

W.S. 1,162

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1,162

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,162

Witness

General Michael Kilroy,
Newport,
Co. Mayo.

Identity.

Brigadier General, West Mayo;
Comd't. General 4th Western Division I.R.A.

Subject.

Active Service Unit Operations
West Mayo, 1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S.33

Form B.S.M. 2

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STATEMENT BY GENERAL MICHAEL KILROY,
Newport, Co. Mayo.

PART II.

Active Service Unit Operations.

Several attempts having been made by the Active Service Unit at Cordaragh, Murrisk (Glosh Patrick), Glenisland, Islandeady, Kilbride, Borrishoole Bridge, Yellow River, Drumultra and Westport to bring off an engagement without avail, a further effort was now to be made. In addition, we felt the situation very grave ourselves. Owing to the many fruitless efforts we had made, with all the planning and worries entailed, we felt disappointed. The hardships endured through spending whole days lying in ambush positions and sometimes hidden in trenches, were not to our liking. The situation was becoming desperate. If possible, contact must be made with the enemy without further delay. Great care must be exercised in order to keep the knowledge of our movements secret. If any of our men indulged in loose talk about our operation plans and outsiders got to know about what was to take place, there would be grave danger of the enemy getting to know too much and counteracting quickly and with advantage on that knowledge. Secrecy of movement was a matter of extreme difficulty when from thirty-five to forty men had to be billeted in two or more villages at the same time. This unavoidable risk imposed a restriction on the natural inclination of people to

discuss unusual happenings. The people in localities where our A.S.U. were billeted realised the danger to us that loose talk about our movements would involve, kept their knowledge to themselves and never gave us any reason to regret our confidence in their discretion, or to doubt their loyalty to us.

On March 22nd, 1921, the A.S.U. arrived in Claddy village and was informed that it was customary for the Drummin police to visit Darby Hastings' public house occasionally. This house is on the Leenane-Westport road and close to Carrowkennedy Church. This would mean a journey for them of just over three miles by the Oughty-Carrowkennedy road from Drummin Barracks to Hastings'. It was a fairly bright moonlit night, so we decided to inspect the road to Oughty for an ambush position.

We had heard so much previous to this from many British propaganda sources of the cowardice of the Volunteers in shooting at British forces from behind fences that the taunt affected us very much. We felt it was up to us to vindicate ourselves. No man, least of all an Irishman, likes to be called a coward. We would make our slanderers swallow their ridiculous and ill-founded accusations and attack the enemy in the open, with the advantage of numbers against us.

Commandant Joe Ring, Vice Commandant James Malone and myself set out from Claddy at about 7 p.m. on Tuesday, 22nd March, 1921. It was a dull moonlight night. We crossed the Leenane-Westport road and turned in on the Oughty road leading west. We were in only about four hundred yards and past a small rise in the

road when one of the boys, Malone, looked behind him and saw a bunch of men on the horizon, cycling up towards us.

"It's the police", he said, "and there are four of them, on bikes."

At this particular point of the road, there was a low clay fence on either side, most suitable for cover. The fence on the north side was black and fresh, as if it had been newly made that day, and there was no brush or briar of any kind to interrupt our view or impede us if we wished to take cover, so that we could slip across without any difficulty whatever. I had my mind made up we would not avail of those advantages.

There was a house within a hundred and fifty or two hundred yards of us, on the north-west side of the road, and as we drew near to it, the strains of Irish music came to our ears. We had heard little music that dreary wet winter in all our travels - as wet a winter as ever came in our time in the west of Ireland. Almost every house we entered in West Mayo had always a portion of turf up the chimney to dry. The previous summer was so wet that scarcely anybody got the turf saved in any sort of fair condition.

The music, lilting and lively, impressed us a lot and one of the boys remarked, "There must be a dance on in there. They seem to be enjoying themselves."

While we had felt for many months past that all our planning, debating, marching and counter-marching had seemed so much waste of time, we now felt, all in a flash, that it was a splendid and necessary preparation for this, our first engagement with the enemy.

Thinking of conditions as they then existed throughout the country and the hardships we had endured steadied our nerves and prepared us for the impending encounter.

Now the police were within a few yards of us. In a matter of seconds, they would be in our midst, with the odds in their favour. Here they were and, even now, I could not bear to order the boys to take cover, much less to do so myself. Instead, I ordered them to walk on the grass margin of the road, on the north side, while I remained on the other side. They may have thought me crazy but they were late to do anything about it, and I never heard them complain afterwards. Joe Ring had a revolver; Malone and I had a Peter-the-Painter each. I had then carried mine for about six months. It contained ten rounds of ammunition, and I fancied it for that reason and because it was so quick to reload with a spare magazine.

On their coming up and seeing the road open, one of the police raced past us on his bicycle while the other three jumped off theirs, just about one yard behind us. This was all the challenge we needed. Those men represented a foreign power in our country and we were out to end their domination as quickly as possible.

Both parties opened up instantly, and the music-filled night was shattered by the rapid rat-tat-tat of gunfire. We were not surprised afterwards when the local people said that several machine guns had opened up in full blast. The lights went out immediately in the house nearby.

At once I sensed that the man who had cycled past us could be a serious danger. It was a manoeuvre

apparently designed with forethought, as we heard no order issued; so I issued the foolish command while we were all extremely busy, "Look after that man gone up the road". (We had accustomed ourselves to avoid mentioning each other by name.) So that my simple order left me engaged with three men on a narrow road, the furthestmost man not more than nine feet away and my gun rapidly becoming empty. My bullets were only .32 - shining and clean nickel - that had not the stopping power of a heavier lead bullet and would only sting and annoy if you did not hit some vital part of the body. There was no time to take deliberate aim; it was a case of blaze away and hope for results - results which showed no evidence whatever of coming. Then, out of the corner of my eye, I saw the furthestmost man, with deadly intent, taking careful and steady aim at me. Just then, I had a terrible buzzing in my ear, as a result of a near miss by a bullet that must have almost got its mark. While this man was still aiming, the other two were blazing away at me, and I had to try and liquidate them very quickly, so I slung them one each and then snapped a third at the man who was aiming so intently to take my life away. I thought I might spoil his aim at least, if only I could be in time. I was doing the best I could to save myself, and perhaps it was not of Ireland alone I was thinking, for I was in a desperate hurry and wondering what was holding up that hunk of lead I expected. The breadth of the road, a matter of nine feet, only separated us.

The trigger could not fall because my bullet arrived first. It went through the policeman's fingers, hit the ^lrim of the revolver grip, bending it in and

jamming the hammer at full-cock, so that it could not fall, thereby preventing further danger from that direction.

Then the three men turned and ran - two over the road eastwards to cover, and the third across the road. This man put his arm on the low sod fence, evidently intending to jump in, but his arm folded under him and he rolled in, head first, instead. I have always wondered why the men ran when they did. Could it be that they knew it was no use expecting help from their man who had gone ahead, because I had sent my two companions to deal with him, thereby cutting them off from all chance of reinforcement or help? In any case, he was not likely to do us any harm, for fear of hitting his own pals, as our men prevented him from moving around. Was it that my seemingly useless little nickel bullets were stinging them so effectively that their lead slugs went everywhere but where they aimed them to go, because their nerves were seriously shaken? Or were they so badly hit that they did not know what was happening? Perhaps their guns were empty by this time, as my own was.

I immediately dived into the field on the opposite north side of the road for protection and re-loaded what was, by this time, my much-despised pistol with a fresh clip of ammunition. I then called Joe Ring to come along and help get out the two men who had taken cover. He came at once but engaged himself quite casually in disarming the man he saw lying down and apparently knocked out, while the other two policemen were only a few yards away and could easily enfilade him. He was using a brilliant torch which made him an

easy target. I saw the danger but could not warn him, for fear of inspiring the other policemen with ideas. I did, however, order him back to help me get the other two but he was so obsessed with getting the revolver that I felt the seconds very long indeed under such risks. He came at last and, at my request, flashed the light up the trench, so that I could control it with gun-fire.

When the two men under cover heard my words, they immediately shouted a simultaneous "I surrender", and stood up. One of them was not more than three feet away from my face, as only the thickness of the low fence separated us, and, I confess, the shout and his sudden appearance, so near, fairly startled me.

I ordered them out on the road. The furthestmost of the two, about five yards away, was slow in coming out, so I hurried to him and kept the light shining on him. His revolver was attached to him by a lanyard. It was lying on the ground, at full cock, with his hand open and just over it. I felt he was going to grab it and fire at me. He looked very wild and aggressive, and took no notice of my repeated orders. He appeared as if he were about to spring on me. I threatened to fire but it had no effect on him, so I did fire, as I thought, along his ribs.

"I am done now", he said, and walked out on to the road. I regretted this very deeply afterwards because it may have been my own fault for standing too near to him on his way out, with the strong flashlight in his eyes.

When we got the two men out on the road and disarmed them, the man Vice Commandant Malone was riding hard on to the west of us surrendered when he saw that the others had yielded. He was taken along to us without further difficulty. We then collected their bicycles and broke them up. This hurt us as much as it must have hurt the enemy. If we had presented the bikes to any of our friends, it might be the cause of getting them into trouble, if and when one of the frequent enemy raids took place and the bicycles were discovered. So there was nothing for it but to crush them with rock or our boots, for want of more suitable means.

When this was completed, we gave the police a short lecture on the unpatriotic stand the "Irish Constabulary" were maintaining against their own country and countrymen - in some cases, against their own brothers and cousins. We also gave them orders not to be found in the enemy ranks against us in future, as they would not get off so lightly a second time. We then left them to look after themselves and their comrade who seemed to be in a bad condition. We were told later that he died a few hours afterwards.

Our capture consisted of four revolvers, with a sparse supply of ammunition, and one shotgun, one or two scabbards and one egg-bomb. We then retraced our steps to Claddy as quickly as possible where we found all the boys in anxious suspense, as they had heard all the gunfire and could not make out what was happening until we brought the news. This was received with much rejoicing when they saw we were back safe and sound.

After a hasty tea, we left Claddy and went eastwards to Ardree and a neighbouring village. We had been told that there was an expected arrival in Westport of bloodhounds, to be used in tracking down the I.R.A. Knowing this, the various members of the A.S.U. insisted on carrying the three of us on their backs, in turn, along the bed of a shallow stream for a long distance, thus ensuring that we left no trail to be picked up by the bloodhounds.

I believe it was on this night of the 22nd March that Dr. Madden joined us at Ardree. It was arranged at a meeting earlier in the year that he would join the A.S.U. when we started operations. His punctual arrival on the occasion was much appreciated by all in the unit. We knew that his active participation would add prestige, not merely to the unit, but to our whole organisation in the West.

On our journey that night, we saw the Verey lights going up from Drummin barracks which meant a call to Westport for police and Auxiliaries. When we arrived in Ardree, about 2 a.m., we had our sentries posted as usual, and then retired to bed.

