. and this was given only when the guilt of the persons concerned had been proved beyond the slightest doubt. In this case permission to execute was granted almost immediately.

On the evening selected for the execution practically the whole column moved into Templeshambo area. About midnight we surrounded the Skelton's cottage. In response to knocks

the father opened the door; he was told that we wanted his sons James and John. The three sons slept in one bedroom. The father, apparently trying to save James, I think, pointed to Paddy (the youngest of the three) and said: "That is James". When they were brought outside, the local men who knew the Skeltons and were there for the purpose of identifying them, said: "That's not James, that's Paddy". In the meantime James came quietly out of the cottage by the door trying to make his escape, but ran into one of the column surrounding the house. He was brought over to where his brothers were and identified as one of the two we were looking for. The youngest boy Paddy was sent home. Both James and John were then taken to Templeshambo Lane, about three-quarters of a mile away from the house. They were told to make an act of contrition and, having done so, were executed. Labels were pinned on them bearing the words "Shot by I.R.A. Spies beware"

The column went to a farmhouse near Clonroche and we remained in that area for a few days. We got word that a patrol of R.I.C. usually left Clonroche R.I.C. barracks every day and travelled to Chapel Railway Station to meet the train. It was decided to attack the patrol. We occupied positions on the road leading from Clonroche to Chapel Railway Station. The road was overlooked from Clonroche. After being in position for some time our "lookout man" signalled that 12 R.I.C. men were coming. Two R.I.C. men came along on bicycles. We thought they were an advance party and we did not attack them as we wanted to get the main party. When it was realised that a mistake had been made in the signal and that the two policemen constituted the patrol, they had passed out of the ambush position. We opened fire on them. They jumped off their bicycles and got into the fields and made good their escape. We heard later that they suffered slight injuries. This attack took place on 30th May 1921. We went to Corrigreen for a rest. After a few days we went back to Clonroche and attacked the barracks for about half an hour.

About this time I was appointed a section commander of the column, so also was Jim O'Neill of Ballindaggin.

The Assizes were held in Gorey usually about the second week of June. It was the custom for the police to travel to the Assizes in convoy, calling at the R.I.C. barracks en route to collect any R.I.C. men who were to attend the Assizes. We had information that on this occasion the County Resident Magistrate would be travelling with them. It was decided that the column, assisted by men from the Kiltomas, Cloglogue and Camolin Companies, would attack the convoy and, if possible, capture the R.M. W.J. Brennan Whitmore was to take charge and he was the ideal man for the job. He decided to block the main Ferns-Gorey road the night before the day of the Assizes and therefore compel the enemy to proceed to Gorey on the only alternative direct route - a by-road leading from Ferns Railway Station to Camolin Station. This by-road was known as the Glen Lane. On this road Whitmore selected an ideal position for an ambush. There were severe bends on it, the south side was wooded and the ground sloped towards the road. We moved into position during the night and the Ferns-Gorey road was blocked at several points and so all was set for the attack. The tenders called as expected at Ferns R.I.C. Barracks and, having collected the R.I.C. men there, instead of coming the Glen Lane, they turned back and travelled via Oulart.

There was nothing we could do, so the local companies were disbanded and the column retired to O'Leary's, Clonee, where we had a meal and then continued to Kelly's, Ballybeg, where we remained that night and the following day. After dark, we moved to a place known as Kiltomas Rock on the Ferns-Carnew Road. We had information that a tender of R.I.C. and Auxiliaries would travel that road the next day. We remained in position all day but nothing came. That night

we returned to Murphy's, The Bleach.

An R.I.C. patrol from Ferns Barrack, consisting of six men, were in the habit of taking up position under a wall at Haughton's corner in Ferns. From this spot they had a clear view of the Main Street and of the approach to the railway station. It was decided to attack them and, to do so from behind a wall opposite to where the R.I.C. usually took up position. It was arranged to have planks placed on barrels behind the wall. On the night selected for the attack we mobilised at Kilbora. While we were waiting for our O/C., Myles Breen, to come, a Volunteer from Ferns arrived with a message from Father Darcy, C.C., Ferns, now P.P., Killaveany, to tell us that instead of we ambushing the R.I.C. they were ready to ambush us. We sent in some Volunteers to scout the position and they found that the message was correct.