The following morning, I asked for a crowbar to enable me to fix the jammed revolver we had captured. It was in McGing's I did this repair job. When Jack Connolly went out to look for the bar, he met Michael G. Brown who asked, "What's on, Jack?".

Jack explained about the crowbar.

"What! You damn fool! Ha, ha, ha!", laughed Brown. "Don't you know it's pulling your leg they

are? A crowbar to fix a broken revolver! Ha, ha, ha! Who ever heard the likes? I heard of the tobacco smugglers making poteen punch so strong for Caipitín Ó Maille, that they bent the big spoon they had when stirring it. They wanted to show their gratitude for the cheap tobacco he was bringing them. But a crowbar to fix a revolver! For goodness' sake, Jack, don't, or you will have the rest of the boys making jokes about the Newport 'flats'. We'll never hear the end of it. Don't you know that?"

"I can't help it - it's an order. Come along, Brown, and help me find one. I must get it."

"Clear off, you dope, or I'll give you a crowbar in the right place where it will do you most good. My God, look at that poor fellow off ..." Brown has a litany of swear words all his own. Some say he has it copyrighted. In any event, it would be unfair to use it here.

When I had stripped the fibre grip off the revolver frame, I found that the rib which my bullet had bent inwards, jamming the spring movement, had put the mechanism out of action, so that the hammer could not fall. When the parts were dismantled, it was easy to force the bent rib into position with the aid of a hammer and the crowbar which had arrived notwithstanding the storm created by Brown. When remounted, it proved perfect, and it was this gun I carried through the rest of the campaign.

The success of this Carrowkennedy operation, small though it was, gave the whole A.S.U. a much better outlook and was a great boost to morale. Our

friends throughout the area even began to make jokes of the affair.

One man, challenged by another who asked, "What can they do without arms, no matter how good they are?", was heard to reply, "The enemy has lots of arms. The boys will take them when they want them". This was the reply of an old Fenian, Captain Patrick Kelly.

The report given in the 'Irish Independent' of the 24th March, 1921, reads as follows:-

"Sergeant Coughlin, Royal Irish Constabulary, was killed and Constables Maguire, Love and Creedon seriously wounded in an ambush at Carrowkennedy, Westport."

Report says that attack took place at 8 p.m. on Tuesday night, 22nd March, 1921.

I would like to draw the reader's attention to the above report. Our honest-to-God stand-up fight in the middle of the road, with the odds in the enemy's favour, is called an ambush. But this is the kind of news dished up to the general public at the time - presumably under censorship.

This fight is not to be confused with our fight in the same townland on June 2nd, 1921, which I will describe in detail later.

There is another report in the 'Independent' of 28th March, 1921. The heading is "Property Destroyed". In Westport parish and Westport district there were many houses burned; goods were taken out of shops in the town of Westport and burned on the streets.

Those activities by the Tans were intended as reprisals for the Carrowkennedy fight.

On 15th May, 1921, the Castlebar Battalion A.S.U. joined with the Westport and Newport units at the villages of Bunrower, Rockfield, Upper and Lower, just off the Westport-Ballinrobe road, at Aille.

An officers' meeting was held on 17th May, 1921, to consider ways and means of making touch with and engaging the enemy.

Up to this time, our efforts to get the necessary and correct information quick enough to intercept their movements was a failure.

After considering various plans, it was decided to cut all main roads in the Brigade area, save one. The Westport-Newport county road was selected as the most likely to give the opportunity we had in mind. It was decided, therefore, to leave this road open and try to intercept any movement made by the enemy on it.

On the 17th, we had Confession, Mass and Holy Communion in Mrs. Geraghty's of Bunrower. That night we crossed to the Ballinacorrigea district.

The following evening, 18th May, 1921, we occupied an ambush point in the Drumneen district, at a bend on the Castlebar-Westport road.

All that passed was one car to Castlebar, with a priest and his driver. They had planks in their car to bridge a cutting we had made in the road.

A motor-cyclist came from the Westport district

and was ordered back. We did not mind it being known in Westport that we were in this locality, for reasons of our own.

About seven o'clock in the evening, it was decided that Vice Commandant James Malone, Captain Johnnie Duffy and six others be ordered into the Westport area, to try and create a bit of excitement by shooting any of the enemy they might possibly see in there.

Commandant Joe Doherty, Newport Battalion, Staff Captain Jim Moran and Jim Brown were sent out earlier and had left to do likewise over at Newport.

Those Newport men were only in position at 8 p.m. on Carrabaun Hill when the Newport Sergeant walked out into the barrack yard. The distance was, roughly, three hundred yards, straight south-east of the barracks to the post occupied by our men.

There was only one shot fired, but the Sergeant fell, mortally wounded, and died some hours later.

Immediately after the shot, a number of Tans and police ran out to the barrack wall, flanking the Newport-Castlebar road. They concentrated their fire on my house which is almost opposite and about three hundred yards away.

When my wife heard the first I.R.A. shot, she looked out the front window and across at the barrack. She saw the first man run from the barrack to the wall. When he fired - lucky for her - it was in the front door the bullet came, as otherwise she could have been

shot at the window.

She immediately lifted the baby out of the pram and lay down on the floor. She got the maid to do likewise with the older child. They were under concentrated fire until 10 p.m. When the firing ceased, they were almost smothered with the dust of mortar and plaster being torn off by the flying bullets.

The maid then brought a mattress from upstairs, and the four of them slept on it till 12.30 a.m., being overcome by exhaustion resulting from the heavy atmosphere and two hours' terrible strain.

They were awakened by a loud knocking on the inner door and a demand by Tans to open up and let them in.

As the glass panels of the front door were broken by gunfire, it was easy for the Tans to put in a hand and undo the lock which evidently was what they did.

Those men were immediately followed by others who went upstairs and all over the rooms, breaking the windows, presumably to ventilate the fire which they got under way almost at once.

The women did not know how many police were present, but there seemed to be a crowd everywhere they turned.

Immediately on arrival, they ordered the women out with the children. My Missus would not be permitted to take even the pram for the baby with her. When she was going out the door, a Tan, with an English accent, followed her with a rug and said, "Take this.

We have babies ourselves".

When she went out, there was a line of police, eight to ten in number, firing up the hill. They were lined up against the road wall, shoulder to shoulder. She asked the nearest man of those what it was all about, but he did not answer.

She then went over to her sister, Mrs. John Kilroy, Main Street, Newport. Both of them, with their seven children and maids, went out to my father and sisters, Maggie and Tillie, about a mile from town.

Mrs. John Kilroy says that they were fired on by a Tan that evening when Annie Mulderrig, the maid, appeared at the door.

The shop goods in brother John's were pitched out on the street by the Tans, after my house and the workshops were set on fire. The Tans were then going to set fire to John's house until somebody told them the house was owned by a very good friend of theirs.

John Kilroy was arrested and imprisoned since 6th January, 1921. He was in Galway for a period and afterwards in the Rath Camp, Co. Kildare. He, therefore, was away when all this excitement took place.

On the day of the 17th May, 1921, the Brigadier of West Connemara, P.J. McDonnell, and his Quartermaster, Jack Feehan, who was a native of Kilmeena parish, arrived in Kilmeena. P.J. McDonnell got married to my sister, Tillie, on that day. They had a wedding party in Mrs. Feehan's, Rossow.

On their arrival from Connemara in our parish very late on the night of the 16th May, they called in

to Owney Kean's, Cuilmore, to discover they had only missed a raid by the Tans and police from Newport.

The police gave Owen a terrible beating and prodding with a shotgun. They forced his sister, Catherine, into one of the rooms and when, on hearing her brother shout with the abuse he was receiving, she would make an effort to get up to him, one of the Tans would then let fly a piece of delph or an egg at her.

A large portion of her delph was broken this way and a big box of eggs also. Any eggs they did not pelt were walked upon.

Catherine had about two hundred of them in a box, all of which were made into a terrible mess over the kitchen walls and floor.

The Tans also called on Thomas Lyons, Cuilmore, after finishing with Owen Keane, and gave him a most unmerciful beating. Then, after strewing all the broken window glass of the house on to the floor, they forced Thomas to walk upon it in his bare feet. Later, they put him to bed, brought in his horse to the bedroom and did their best to make the horse go into the bed. The horse did put his two forefeet in on Thomas but, when Thomas groaned, the horse withdrew on recognising his master and could not be forced to do so again. This beating broke Tom's health and the poor man died a few years afterwards. Thomas was a brother of Commandant Ned Lyons. Ned was the choice of all the Companies in the Newport Battalion and beloved by all. He was arrested about 20th October, 1920, and brought to Westport Quay where he was detained by the military

for some days. He was seen going through Westport in a military lorry without even a jacket on him. We were led to understand he refused to put on prison uniform and that he went on hunger-strike. I visited him during the Truce, but he did not know me then. He was very reduced and changed physically. I understand he had been forcibly fed for a long period before he died.

The Tans carried on even more ridiculous with Stephen McGough the same night. They shaved one side of his head and one half of his moustache, then brought in his cow and put Stephen riding on her through the house, after which they galloped her out the door. Evidently they expected he would be smashed by the lintel and brushed off the cow's back. This did not happen, however, for Stephen, though unpretentious, was able to rise to the occasion, though, perhaps, to "duck down" would be more in keeping with what he did. In any event, he achieved what seemed impossible - going through a low narrow door on a cow's back in full gallop and without a scratch, with Stephen hugging the cow's neck. He says "he fairly laid in the spurs when he got out in the open". The cow turned up a byroad to the farm. The Tans ran out after him and did their best to shoot him. "When I got in the clear", he says, "all the devils in hell would not catch me and the poor frightened cow". When Stephen got out on his own hill, it was an easy matter for him to dodge his unwelcome visitors. Hours afterwards, when he saw them, by the light of their cars, leave the district, he returned to his house only to leave it again as quickly as the cow took him earlier in the night.

Before the Tans left Stephen's house, they got a calf, rolled him up in the blanket and put him into the bed. On Stephen's return, he immediately saw the blankets jumping and naturally thought it was some of the Tans who waited behind the others in order to get him on his return; so he cleared out mighty fast.

After their visit and interview with those people, McDonnell and Feehan had lots of news for their friends over in Rossow when they arrived in the early hours on the morning of the 17th.

The following night after the marriage and wedding party, the two boys required to go across by Newport from Rossow on the south to Derrylahan on the north side. After proceeding cautiously, they arrived in the corner of a field at Kilbride. They were about to go out on the county road, within a half mile of Newport. They paused for a moment to make sure of their surroundings, as had to be done always on such occasions. There was a tramp of many feet immediately beside them. The two boys had to lie down in an elevated place, about four-foot over the road, without any cover whatever. It was a large group of Tans and, if they looked, they could not miss seeing the two boys as they were on the edge of the bank. They had not time to move back even a few yards where there was lots of cover at their elbows. The Tans crossed the fence just opposite.

It was at this point that some members of the local I.R.A. Company lay in ambush for an officer of the Tans, named Fudge, earlier in the year. We have been told that the Tans occupied this position many

times after the I.R.A. attempted their ambush.

The problem for the two boys now was how to get out of this dangerous position without attracting attention. The enemy was only about twenty yards away and, if the slightest noise was made, the game was up. The boys first got their bombs and revolvers ready. If they were discovered, their only chance was to sling the enemy everything they had in order to keep their position from being rushed. This preparation being made, the boys now started their tedious retreat. Moving backwards inch by inch, feet first, was no easy matter when such extreme caution had to be exercised. However, they succeeded, after a long suspense of this trying ordeal, in getting far enough back to come under cover. They were then able to stand up and walk off.

A wide detour had now to be made in order to get to Derrylahan and they succeeded in getting there without further mishap. The following day, May 18th, was very quiet in Derrylahan until evening came.

After the shooting of Sergeant Butler at 8 p.m. in Newport, McDonnell was given a lively start for his honeymoon. The unceasing rattle of gunfire for hours was, I am confident, a most undesirable atmosphere. Such a condition, I am sure, would have a depressing effect on the most ardent spirited. The gunfire was only across the hill, half a mile away as the crow flies. P.J. McDonnell and Jack Feehan did not leave Derrylahan until after the Kilroy women and children from Newport arrived there. When they set out for West Connemara, they had the first mile of their journey illuminated by the blaze of the timber shops and houses at Newport.

On the night of the 18th May we had all our arms thoroughly cleaned and oiled before leaving Ballinacorriga. We left about 11 a.m. and went on to Brockagh where we arrived about midnight. This is a distance of over three miles. It took us about two hours to arrange with the local Company for outposts and communications, as some of the men lived quite a distance apart and were then in bed. We required the service of this Company in connection with the fight we were looking forward to in Kilmeena on that day; also, it was likely our line of retreat would be through this district. Our eight riflemen, whom we had sent in to the Westport district, had not yet arrived. This caused us much grave worry. They were the most experienced men of the A.S.U.

At 2 a.m. on 19th May we left Brockagh and arrived at Knocknabolia railway bridge, Kilmeena, three miles distance, at about 3 a.m. The beautiful May morning was just beginning to creep across the lovely low green hill of the surrounding district. We expected that this elevated bridge, on which the county road cross the railway at right angles, would be our principal point of attack. There was a sharp right angle bend each side of the bridge. On the Westport side, the hill of Knocknabolia has been cut away to a depth of fourteen feet in order to give space for the county road approach to the bridge. This whole lay-out was an ideal position for a few seasoned soldiers to occupy, if we had sufficient riflemen to protect their flanks. Without this, it would be next to impossible to get safely away. I felt I could not put men into a position from which there was not a reasonable chance of escape. With fourteen of our best riflemen absent, there was nothing

left for us but to abandon this most favourable position.

On our arrival we had only twenty-two riflemen and sixteen shotgun men. Now we gravely felt the absence of our dear Westport and Newport riflemen and wondered if they had run into serious trouble after leaving us at Drimeen. If we had only information of the enemy movements so as to know which side they were likely to come from, it would be a great help to us. We could then block the road to suit the occasion. This information was entirely lacking. The site around the bridge is very narrow and, owing to its two right-*angle* handed turns, could be easily blocked in a most deceptive manner from either side of approach. The only men of what was left of our A.S.U. now present, that had been under fire, were Paddy Cannon of Castlebar and myself. The line of retreat from the bridge across Knocknabolia hill was very bare. The hill is about one hundred and fifty feet high and rises gradually from the bridge for about two hundred yards back.

Without any hesitation, we decided against this position. Instead, we place Vice Brigadier Ned Moane with Michael Staunton and Jack Connolly on top of the hill behind the new Congested Districts Board fence as our right flank protection. We then crossed southward about two hundred yards to Messrs. Commins' and O'Grady's fields, where we had plenty of parallel fencing and cover. The first fence, occupied mostly by shotgun men, was within fifty yards of the county road. We sent the Adjutant, Johnnie Gibbons, to the top of Clooneen Hill with Butch Lambert to protect our left flank. This position was south of us and covered the road leading from Westport, about four hundred yards away from our

main body. Gibbons had no rifle, only a revolver with four rounds of ammunition; Lambert's rifle was a single shot Martini. Our two flanking parties had now about one mile of the county road under observation.

Dr. Madden occupied a position about two hundred yards east from the county road. This fence is on the south side of Knocknabolia Hill and within two hundred and fifty yards of our main position from its lower end next to us. This was the corner Dr. Madden occupied most of the day. He had the liberty of moving up and down under cover of this fence at will. He availed of this movement occasionally during the day.

Tailor John O'Flynn's house is about seventy yards south-east from the bridge in a straight line, but about forty yards in off the main road.

Our Quartermaster, Tommie Kitterick, and Captain Jim Kelly, with some assistance, almost depleted Mrs. Commin's fowl yard. How those two young, smiling officers could lower themselves to be guilty of such a bloody slaughter was a surprise to many - and the joke of the A.S.U. for years afterwards. Their reply was always, "We had to feed the troops". She was an aunt of Captain Kelly. Dear me! What supporters those families of the Commins and Kellys were! Wherever you met one of them, you were sure of a welcome.

The hours were ticking away slowly and some of us could not help remembering our extremely weak left and right flanks. What a difference it would make if only our missing riflemen would turn up in time! All of us seemed to be very confident that we were sure of an engagement before the day was done. Our main position

was within thirty yards of Commins' house where the Quartermaster and staff were so busy cooking dinner. About 10 a.m. a car load of nuns passed up from Newport to Westport. About 11.30, a car with the Kilmeena and Newport priests came from Moyne Church, where a general station was held that morning, and passed up to the Parish Priest's house - Father Conroy's - three hundred yards away on the roadside towards Westport. The nuns' car returned from Westport about 2.30, after attending a meeting or perhaps an election of Reverend Mother in Westport Convent. At 3 p.m., a Tan lorry drove down the road from Westport on which we opened fire when it came opposite our main position. It contained eight or ten police and Tans. Accompanying them were two other lorries of police and Tans under District Inspector H.C. Donlon. Those two lorries halted at Fr. Conroy's and then the men dismounted. A number of them were ranged under the high wall on the west edge of the road, in regular barrack square fashion and on one knee, firing down at us. I never expected to get such an opening at an enemy, and here was I doing the officer without a rifle. I remember distinctly laughing at their capers. It was not long, however, until they seemed to get another order for they all rushed across the road to the low fence at their toes, where they had reasonably good cover.

When the first volley on the leading lorry was fired, one man was falling over the side when a comrade of his pulled him back. There were several other volleys discharged at this lorry before it got across the bridge and out of our sight. It was then under the fire of our right flank for another two hundred yards.

On reaching Duffy's of the Railway Cottage, Knocknabolia, they had complete cover from our right flank. The men dismounted here and returned to the bridge under cover of a substantial county road wall. On their return to the bridge, they came under the fire of our riflemen with the main body. From this position at the bridge, they were able to enfilade our front line. We were able to hold them down there, however, for a considerable period and got our men to fall back to the second fence, fifty yards in the rear.

Eventually, some of the enemy worked their way from the bridge in as far as O'Flynn's and erected a machine gun there. This advance of the enemy eastwards around O'Flynn's house again left us open to enfilading fire along our second fence. There was a regular fusillade pouring in from both sides of us, but we had great cover from the Westport end. A machine gun was turned on us, but they did not seem to have a capable gunner, thanks be to God. After about an hour, Sean Collins, an Artane boy, was shot in the region of the heart. I saw him in Cousin Patrick O'Malley's arms who said an Act of Contrition for him. When I saw Paddy engaged, I asked him for his rifle. He said, "Yes, but it throws to the right and high". The front sight was badly worn with age. Up to this, I could not bring myself to take a rifle off any man under such critical circumstances. I rendered the best service I could with this rifle but found it very much out of alignment.

The enemy now began to rain rifle grenades on us from the Westport side. It was soon evident to me that it was on Dr. Madden's position the grenade thrower was

concentrating. The first grenade crossed over us and fell out in the bog, about eighty yards from us, but did not explode. The second fell within thirty yards of Madden's position, and immediately a third came and landed exactly in the corner where Dr. Madden spent most of the day. Madden was not there when it arrived; he had moved up to the other end of the fence.

Before this took place, I remember chasing two men from the position at the bridge which we had a notion of occupying in the morning. By this time some of the enemy of the first lorry had worked their way in around O'Flynn's house and thereby made our second fence untenable. I ordered a general retreat and got Commandant Paddy Jordan to come out in the open and help me keep down the enemy while our boys were getting away. Paddy was in among briar at a fence from which visibility was poor. He came out at once into the open, about ten yards from any protection whatever and lay down beside me. There was much blood on his face but I thought it was from briar scratches, and he did not complain to me. We remained there for about a half hour. I was glad to find that the enemy had not the pluck to rush our position so that our boys had lots of time to get away.

When the grenades were coming so accurately, naturally Dr. Madden tried to get away with the rest. He was also under machine-gun fire for some considerable time. I saw him run from his position but I also saw a policeman at the back of O'Flynn's house with his forearm along the fence, levelling his rifle to get Madden who was somewhat less than two hundred yards away from him. Now what was I to do with my inaccurate

rifle? Here was my bed-mate, and the best friend a man ever had, going to be shot down before my eyes. Speed was sure to ruin my effort. Sloth was going to rob me of my friend. The ammunition I had, I got in 1915 from Seán MacDermott. It was buried for over five years by myself, and just about ten per cent. of it had failed during the day. Now, along with my other difficulties, if I chanced on a dud cartridge, my friend was lost. I took aim and fired - a perfectly good cartridge. I hit the clay at the policeman's elbow, so that he did not fire but looked across at the "man from the back of beyond" that dared to interrupt him in the "discharge of his duty" while engaged in shooting down Irishmen in order that the Empire might live.

During this last half hour while the enemy with their bullets dug up the ground all around Paddy Jordan and me, and even forced clay up into our nostrils, they still failed to give either of us a scratch.

Eventually, I told Paddy to clear out and, when he got through the first gap on the right, I followed. All this time, from the first minutes of our contact with the enemy, their machine-guns made an awful racket. This was, in my opinion, with a view to frightening us.