On another occasion we loopholed the Palace walls on the road to Ferns Station to ambush an R.I.C. patrol which usually went to Ferns Station to meet the train, but on this occasion the patrol did not come.

A day or two later the O/C., Myles Breen, and the Vice O/C., Paddy Kenny, were summoned to attend a Brigade Council meeting and I was left in charge of the column. I decided to attack Ferns R.I.C. Barracks. The barrack was situated at the edge of the town on the Strahart road. It was a strongly built detached two-storied building. It had a valley roof but it had been covered with wire cage. There was a low wall in front and on one side about 10 or 12 feet from the building. There was a garden at the rear and at one side which was surrounded by a hedge. In the front was a door with a window on either side and three windows upstairs. There was one small window upstairs on either end. At the rear there was a door and two windows upstairs. The rear door was the one usually used by the police. The windows had steel shutters

with loopholes. The garrison numbered between 20 and 24 R.I.C. and Black and Tans.

I set out from The Bleach on 1st July 1921, with 25 men of the column. On the way we collected about 15 men from the Kilthomas Company. I cut all telephone wires and placed outposts on all roads leading to Ferns. I divided the remainder into four sections of seven men each. I detailed a section to attack the rear of the barrack and a section to each gable end. I took charge of the section which was to attack the front. With three men I occupied a house on the opposite side of the road and placed the other three men behind a dead wall on the right hand side of the building I occupied. We placed a mine beside the gable end and I gave instructions to open the attack when the church clock struck two (A.M. 2nd July 1921). We opened fire as arranged, but the mine failed to go off. The garrison replied but their firing was not accurate. They fired Verey lights continuously up the chimneys. We continued the attack for about one hour and then withdrew.

I dismissed the members of the Kilthomas Company and the column retired to Kinsella's, Ballinamona.

The Officer Commanding the British Forces in Wexford ordered the destruction of the following houses: Sean Etchingham's; Courtown; Kenny's, Ballycaley; Veaney's, Gorey; and Kelly's, Clonee, as an official reprisal for the Inch ambush. A notice stating this was published in the Wexford papers. The column got orders (I don't know whether they came from G.H.Q. or from the Brigade O/C.) to destroy Ardamine House, the residence of Major Richards. He was a signatory of the death warrants of the leaders executed after the 1916 Rising. Courtown House, the residence of Lord Courtown, was also ordered to be destroyed. This was a reprisal for the burning of the four republican houses.

Having stayed at Kinsella's, Ballinamona, for the remainder of the night and following day, we moved that night to Darcy's, Ballywalter, about 1½ miles from Gorey. Bringing the Camolin company with us, we set out the following night to destroy the two houses and to attack the coastguard station. On the way we met a dispatch rider from G.H.Q. with instruction not to destroy the residence of Lord Courtown. We burned Ardamine House.

The local company informed us that the Black and Tans had evacuated the coastguard station that day. They also told us that, although the Black and Tans were only in the place for a week or so, they never stirred out except to go to the local pub. Most of them were in the 'horrors' and were fighting among themselves. We understood they left and went to Dublin by train without the permission of their own authorities.

A day or two later we went into an ambush position at Glandoran on the Gorey-Cranford-Carnew Road. We remained in position the best part of the day. Then we got word to proceed to Murphy's, The Bleach. When we reached there Jim Daly, Brigade Adjutant, informed us that a truce had been arranged to take effect at 11 a.m. the following day and we were to cease fire.

Signed: James O Toole
(James O'Toole)

Date: 2 = 2 = 55

Witness: Sean Brennan Liut. Col.
(Sean Brennan)
Investigator.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21
NO. W.S. 1084