When we got through the first gap in the fence, running from west to east in the line of our retreat, we found that we were under fire from the south, that is, the men on the Westport side of us. Luckily, there was a good depression alongside this fence, so that we could advance on our stomachs without being observed by the enemy. After fifty yards advance by this method, we came upon another fence running at right angles across

our path. When we arrived in this corner, Paddy O'Malley, who was on the north side of our fence, heard us talking. He called me but, owing to a stiff breeze through the firs on the fence, I found it difficult to know what he was saying; so he had to repeat it several times for me. His shin bone was broken by a bullet and he wanted to know if we could help him. This was impossible as the fence was high and topped with whins (or furze) and could not be climbed without exposure to the machine-guns. I felt this very hard and it must have been very trying on O'Malley as I knew it was on myself. But the continuous rattle of a machine-gun directed against you helps one to make up one's mind very fast. I directed Paddy Jordan how we had to cross the fence in front of us with the greatest possible speed - just spring on and off again, regardless of obstacles. It also was strongly planted with white-thorn which had been trimmed. We did not know what was on the other side, whether rock or thorn trimming, briars, etc. I jumped first on to the top and off again. Naturally, I was looking where I was going, not where I had landed. Oh dear! What this cost me! The trench was about nine feet deep from my head, but clear and grassy. However, when I arrived on top of the fence, both my shoes had gone under a very strong briar which was stretched along the top of the fence and evidently rooted at both ~~sides~~^{ends}. When I made the second spring, my shoes remained anchored by the briar, so I put out my hands to break the fall. Even this did not seem to help me much because the small of my back got a fearful snap. For some seconds I felt my back was broken and I dare not stir it. Here again, that darling machine-gun was a great stimulant. After a short pause,

I did try to wriggle it gently and, to my great joy, I found it was not broken and, with the music of the machine-guns, it was recovering very fast. Could I risk getting up? Yes, I did and, O, My God, save us all, there was Paddy Jordan high above the fence and could not get down unaided.

His rifle was caught in two gablots (forks), one at each end, in the whitethorn bushes and Paddy, like an inverted V, hanging across it and not able to go one way or the other. Now, here was Paddy with his posterior cocked up in the sky, a challenge to all the snipers in the barony. I was afraid of my life it would be shot off him. I saw at once the only way to release him was to push him still higher, so as to take the weight off his rifle and free one end. When this was done, they both tumbled down on to me.

We carried on for another hundred and fifty yards and came to a stone fence which we crossed easily, with the help of the machine-gun music. After turning to our left, about ten yards, under good cover, we came upon Paddy O'Malley, with his broken leg, and Thomas Nolan who was wounded in the left knee slightly, and the right leg shot through the calf. The shin-bone was broken and something like paralysis set in. Also present was a chap, called Pearse, who was unwounded but would not leave his pal, Tom Nolan.

Those wounded boys felt they could not get any further, and Jordan also decided to remain with them. I tried to persuade them to keep moving but failed to convince them that it was the right thing to do, or else it was impossible for them to do so. They were in a

low, secluded trench and perhaps they did not hear what I heard. I was then in a desperate hurry to get away and still felt I should not let those poor boys see my feelings. I heard the enemy shouting and cheering. Evidently they had advanced to the first fences we occupied, and come upon our dead and wounded companions. The dead were:

Captain Seamus McEville	- Castlebar.
John Staunton	- Kilmeena
Thomas O'Donnell	- Castlebar Company.
Sean Collins	- Westport Company.

I have been told by one of the priests, who attended those boys on the ground, that Seamus McEville was the only man dead. O'Donnell, Staunton and Collins had some small flicker of life when he attended them.

The wounded and captured were:-

Commandant Paddy Jordan	- Castlebar	- Died about ten days later.
Captain Paddy O'Mally	- Newport	- Broken leg.
Thomas Nolan	- Castlebar	- Wounds in both legs; one shin-bone broken.
Paddy Mulloy	- Tiernaure	- Flesh wounds.
J. Cannon	- Westport	- Badly wounded.

The wounded who escaped were:-

Jimmy Smyth	- Castlebar	- Broken toes.
Hughes	- Castlebar	- Flesh arm wound.
John Chambers	- Castlebar	- Disjointed knee.

On 18th December, 1952, I was told the following by Thomas Nolan (above) that, after I left them, Commandant Paddy Jordan made another dash to get away. Nolan says

the field I left them in was ploughed. They were under the crest of this field when Jordan dashed up this crest in a south-easterly direction. He must have been exposed to gunfire from the enemy on both sides. Nolan says he saw the clay being torn up around Jordan, and then the poor boy fell and did not get up until the enemy found him there. This, I assume, is where he got his wound in the head.

Having heard this evidence of the enemy advance, I bade goodbye to my dear comrades and moved off under cover of a low fence. This was a bitter pill for me to swallow, but time was pressing and I had to get away. I had not gone far, however, only about two hundred yards, until I came upon Jim Brown, a great soldier, with only a shotgun. He was entirely unconcerned and discussed our problems freely. He knew that all the rest of our boys were gone and, though we still had the music of the machine-guns, he did not seem to mind in the least.

When crossing the byroad leading east, about three hundred yards from Jordan and the boys, on our way to Drumhuskert, the road was cut up beside us with machine-gun fire, but those were the last we had to dodge for that day. GBrown and I made for Keane's of Fahey Hill, about two miles away, where we got much needed refreshments after our enforced abstinence of twenty-two hours. Most of the other boys were billeted in Gortnaclassor and surrounding villages where they were also refreshed. God bless the girls who came along and rendered first-aid to the wounded boys. Their names were:-

Miss Joyce - A qualified nurse.

Miss Gallagher, now Mrs. John Kelly.

Miss Brigid Kelly.

Miss Mary Mulchrone.

There may be some others whom, unfortunately, I cannot now remember. They very capably helped Dr. Madden with his dressing of the wounded and attended to their comforts afterwards.

Lessons to be learned from our experience in the Kilmeena fight:-

- (1) In future, when going into action, we must have both flanks better protected if at all possible.
- (2) After this fight, every opportunity was to be availed of to instruct all officers and men that, if and when again engaged with the enemy, particular attention was to be paid to all enemy machine-guns and the men who operated and attended them. On no account were they to be allowed to get into action, if at all possible. We were not likely to forget what the guns cost us in Kilmeena. These instructions became a daily topic with every member of the unit from this onwards. The knowledge thus acquired paid rich dividends later on.

I would venture to state that never were instructions more closely observed, and seldom with better results as a consequence. The Carrowkennedy engagement clearly demonstrated this fact.

We lolled around here under the protection of a

strong outpost, ably assisted by the local population, both young and old, until nightfall. We then mobilised, got three horses from local farmers for the three wounded men and moved off at midnight.

We went north-east by Cortoon, crossed the Castlebar-Newport road on to the Horsefield road, north to the Owennadarrydevea or Newport river. We crossed the new bridge near Jack Dever's and called on Jack - where we were given several cans of fresh milk to drink. He then gave us a present of two beautiful home-cured hams which was much appreciated by all of us. We then moved on another one and a half miles into Skirdagh Upper and Lower, as well as the village of Cloontafinna containing five houses where we had a good rest - Friday, Saturday and Sunday. This was a route march of over six miles.

The two wounded men, Hughes and Smyth, were billeted in Mrs. McDonnell's of Upper Skirdagh, while Dr. Madden and I stayed in John Dyra's, just across the yard. Some of those days Dr. Madden felt he must amputate two of Jimmie Swift's toes. Jimmy was put on the table, and I was instructed in what assistance I had to render, including administering the anaesthetic. He got the job done to his complete satisfaction and made Jimmy quite comfortable. On Saturday I undertook to "make a silk purse out of a sow's ear". The rifle I had was almost useless because the front sight was so badly out of line. I stuck the point of the barrel and front sight in a hot turf fire until I got the projecting sight very warm. I then hammered it over to what I considered the correct alignment. After it cooled, Dr. Madden and I went up one of the mountain ravines, close at hand, to try it out.

To our delight, we found it just about perfect. So this was another of the tools salvaged in order to bring about John Bull's downfall.

On Sunday evening, 22nd, a number of the Brockagh girls came down to their cousins in Skirdagh. They had all the latest news of the happenings around Westport since the Kilmeena fight.

On that Sunday evening also, Commandant Jack Connolly and Staff Captain Jim Moran came from Lower Skirdagh. They asked permission to go over home to Tiernaur, six miles west of us, to ease the minds of their people at home. It was rumoured they were both killed in Kilmeena. They promised to be back at nightfall. In coming from Lower Skirdagh, Jim Moran foolishly came without his rifle but Connolly had his. They were back from Tiernaur, as promised, at nightfall and had a splendid salmon from my cousin, Michael Kilroy, "The Leap". I had arranged to meet my wife and two sisters in Jimmie Keane's of Tawneywongane, one and a half miles outside Newport that night.

When the two boys had a rest, we started off for Keane's where we arrived about midnight. We had two and a half hours of pleasant conversation, exchange of recent news and recent rumours, of which there was plenty, while Jimmie Keane and his son did guard for us outside. When the time of departure arrived, I felt a great urge to get away quickly. The feeling was like a distinct sharp call and so sudden. What was it? Had we overstayed our visit? What was happening? Was I foolish to have come? We must get out quickly, but no person here must know the urge. Surely there must be something happening or about

to happen. What a terrible feeling! Jimmie Keane was called in to say good-bye and thank him for his kindness.

When Jimmie came in, he advised us - as we had justified our stand by all the fighting we had taken part in, we should now go easy until the harvest was gathered and perhaps a settlement might soon be made. I passed the joke that perhaps the next fight might be in Jimmie Keane's cabbage garden. What a remarkable coincidence, as this is exactly what happened in the next village within an hour!

We said good-bye and left, bringing some beautiful presents of wafers, biscuits, etc., from the women. We hurried over the ancient road leading from Newport to Crossmolina. This same old road is the one chosen by the Tans and police to steal in on the A.S.U. in Skirdagh this morning, while it was still dark and the boys asleep. They must be only fifteen minutes behind us. We came to the stepping-stones which then led, for a quarter of a mile across the bog, to high ground leading to Upper Skirdagh. We crossed in along this passage now at our leisure and feeling very much at ease.

There was nothing but peace and contentment this lovely May morning in Skirdagh. It was now beginning to dawn, the light slowly enveloping us and the grey shades disappearing.

The lambs in the surrounding gardens were up stretching themselves, flexing their muscles for the daily romp and glad to be alive. Some of the lambs were feeding, and oh, how their tails quiver while this operation is on! I doubt if there is anything in nature faster, unless perhaps the tail of a fish.

Did our city folk ever hear of anybody doing a job in "two shakes of a lamb's tail"? Dear Lord, protect us all! That's it. That's the speed with which disaster is now approaching Skirdagh and Cloontifinna. "In two shakes of a lamb's tail" it will be upon us, if the Lord Himself does not avert it.

When we got to our billets in Upper Skirdagh, we felt it would be unfair to wake up our friends in order to get to bed ourselves, so we decided to wait outside and let our friends have their normal rest, the idea being that later we could sleep all day if we felt like doing so.

We then went around at the back of the houses, only a few yards, discussing the problem of escape from Lower Skirdagh, should the need arise, and what a fine cover Michael Dyra's ault (gulley) and other natural folds in the terrain offered. We were only a matter of seconds discussing this problem when we heard a shot, fired by our outpost in Lower Skirdagh. This was immediately followed by a rat-tat-tat from the enemy.

It was only beginning to dawn, and our outpost did not see the enemy until they were quite close. He was not likely to recognise them either. John Murray, who was returning from the wake of Pat McManamon of Skirdagh Cross, observed the police coming down the old road from McNella's. This was about 3.30 a.m. They then turned in at the old bridge and walked up to Pat Maley's and John McManamon's in extended formation. Murray raced in a short-cut to our outpost and, between them, they saved the situation.

I have been informed later that a number of our boys of the A.S.U. left their billets and went down to Pat McManamon's wake at Skirdagh Cross. Presumably, the close confinement of the last three days was having its boring effect on them. (It is likely to affect town boys in this way.) They thought that a period of association with the local community would be of interest and enable them to pass the time in a more social manner.

Whatever their reasons were, they should not have done this. Conditions were not normal. The Skirdagh people were always splendid nationally but, no matter how good their intentions were, our boys must know well that ^{these people} they were taking a great risk in putting up the A.S.U. immediately after the Kilmeena fight. If some of the older people, men or women, were frightened or nervous, it was no wonder at all as those conditions were new to all concerned.

I desire to add that I did not see or hear of the slightest sign of either nervousness or fear. At the same time, their feelings should have been considered and respected, and this was the only way we had to show our gratitude. They fed us, did our washing and gave us shelter when we badly needed it. Newport was only three miles away and that, in itself, should have been sufficient to impress all with the need for quietness and secrecy. But "boys will be boys", and it is easy for us now to criticise in the light of what happened afterwards. But it did seem to the rest of us at that time that, from association with the A.S.U. and seeing the care exercised in general by everybody, those boys should not have taken such liberty by "exploding their

hand", so to speak, in this way. They risked letting the whole A.S.U. down badly, as well as the nation and our dear friends with whom we were staying.

At that wake, there were people out from Newport, some of whom were not worthy of trust as far as we were concerned. It was no wonder that, under all those conditions, the Newport police and Tans decided to raid us in the small hours of the morning.

If we only knew they were coming, what a lovely reception we could have prepared for them! Now they had to take "pot luck". We did the best we could, and it was not at all to their liking. In fact, but for the loss of dear Jim Brown, it was the most interesting engagement of our whole campaign.

Now, owing to the prompt action of John Murray, several valuable minutes were gained for everybody concerned, and that meant a lot.

The outpost fired at once. The time was then just 3.45 a.m. It was not possible for our outpost to send word around to all the boys who were in bed. He felt that, by opening fire would be the best all-round method of getting the boys to hit the floor, and force the enemy to cover at the same time.

The boys got out very hurriedly and dressed to the accompaniment of rapid fire by twenty-four of the enemy who had run to cover immediately when our sentry opened up on them.

Skirdagh is a large, extended village of twelve houses, and there were some of our boys in every house and about a dozen boys in Cloontafinna village, east of

Skirdagh, which consisted of five houses. The seventeen houses extended for about three-quarters of a mile.

The first rat-tat-tat of the enemy fire left no question to be asked or answered. Everybody - villagers as well as A.S.U. men - felt like as if they had the proverbial "red-hot coal on each foot" and had no time at all to throw the coals off.

What with the boys dressing (in "two shakes of a lamb's tail") and the women chasing around collecting haversacks, washed socks, shirts, sweaters, caps, bandoliers, etc., then chasing back again to make sure nothing was forgotten! They knew only too well what a mistake or oversight would mean for them.

Afterwards re-making the warm beds and occupying them in double time, in order to allay any likely suspicion that may be coming later.

Then the sudden eruption of men, diving out the back doors and windows. One man, after diving out a window and getting on to high gear with the first or second spring, was hit on the back of the head by his haversack which was catapulted out the window after him. This promptly sent him spinning on to his knees.

Another man raced out the door but raced back faster. He had everything but his rifle. He wondered what was missing when he could sprint to easily. A third actually got away without his bandolier of ammunition. But, on this ammunition, hangs another tale.

Some were actually out on the street without their

boots, but the housekeeper quickly followed up with them. Another had two socks on one foot. Still another put two feet into one leg of his pants. You see, the Tans were only twenty-five yards away from some of the houses, and most certainly our boys did not like this kind of music so early in the morning. Besides, it was too near and on too discordant a note for peaceful slumber,

The boys in this end of the village were in real danger and they knew it.

All this excitement was over in a few seconds. The speed which was developed only goes to show how fast one can be when he has "a coal on each foot", especially if the feet are bare.

Now was being enacted what, in my opinion, was one of the most remarkable chain of circumstances, covering a period of twenty-four hours, that happened in Ireland during our campaign for Irish freedom.

When we three boys in Upper Skirdagh heard the firing in the lower part of the village, about a half mile away, we sprung into action at once. Whoever had the large paper of beautiful biscuits slung it violently away from him just as if he got an electric shock. He gave it such a dash against the grassy fence of the garden that the paper seemed to dissolve, and there were the beautiful pink wafers, with an admixture of other sorts, strewn for yards all over the fence. What a treat the hens must have had when they came around the corner some hours later, and what a spring must have developed when they spied the sumptuous spread on the side of the fence!

Captain Jim Moran, not having his rifle, was to go into McDonnell's and Dyra's here beside us, so as to help Dr. Madden get out the wounded boys and get them away. What an innocent move on the evening before deprived us of this man's rifle. His marksmanship, which was excellent, would have made his assistance in the fight a great help to us. Commandant Jack Connolly and I ran down towards the lower section of the village in order to help cover our boys' escape.

It was almost flat for three hundred yards in front of McDonnell's, just a very gradual rise and then a dip of fifty or eighty feet. When we got on this crest, owing to the dull light, we saw what we thought were our boys coming towards us in an extended line over the flat bog and at an elevation over the hollow, which was between us, of from ten to fifteen feet. We still kept hurrying and were down in the flat in a few seconds.

Now we could see those in front more clearly between us and the eastern sky, and I began to observe the regularity of the policemen's caps. Whether we had some cloud which obscured the light, or not, I can't remember, but it was a quarter to four a.m. and still visibility was poor. On becoming suspicious, I turned my head and spoke over my shoulder to Jack, "Be careful! I think this is the enemy". We still kept advancing, but, my oh my, there was no desire at all now to run forward. However, the need for this pretence or deception suddenly ended. For immediately I took my eyes off Jack and looked forward again, I saw the next man in front of me raise his rifle and start to aim. Naturally, I took it that it was at me he was aiming and he could not be much over one hundred and fifty yards

away. Surely he could not miss at this short range. Now I had to estimate how long it would take him to aim and pull the trigger. If I flopped down too soon, he still would have his live cartridge which I desired to deprive him of, and I would then be at an even worse disadvantage. If only God would help to make this deception complete, otherwise I was a "dead duck" immediately! I waited so long, oh, so very long, and was still walking forward. It must have been at least two seconds and then I pitched forward to the ground. Thanks be to God, the deception was so complete that I heard him say immediately and distinctly to one of his pals, "Wasn't that a good shot? First shot in the morning, a man down". Now here was Jack and I caught in this hollow with the hill immediately behind us and no chance of escape. If we attempted to run in any direction, we would be noticed at once. We would then have twenty-four rifles pumping lead at us and, dear me, what amusement that would yield! Oh yes, to the enemy, I mean, of course, not to poor Jack or me!

Jack and I were now placed at every possible disadvantage, while the enemy had every advantage in the calendar. They were on a tableland over us. The most perfect cover was at their very toes. They had the rising sun at their back while we had it on our eyes. They got the first shot in, and there were twenty-four of them extended along that tableland to back up that first shot. They were a lot too close to us for comfort. Where we lay was as bare and flat as it could possibly be. Their cover was such as seldom occurs in any kind of soil, and very rarely even in bogland. I can only compare it to a huge jumble of large boxes or crates,

from four to twelve feet long, about three or four feet wide, with rounded ends, and about two feet six inches high. There was a passage made by cows around every one of them. This was done by constant usage down through the ages. I understand that the cows in this district were lazy. They created the trenches for walking in, so that they could feed on the banks without having the trouble of stooping down for it. Also, by this convenience, they could keep an eye on the scenery and their pals as well.

Anyway, here were the ideal and ready-made trenches over which the advancing enemy was walking when we were fired on. We gathered in our rifles quietly and very slowly, so that the enemy would not notice any motion in the supposed dead man. We knew that, owing to the poor light, we had to aim very low. I aimed as low as the hips, at least, and fired. As his head was encircled by a bright patch in the sky at his back, I actually saw the dust leave his cap. He was saved by the worn sight of my rifle. His comrade, with an English accent, asked, "What's that? What's that?" "Oh", says the other, "the peak of my cap - he struck the peak of my cap". The Englishman says back to him, "Take cover! Take cover! You should always take cover in a case like that!"

Still Jack and I got three or four rounds each in to them before they were all under cover.

Now, there was at least several minutes of rapid firing in which the enemy discovered that we could shoot straight. This discovery on their part proved a great asset to us, as after events proved several of them got

their caps riddled with bullets. They had been expressing gratitude for their escape afterwards and showing their caps to prove what narrow shaves they had.

Naturally, this was a good incentive towards keeping them under cover. A most desirable proceeding, from our point of view!

If Jack and I felt at the outset that they were a lot too near us, now we had the tables turned and they felt we were a lot too close to them for comfort.

From now on, there was only an occasional round fired from either side. This was most important to us as our ammunition was running very low.

The minutes were ticking away very slowly while Jack and I realised that it was becoming very serious, even if we had the best of the encounter so far.

Retreat in any direction was next to impossible. There was in our rear about a hundred yards of a steep incline, so that any effort to run up this in front of an enemy so close may prove disastrous. A greater distance to either right or left, without any cover whatever, left our chance of escape in any direction very slim indeed.

I was now anxious to fall back to the base of the hill, if possible. I whispered my desires to Jack and asked him to shout if he saw any move of the enemy while I was up.

When running back, Jack fired where he saw some movement. "Wasn't that quicker and better?", says Jack, "And he will give us no more trouble".

So far, this engagement gave us another reason for a big laugh, now that we had control, and the build up of a great store of confidence. There were many excellent reasons for this elation, if only our position was not so serious from the point of view of depleted ammunition.

For instance, here was the evidence that two men could force twenty-four to cover and keep them pinned down. One man could do the same, as Dr. Madden proved successfully for the half-hour while Jack and I were retiring back to him.

Under such conditions, an additional dozen experienced riflemen could achieve a lot, by either a flanking movement or even a front attack.

In my opinion, given those conditions, the Skirdagh fight would be over in an hour. It could only end by the complete surrender and capture of all the enemy then engaged and their equipment.

We were there at least twenty or thirty minutes, and we were down to our last round of ammunition when we heard Dr. Madden, like a grouse on the heather, calling behind us - "Michael, Michael, where are ye? Where are ye?"

It was most difficult, under our conditions, to let him know but we managed somehow and told him to keep a sharp look-out as we wanted to get back. We were right under him but the curve of the hill hid us from his view.

We had a lot more confidence now as we knew Madden had perfect control of the situation, being on a

much higher and more commanding position than the enemy. I started to go up the hill, feet first, a most difficult task, with my revolver sticking in the ground and pushing me over every move I made. It must have taken us at least a half-hour to get back under cover beside Dr. Madden.

Fortunately, we got Moran and Connolly to bring us back from Tiernaur, Sunday evening, two hundred rounds of .303 which they had charge of. This also gave us great heart when our supply had run so low. We were now joined by Tommie Ketterick, Quartermaster, Johnnie Gibbons, Adjutant, Paddy Cannon, Castlebar, and Jack McDonagh, Westport. We immediately pooled and divided all our ammunition equally.

Now Ketterick started with his endless jokes and, as everybody felt we were in control, we did enjoy them. "Look at that fellow away in the rear, five hundred yards! Is it his rifle or his leg he has up, daring us? Will I make him take it down?" Then a bang, and there was nothing to be seen but grey sedge or mountain grass, the cover was so complete. This went on for hours. Ketterick wanted permission to do a right flank movement but, as this would mean a wide detour and delay, our numbers (only seven) were too small to divide up for a movement of this kind against such odds. We knew there was a big number of men down there, but we did not then know exactly how many. We were about seven hours engaged and we felt that reinforcements might arrive any minute. Sure enough, at 11.45 the first of the lorries came. We saw three racing down from Skirdagh school, about one and a half miles away. We then withdrew at our leisure, feeling sure that the enemy would be very

slow to follow us. In this, we were very much mistaken.

Pat McLoughlin and Michael Browne, his pal, escaped from Skirdagh to Buckagh village. They saw a number of police - approximately thirty - passing through Buckagh village at about 11 a.m., travelling in an easterly direction. I assume that it was this party that arrived so quickly on our trail at the entrance to Glanlaura. If this is so, we had a miraculous escape from being surrounded. Ten minutes delay on our part would leave us practically surrounded.

They must have been watching us going up the old passage which leads around Buckagh mountain. When we left their sight by crossing the shoulder of the hill, we moved diagonally down to the right, leading to my dear friends, Mr. Patrick Chambers and his wife. We were hungry and dry, so we got a beautiful home-made cake and a can of fresh milk. We would not dine inside but we took the food out to the gable of the house where we could have a delightful scenic view of the towering hills each side of us and beautiful Glanlara from end to end, with its lovely placid serpentine stream over which some of the locals had to cross as much as thirty times on their journey up or down the glen.

We had only just started our meal when, to our dismay, the low shoulder of the hill we had just crossed on entering the glen twenty minutes before was swarming with police. We told Patrick Chambers he would find the can over the hill later. As we had not all the milk drunk, we took the can with us. We also divided the bread and cleared off in extended irregular formation, covering a square of about fifteen yards. We moved diagonally to the right for a few hundred yards. The

milk was finished and we dropped the can. We then came on a wide space of perhaps twenty yards or less that seemed to be affected by an ancient landslide. We were impressed by this depression very much because the moss, grass and old rushes there were about exactly the shade of our trench and gabardine coats. We considered it very much better than the heather on either side, so we turned straight up on this surface.

Immediately the enemy appeared at the entrance to the glen, they started letting off bursts from the machine gun. We judged by the change in the echo and noise as a clear indication to us that we were not yet sighted. While this continued, we still kept moving slowly up. If we rushed, it would be like calling on the world to watch us. At the same time, we knew that every yard gained might make the difference between success and failure.

We were perhaps one-third of the way up and the gunner still firing and swinging his machine gun in many directions. Suddenly, the ground was torn up in our midst by many rounds from a burst of the machine gun in a zig-zag fashion. Instantly, there was a cry of, "Halt", and an explanation as to why they should remain upright - in other words, no movement, as the gunner was not likely to be looking over his sights under those conditions. If that were so, we were yet safe. We would quickly know if he had sighted us. Also, any movement on our part would only help his vision as our colour was very close to that of the grass. In a few seconds, he sent another burst in an entirely different direction. The idea behind those machine gun bursts seemed to be that, if a group of men were anywhere

about in hiding, they would get panicky, jump up and run for their lives like frightened hares. Should such a foolish thing happen, what delightful sport those "limbs of the law" would have that blessed May day on the beautiful slopes of Glanlara. Their gun bursts were in vain, however, as there was no evidence of panic to be found in the Glan.

We then decided to take what cover we could on the steep bare hillside and not risk further movement. Perhaps, with God's blessing, we might be high enough up to escape their right flank movement. In a very few minutes, their highest flanker on our side passed right under us, just about thirty yards away. We could easily put a finger stone further than him. How he missed seeing our milk can is more than I can understand, because it was foolishly left in the open. Perhaps he did see it but knew that it was better to be a coward for five minutes than a dead man all his life!

How many hundred Tans and police passed in, we do not know. They covered a mile wide, from hillside to hillside, in extended formation and I believe they were, at least, half a mile in depth. There should be, at least, four or five hundred for there were about fifty lorries on the roads. A platoon of military were at Skirdagh cross-roads but refused to go up the hills. They told the police that they were not paid for that kind of work, but that the police were. We do know that a lot of the police, on their own admission, came from Athlone and intermediate stations without breakfast.

In many houses which they entered, they ate up several home-made cakes and drank many basins of sweet

milk. Lots of them were astonished how those people could have such beautiful bread, not forgetting the old saying that "hunger is great sauce".

Gradually, the main body moved in past us. Then a struggling rearguard and finally, strange to say, a bunch of the real "Brass Hats", about six of them. Lo, and behold you! What did they do but sit down to rest on some garden fences straight under us and only four hundred yards away! What a temptation! If only we could rope them in. Here were we, too far away to do it silently. Too far also from the top of the hill to have a chance of getting away from that machine gun if we opened fire and thereby draw attention to our position. What a galling situation!

We had everything (almost) that one could desire, arms, ammunition and a quantity of rare bulls' eyes. But (ah! How annoying that word can be!) our hands were tied, so to speak. We had to lie there, with lots of time on our hands, and let our desires dissolve into thin air. What a strain this was on all of us! However, we found much consolation in the saying, "He that fights and runs away shall live to fight another day".

Until all had passed in, we remained where we were and soon they were gone "like the snow of last year". Not a trace of them in sight.

Now we could stretch our limbs and make for the top of the hill "like the goat in fine weather". On getting there, what a pleasant surprise was in store for us! God Himself had the place prepared for us for centuries. The turf was cut away to the bare gravel, for perches around and at various angles, so that we

were left with an assortment of ramparts breast high. Here we felt very secure, as we knew that even the hundreds of men, who had just passed in, were not capable of dislodging us, even if we were discovered which was most unlikely.

Our position now was on a shoulder jutting south from Berreencorragh and just one thousand, two hundred feet above sea level. We had a splendid view of a large tract of the country, south, east and west. With the aid of our telescope, we noticed two lorries and a red cross van at Cloontafinna, two miles away. We saw a number of stretchers being carried to the van and apparently put in. We knew that the officer in charge of the police in the morning's fight was Munroe and that he was badly wounded in the chest by a bullet that entered the arm or shoulder. Also, one of our men, Jim Brown of Kilmeena, was badly wounded in the abdomen and died in Castlebar Hospital. Another policeman was killed and one wounded.

We do not know how Jim Brown got caught, but we strongly suspect, from what I saw of him in the retreat from Clooneen, Kilmeena, the previous Thursday, that he may have been rather incautious. This could be encouraged in a man like Brown by the short range of his old shotgun which necessitated getting close to the enemy. While he was very quiet, he was a big, powerful man and not likely to fancy running on every occasion. It was only when we got down off the mountain we learned of Jim Brown's misfortune.

We remained in our ramparts until nightfall and then came down to Mrs. McDonnell's and Dyra's. They

set about cooking for us at once. I assure you Cousin Michael's salmon was not forgotten. However he escaped the round-up was a surprise to us all.

My dear Lord! What beams of joy shone from the faces of those people for sheer delight in seeing the seven of us safely back again after the past twenty hours' excitement. I would mention especially those of Mrs. McDonnell and her three daughters, Mrs. McNulty, now of Chicago, Nora and Maggie, now Mrs. John J. Ketterick of Newport.

There was a pig of McDonnell's shot on the street in the morning. When old John Dyra next door was getting out of the kitchen bed in the morning, another bullet came in the front door and flattened on the wall beside him. This bullet actually blackened his hip when passing.

Ellen McDonnell told me she knew where the forgotten bandolier of ammunition was hidden in a reekle of turf. She also suggested that we could collect it while the meal was being cooked by the others. Ellen and I went down right beside where some of the Tans were under cover in the morning. We searched a good deal but failed to find the bandolier. Nevertheless I thought this girl's hiding of the bandolier under the noses of the Tans was a wonderful feat. She was little more than a child, and it was then approaching midnight and very dark.

When Ellen and I got back to the house, our supper was ready and we had a beautiful meal of salmon, "fresh run" from the sea. When supper was over, it must have been after midnight, so we said good-bye and started

on our trying journey.

Gerald Flynn, N.T., and Joe Murray were compelled by the military to help in extracting a field-gun - and the mules who were drawing it - from a bog hole alongside the road at a bend at the bottom of the hill at Treenlaur. The soldier, who was riding on the mule, got his leg jammed between the mules in the bog hole.. Flynn counted the mules near where he was forced to help, and he found there were, at least, sixteen and perhaps twenty mules. This would give this military party two or three field-guns and two or three field kitchens, with six mules to a gun and two to a field kitchen. Flynn reminds me that it is now thirty-four years since Skirdagh, and he cannot be more accurate about details. He reminds me that he could not count the military, as they were all over the place around the wood at Treenlaur Lodge. There were also police in his vicinity around the place.

My, but it is a great consolation, when one is in a tight corner, to be able to anticipate the other fellow's move! Then you can slip between his fingers and sit down for a good smile. Dr. Madden was always about perfect at this game.

Our objective now was to get across the Newport river, over two miles away, south of us, as quickly as possible. We wanted to get outside the likely cordon that was possibly already established. This must be done at all costs before daylight. But how could we hurry? Such a method was impossible to adopt with safety. We had to investigate and be suspicious of every cow, calf, donkey and whin bush along our passage to the bridge. We knew the enemy was likely to be met

with anywhere, but most certainly he should be at the bridge, we had to assume. Having arrived there, our problem was to reconnoitre the bridge and its approaches from both ends. A slow undertaking but, to our delight, we found the bridge and its surroundings unoccupied, so we crossed over like one Tom Smith.

Rejoicing in our great good fortune and thanking God for our success so far! But how He must smile at our puny efforts and antics, especially if He gave us a thought at all or remembered the tit-bit He had arranged for us!

Our whole equipment of rifle, revolver, ammunition, bandolier and haversack weighed over thirty pounds. In all, our marching, carrying this weight was "a labour of love".

We were now passing at the south-west corner of Beltra Lough. When we rounded a "criggaun", or hillock, we had a full view of the lake, three full miles long. To the school and cross-roads beyond the lake was another quarter-mile.

Oh, to our consternation, there were the headlights of many lorries! "Jump to it, boys", says Madden, "They are setting outposts there now and, as quick as we can run to the Derryloughan or Newport-Glanisland road, they will be there."

Now seconds, even quarter-seconds, were going to count tremendously, and they did. The road was just over a mile away. Our passage was over a new coarse sandstone and gravel road. The lorries had just about three miles to do over a much better old road. In other words, they should be at the head of our road in

six minutes or less.

Could it be done? Could it really be done by all seven of us, even if we were dressed only in tights, over such a bad road? Surely no! Then, what with our heavy boots, full suit, overcoat and thirty pounds of equipment? Surely it was impossible. But it must be done.

We had lots of experience by now that "God helps those who help themselves". We asked Him to lighten our load, and He not only did that but, figuratively, dressed us in tights as well and perhaps carried us along.

When we started the race, the order was, "Run, boys, run, and if you fall, don't wait to rise!" As we approached the main road, we were forced to observe that, on our left, about thirty yards away, there was a very slight hill. As the leading lorry was climbing it on the far side, the beams of its headlights were shot upwards, just slightly over our heads. We were not yet on that road but we must cross it in order to be safe. We made a last sprint and, I assure the reader, there was not one "laxter" (lazy fellow) among us.

We were now crossing the road and making for our final jump to freedom. But, oh, what a trench was in our path! Who wanted to measure it? Nobody. Nobody cared a d--- what breadth it was. All were going to jump as far and as fast as they could anyway. This is where the quarter-second counted. Here is where the sprouted wings helped, or was it the lorry lights? However, the trench was taken in great style by six of us, but the seventh, we found later on, made a boggy landing. He failed to clear the trench and sank down to his hips, or perhaps deeper. At the time, the rest

of us did not know because we kept up our speed to get beyond the lamp beams which we knew were coming. I assure you we did not stop even then.

On getting in a hundred yards, we suddenly found ourselves enveloped in a dense fog. So dense was it that we could not see the lights on the lorries, though we heard the men talk. This was one of the many blessed fogs by which we escaped in almost every pinch during our whole service period, when the going was proving too much for humans to endure.

Now we were secure and at easy - here on the flat bog - so we got together and discovered, to our consternation, that someone was missing. We quickly realised it was Dr. Madden. This was a stunning blow to us all. We tried at once to extend and search for him but this order was countermanded immediately, as the fog was very dense and we saw the great danger of losing others owing to the many bog-holes that were around. Also, there was great likelihood of us all losing our sense of direction, as often happens in a heavy fog. Then, God only knows where we would land even if we were lucky enough to escape the bog holes.

When Dr. Madden failed to clear the trench, he had to settle down, as the headlights would be on him in a second or two. He had to turn his face and hands away before the shining lights would show him up to the enemy.

The enemy lorries halted right beside Dr. Madden and set down the outposts, with instructions to go down and occupy the bridge we had crossed a few minutes earlier. The lorries then drove off towards Newport.

Dr. Madden joined us in a short time afterwards. We retired to the village of Loplogh, just a quarter of a mile up from the road.

After the battle of Skirdagh, a persistent rumour originated in the West that Dr. Madden and myself were killed in that engagement. It was only our appearance in various localities later on quenched the belief in our death.

As far as I can remember, not one of the boys showed any sign of exhaustion after their mile race. How this could be possible is beyond my comprehension. I can only see one explanation for it and thank the great God of Heaven Who enabled us to perform such a marvellous feat.

After having breakfast, we found the fog had lifted a good deal. As the village is in an elevated position, we could, with the aid of the telescope, see fairly faintly the police at the bridge, about one and a quarter miles away. Owing to the fog and the distance, we were away from the Glenhest road which leads from Newport to Crossmolina, we must have missed a lot of fun. As the newspapers of the time suggested, the whole Nephin range of mountains in North Mayo were surrounded by police and military. In support of this huge operation, free use was made of aeroplanes and carrier pigeons, and the infantry was flanked by artillery. All this was done, apparently, with a view to creating consternation and awe among the people of West Mayo.

The police spent six days combing that whole district but did not capture one man of the A.S.U.

In this parish there had been a well-known prophecy of Brian Ruaidh (a local seer who had an uncanny knack of forecasting events) regarding a big fight in Skirdagh. It runs: "There will be a big fight in Skirdagh, and one of the British party - a red-haired man named McManamon - would jump on a horse and ride bare-backed to Newport for help. When he would arrive in Newport, he would be asked, 'What's wrong?'. His reply would be, 'Unless help arrives quickly, we will be all killed'." Now, every detail of this speech and all particulars took place on that 23rd day of May, 1921.

We knew this tall red-haired McManamon well in Newport Barracks for some time before the fighting started. The morning of the fight, he jumped on Pat O'Malley's horse and rode bare-back to town. When he arrived at Newport crane, he dismounted and was asked by Miss Lizzy O'Boyle and Mr. John McGovern, both of whom are now dead, "What's wrong?". The answer was, "Unless help arrives soon, we will be all killed". In addition to the foregoing, when the police returned to Newport, they reported freely that they saw St. Patrick walking around among us all day.

They also reported that they could not put up their rifles but it was ding-ding every time. If that was correct, they must have been very careful of their heads for the eight hours they were under cover during the fight; otherwise, there would have been a lot more casualties.

Our stay in Loplogh was uneventful. We left there on the night of the 24th May and went across to Letra where we remained until the following night. We

then went across to Butler's of Rockfield where we were royally received. The people in that locality heard the sounds of the fighting in Skirdagh, about eight miles away as the crow flies.

The following night - on 27th May - the seven of us moved into the Aughagower district where we met the members of the Westport Unit in Curvey and Lankhill villages. Those were the boys we missed so much in the Kilmeena fight. Naturally, they felt in high spirits on hearing what happened in Skirdagh and congratulated us on getting some of our own back for the reverse we sustained in Kilmeena.

Yes, this was war - grim war, with all its nakedness! While congratulations were in order and well intended, they only served to remind us of our dear comrades we lost in Kilmeena and Skirdagh. It was only nine days since we parted on the Castlebar road at Drumneen. We had lost five comrades killed, four wounded and captured, three wounded and escaped; there was also one Volunteer captured.

Whether in victory or defeat, we knew by now that it was painful departing from the battlefield, having to leave some dear comrade behind.

After spending some days in the Aughagower parish, we moved on to the Carrowkennedy district, and we then moved over to Oughty. We had travelled about eight miles of mountain country which brought us close to Drummin R.I.C. barracks, so we decided to burn down this stronghold before leaving.

Instead of breaking in the door, we entered by a

window and discovered, on getting in, that there was a trap set for us. Inside the door, there was a bomb held to the floor by nails. There was then a twine tied to the ring of the bomb and fastened to the door, in such a way that the opening of the door pulled the pin of the bomb and set it to explode by having the fuse ignited.

We disconnected the bomb and preserved it for further use. To return it to its former owner, with explosive results, was our particular desire. Now the boys prepared the place for a real blaze which was set going in a few minutes.

It was now nightfall, so we set off eastwards to Claddy where we billeted again and in the neighbouring villages - all in the Carrowkennedy district.

On the following day, about twelve o'clock, the 2nd June, our outpost sent us word that the enemy was on the Leenane-Westport road, in force, at Carrowkennedy. They had a group of turf workers collected off the nearby banks, and compelled them to fill in a road trench which we had got cut some weeks earlier. Immediately we got word, we ran out to a point where we got a good view of the operation being carried out on the road. This was about three-quarters of a mile from us. Some of our billets were much closer. In a short time, the trench was filled and the convoy drove off towards Leenane.

One of our officers remarked that, as the road leading round by Delphi to Louisburgh was blocked as a result of our order issued on the 17th May, they would have to return back our way again.

Others suggested they were probably going out to

Letterfrack fair. Even so, when returning to Westport, they would have to return our way. Moyah, the poor boys, by Carrowkennedy!! Was our long wished for opportunity in the offing at last? Would we be so favoured?

Surely "Mayo of the welcomes" never prepared a reception with such a fluttering of hearts, such anxiety for realisation, such enthusiasm for accomplishment, such desire to have everybody in position, and such anxiety to obey! Could we really be so favoured as to have them "come our way" on their return to Westport.

The self reliance engendered by the many contacts with the enemy was very apparent to-day. The inefficiency displayed by the enemy at the recent fights in Kilmeena and Skirdagh, as well as the first Carrowkennedy fight in March and later at the Railway Bridge, Westport, inspired our boys with the utmost confidence. In all those instances, we were hopelessly outmatched by supposed trained men with up-to-date equipment. In some instances, we were outnumbered to the extent of eight to one and twelve to one. What wonder then if our boys were anxious to enter on a trial of strength or efficiency where the odds were reduced to something like equal. Yes, you could see the confidence blooming to-day like the first of the summer roses, a delight to behold.

Mobilisation "at the double" was the order. As the men were to come up, they were to rush over to Vice Commandant Malone at the County road.

Dr. Madden, Commandant Ring, Vice Commandant Malone and myself ran the distance to the County road

and had a quick look round. We stationed Malone overlooking the County road, in the neighbourhood of the burnt-out R.I.C. hut, with instructions to wait there for the men and where to place them for the time being as they came up.

Madden, Ring and myself then hurried forward along towards Westport, parallel to the road in the direction of Thomas Navan's, where there is a bend in the road. After examining the ground in this neighbourhood, the three of us were agreed that it was a much more favourable site for us than the position where the boys now were, with Malone.

We were probably not more than fifteen minutes on this job until we turned back. Immediately we turned, Malone and others were whistling, shouting and doing their best, evidently, to pull the sky down. It was quite clear the enemy were coming. Time would not now permit us to occupy this last selected ambush position.

Joe Ring suggested that the double creaggane (hillock) out in the fields, one hundred and fifty yards west, would be a great point for one of our men. We agreed, and he volunteered to go if given permission. This was granted and he set out at once. In his crossing the intervening ground between the road and the hillocks, under the protection of a low fence, he was continually being sniped at. His haversack was projecting higher than the fence. He got across safely and succeeded in rendering valuable service from that post. The fact of the enemy seeing him go there was, in itself, a great asset to us and a great setback to them. It confined their movements very much.

About the moment Joe Ring left us, the leading lorry had halted underneath our main position which was about sixty feet higher than the road. It was a splendid location, well protected by a rough stone fence.

A left flanking party extended from our main body down by a wood and out into a bare flat, on a level with the road. Notably Captain Jim Moran of Shralogga was out in this flat. He told me of the sniping he had at the enemy as they ran into McGreal's.

Our right flank was protected by Vice Brigadier Ned Moane, Adjutant Johnnie Gibbons and, I think, another whom I cannot now remember.

I believe it cannot be said whether the driver of the first lorry steered into the position where the lorry halted. I do believe he was dead when it came to a stop. I also believe that is where he would halt had he been alive. It was the best place of protection for the men and the Lewis gun they carried. The driver was District Inspector Stephenson and he was shot "dead centre" in the forehead.

Now the fun started. Our boys started singing "Kelly, The Boy From Killane". They kept it up for a long period, much to the discomfort of the enemy. I am confident it helped materially in hastening their surrender also.

The enemy pushed and kicked out the Lewis gun from the rear of the lorry. Several men followed it on the flat, like salmon jumping. They knew they daren't rise their back, head or any part of the body. When they landed on the ground, they had about a two foot, six

inch sod: fence to protect them. Under this cover, the machine-gun was set up.

Boy, oh boy! Did our gossoons remember the instructions talked of day and night for about a fortnight? Dear, oh dear! How they attended to those gunners and with such effect!

There was a burst let up into the air to frighten the supposed rabbits. Then a poor fellow tried to level it across the fence at us, but that was all. Suddenly, there was too much lead in his head. Another comrade pushed him aside and started the same game. This second man had scarcely caught the gun until he also was dead.

Then a third man made a like effort and met with the same fate. After that, poor "Lady Lewis" was left all alone. There was no other man found with the nerve to embrace her. She was looked upon as one to be avoided rather than courted.

While all this was taking place at the front lorry, the men and officers of the second lorry and car had dismounted and taken cover around the bridge and its walls, about eighty yards in rear of the front lorry. All those Tans were under the fire of our men on the left flank of our main body, our section on the hill to the south of the bridge, under the command of Commandant Joe Doherty and Commandant Joe Ring, to the west of the enemy.

The driver of this second lorry was a civilian and his lorry had been commandeered for the occasion. He took cover under his lorry and had a very hard time

dodging Joe Ring's bullets, under whose vision he was. There was one man killed and at least one badly wounded at the bridge. Some had taken cover under the bridge.

When they found themselves under such concentrated fire at this point, they made a dash for McGreal's house on the roadside, about forty yards in their rear. This isolated them from taking further part in the engagement. It also enabled more of our men to concentrate on the front lorry and thereby bring about a more speedy capture of the whole party, as results proved.

For some reason, a man's two legs were sticking out from the back of the front lorry and, when the boys had nothing else to fire at, they were popping at those legs. The two calves were practically shot off them.

Now, there was yet a live man in this armour-plated lorry, and he attempted to shell us with a grenade. Evidently, he did not like "The Boy From Killane" or the boys that were singing it. He also seemed to know that he must not expose any part of himself, having already experienced the accuracy of our riflemen. It would be easy and simple if he got us running away like rabbits. But, cramped up in the lorry, with tools, ammunition boxes, tyres, etc., the poor boy had scarcely room to roll on his side.

In addition, those numerous, unfriendly Republican bullets were most unpleasant and they kept coming. How, then, could he adjust his grenade-throwing rifle, or fit his grenade into it? He couldn't; it was impossible but, evidently, he tried. When trying, in his cramped up space, apparently the bomb fell beside his head and nearly blew it off.

Bombs are very dangerous things to handle and he should not have tried this, with so many disadvantages. There was a big groove taken out of the side of his head when we found him later.

I suggest the foregoing disadvantages are what brought about his disaster. Some of our boys suggested it was how they shot the ring pin out of the grenade and set it off. Perhaps - even a chance in a million is possible, and "your guess is as good as mine".

Now, that bomb explosion, as was expected, speeded up matters in our favour a good deal. In a few minutes, there was a white flag waved from this lorry.

While this fight was going on, one of their men kept up a steady fire on our position. I believe he kept completely under cover, as the keenest eyes could not detect him and his shooting seemed to go wild all the time, thanks be to God. Nevertheless, the danger was there while he had his liberty.

It seemed he must have dived into this thicket of sally bushes, first thing, when the lorry halted. Now, this man was a real danger as, quite possibly, he could not see the white flag in the lorry behind him. He was much lower than the road, with a fence at his back, and very likely he was not looking behind him.

Time was pressing on us very much. We were probably well over two hours fighting already. Here was partial victory within our grasp which could easily be snatched from us by the arrival of reinforcements from Westport or elsewhere.

We decided that ^{at} Joe Baker, with some of his men,

would carry out a flanking movement by working down towards the road from our left centre, under cover. This Joe gladly undertook without hesitation.

Captain Johnny Duffy, his brother, Paddy, with some others, fixed bayonets and did a right flanking movement to the road, no cover being available. The main body and Baker's section, which were by this time in position quite close to the enemy, kept up a protecting fire for Duffy and his section.

When Duffy and his section approached the lorry, the hidden man in the trench came out when ordered to do so. Perhaps the shining steel "enlightened" him. He was the only man from the front lorry that escaped unwounded.

This man was taken over immediately by Duffy and his section to Mrs. McGreal's and was instructed to tell his pals what had happened at the front lorry. Up to this, they must have been ignorant of what had happened ^{around} ~~there~~ in the front lorry. They were confined to the house and had no view from it.

My individual point of view has been that the enemy, by occupying McGreal's house, isolated themselves from their comrades and, by doing so, were guilty of an error in tactics, which contributed to our success in this fight.

Immediately, a number of our boys, including Jimmy Flaherty, advanced on the captured lorry to take over Lewis gun, rifles and all available material without delay. All equipment was brought up at once to our main position for security.

Then followed one of the most extraordinary fits of antics one could possibly expect to witness from a grown-up man. Poor Jummy Flaherty seemed to be demented. He was carrying on like a well-fed kitten with Miss Lewis, kissing her, rubbing her down, patting her, then patting her again and then a further romping. It was almost heart-breaking to interrupt him, but time was pressing.

Night was approaching and the capture only half completed. He had to be reminded the war was not yet won and to train his "lady love", Miss Lewis, on McGreal's at once but to be sparing on ammunition. He did this without further delay and with very much pleasure. We found Jimmie to be a splendid machine-gunner.

While one section of our men looked after the booty from the first lorry, others attended to the wounded. Francis Cregan was badly wounded and seemed to bleed a lot. He was carried up by our boys on a door-leaf from the road to a neighbouring house, and some drink secured for him. We then removed the dead man out of the lorry.

The man that had the bomb accident was in an awful condition. There was a semi-circular groove, about two inches, gouged out of the side of his head, over the ear from front to back. It was like as if done with a sharp instrument. The wound was covered over with fine dust from the lorry which had settled down after the bomb explosion.

On searching D.I. Stephenson's pockets, we found instructions issued to him from Galway, directing him to

call on the Wallace brothers at the head of the Killary Bay, near Aasleagh. So these were the instructions that took them on their fatal journey. Both of these boys were safe and sound in McDonnell's A.S.U. of West Connemara and were among the best men we had.

Having completed our work with the captured contents of the first lorry, all attention was now directed on those men who were herded in McGreal's house. A number of us now converged on McGreal's, with Captain Duffy and his prisoner. When they were informed what had happened, Captain Duffy demanded their surrender which they refused. I then arrived and demanded that the people of the house be let out unhurt. This was also refused. I then reminded them that there was a war on, which they evidently had not yet grasped. I told them that, if they were not coming out at once, we were not going to take any risks by delays of this sort, that we were not going to allow them hold us up, that we would set the house on fire and that, if any members of the McGreal family would be injured as a result of the fire, we would shoot them down, to the last man.

This brought immediate results. The Tans all marched out at once, with their hands up, and they were lined up on the road and disarmed without delay. The Tans seemed to be very much afraid, and the officer inquired from me what we were going to do with them.

I told him this fight was over and that we were not the savages he and his Government were so busy describing us to be, that we were Christians first and above all else, and that he need not have any fear whatever. They were told they would be released as

soon as we were ready to leave.

This they did not seem to be able to grasp. The whole thing was positively painful to us. The worry that moved them all was most embarrassing to anyone with a spark of Christian charity, and we were most anxious to end all their worries at once. Any assurance of ours did not seem to have any effect on them.

I then observed one poor fellow that seemed to be badly wounded in the leg or foot, trying to stand to attention with the rest. He seemed to be in great pain and losing a large quantity of blood. We ordered him to the fence at once, to sit or lie down, and I blamed both himself and his pals for not letting us know and for assuming we would be so heartless as to impose such unnecessary punishment on any human being.

This simple act of charity, and the few words of compassion associated with it, had just the effect we all longed for. It was electrifying in its results. The whole outlook of the prisoners changed, just as you'd clap your hands. They sensed that they were in luck. Immediately, our boys and themselves started conversations and jokes.

The O/C was requested to send one of his men for spiritual and medical aid to Westport. He was informed how badly some of his men were up at the other lorry. He dispatched a man at once on this errand.

Our toughest problem now was to break off the conversations. It did not seem to occur to our boys, for one moment, that there would be ten thousand additional men out for our blood after this evening's engagement.

I was amazed. It was entirely beyond my comprehension. But, then, there are a lot of things I do not understand at all, at all. The relaxation seemed to be very tempting indeed, after the high pressure operation of the past few hours.

However, we got the lorries on fire and took our departure. Even then, the O/C was very anxious to get a further promise that we would not fire on them when we were retiring. We gave him that promise. Whether it allayed his inner feelings, or not, I am not in a position to say.

Anyway, he had not long to wait, for we covered a lot of ground in a short time.

It was now darkening rapidly, so we had some hurried refreshments in Claddy once more and made a speedy departure.

We had been informed later that it was hours after daylight, the following day, before any help came to the wounded and dying enemy at Carrowkennedy.

We were also told that the whold district was thoroughly scouted by enemy 'planes in the morning before any help was permitted to come along.

We did not know, for quite a while afterwards what was thought of the removal of D.I. Stephenson. Evidently, he had been scourging the people of Erris in North Mayo for some time before he came to Westport.

When the Erris people heard of his demise, they just about "set the barony on fire", so great was the jubilation.

SIGNED: Michael Kilroy
(Michael Kilroy)

DATE: 15th April 1955

15th April 1955.

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WITNESS: Seumas Robinson (Seumas Robinson)
(Investigator)