

W.S. 1,187

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21  
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21  
No. W.S. 1187

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,187

Witness

Patrick Butler,  
Nine-Mile-House,  
Thomastown,  
Co. Kilkenny.

Identity.

O/C. 'C' Coy. VIII Battalion  
Third Tipperary Brigade;

Member of Third Tipperary Brigade  
Flying Column.

Subject.

Irish Volunteer activities,  
Grangemockler, Co. Tipperary, 1914-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

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STATEMENT BY MR. PATRICK BUTLER,

Nine Mile House, Thomastown, Co. Kilkenny.

I was born in the year of 1888 at Breanormore, Grangemockler, Co. Tipperary. I was one of a family of 13 children, two of whom died young. The remaining eleven consisted of seven boys and four girls. My grandfather, Edward Butler, was a member of the Fenian organisation and was associated with Charles J. Kickham of Mullinahone in that movement.

I attended Grangemockler national school until I was 14 years of age, after which I secured employment with a farmer in my native district. At the age of 17 years I joined the British Army and served in it for about four years. After my service with the British Army I returned to my home at Breanormore. The only Gaelic or Irish Ireland organisation in the district at that time, to my knowledge at any rate, was the Grangemockler Gaelic Football Club, of which I became a member and of which I remained a member for many years afterwards.

A company of the Irish National Volunteers or Redmond's Volunteers as they were called, was formed in Grangemockler early in the year of 1914. I joined this company at the time of its formation and, on account of my experience in the British Army, I was appointed drill instructor. There was a good deal of local enthusiasm at first but gradually this waned; the members commenced to lose interest in the parades and meetings and in about a year or so the organisation, so far as Grangemockler was concerned, had died out.

In the summer of 1917 I joined a Sinn Féin Club which was then being organised in Grangemockler. As far as I can now recollect, the late Mr. John Browne of Grangemockler, brother of Dr. Browne, now President of Galway University, of Fr. Browne, now Superior General of the Dominican Order, and of Mrs. Seán MacEntee, was principally instrumental in getting the Sinn Féin Club going. The club held weeking meetings in the parochial hall in Grangemockler. Between men and women the membership was about thirty, and each member paid a weekly subscription of twopence. The club did good work during the general election of 1918 in helping to secure the election of the late Pierce McCann as Sinn Féin member for the South Tipperary constituency. On polling day I acted as tally clerk for Pierce McCann at the polling booth in the Town Hall, Carrick-on-Suir. The Mr. John Browne to whom I have referred died sometime later from injuries received in a football game. His death was to my mind one of the biggest blows the Sinn Féin and Volunteer movements received in this district.

Towards the end of 1918 or early in 1919 a man by the name of Seán Nolan visited Grangemockler. He was from Cork and at that time he must have been organising for the Irish Volunteers. He addressed a meeting which was held in a field just beside the village of Grangemockler. The object of the meeting was to form an Irish Volunteer company in the district, and at the meeting Jerry Shelly from South Lodge, Grangemockler, proposed that I be elected as captain of the company. A few of us, however, who were discussing the matter privately amongst ourselves thought that things were being done too openly and that the formation of the company should be postponed

for a week or two and that we would do the thing in our own way.

During the next week or ten days I visited a number of young men whom I considered to be reliable and asked them to attend a meeting in the parochial hall in Grangemockler. At this meeting, which was attended by about 25 men, the company was formed. All who were present joined. I was then elected as captain of the company, which became "C" Company, VIII. Battalion, 3rd Tipperary Brigade. Five of my brothers - Martin, Jimmy, Jack, Tom and Harry - joined the company at this time. My sixth brother - Ned - was then serving with the British Army, but when he obtained his discharge and came home he, too, joined the company. Thus all seven brothers were in the company, and three of us - Jimmy, Ned and myself - were afterwards members of the Brigade No. 1 (Denis Lacy's) Flying Column.

The company paraded about twice a week and we drilled and trained in various places around Grangemockler. Each man paid a small subscription into an arms' fund. With a view to building up the strength of the company, I appealed to each man to get at least one new member, a man whom he could trust, and in this way our numbers slowly but steadily increased until within a year or so we had a strength of over 50. One great drawback was lack of arms.

Early in 1920, with Ned Glendon, Pierce Tobin and my brother Jimmy I went to Duffhill to assist the Carrick-on-Suir Volunteers in the hold-up of a mail train from Waterford. John O'Keefe of Carrick-on-Suir was in charge. The train was stopped by a railway linesman

who flagged the train for us. The linesman's name was Frank Roche. He was a member of the Volunteers in Carrick-on-Suir. The mails were taken from the train and brought away by O'Keefe and some Volunteers from Carrick-on-Suir. I believe that, after examination to see if there was any correspondence for the R.I.C., or for the British authorities, the mails were returned to the Post Office.

About August of 1920, I received orders to have all arms, shotguns, etc., held by private persons in the company area, collected. I detailed three members of the Company to each district in our area to collect the shotguns. Generally speaking, the farmers handed over the guns willingly enough, either when the Volunteers called, or a few days later. In one case, that of an extensive Protestant farmer and well known sportsman named Thomas Barnes, I decided to raid the house rather than have Volunteers call on him. In this raid, I was accompanied by two members of the Company, Ned Glendon and Pierce Tobin. In addition to a few shotguns, we got two revolvers in Barnes' house. One of these was a very old pattern revolver which fired a .45 bullet; the other was a useful .38 weapon.

In all, we collected about thirty shotguns. I arranged that the parochial hall in Grangemockler would be the receiving centre for these guns and, on the night they were brought there and in the presence of those members of the Company who had brought them in, I had some of the floor-boards in the hall raised and the guns dumped underneath the floor. When the Company was dismissed and the lads had departed, I went back with, I think, Glendon and Tobin to the hall, took the guns from

their hiding place, brought them to the schoolhouse and placed them underneath some floor-boards in the school. This we did in case, by any chance, the secret of the hiding place might leak out.

Sometime in September of 1920, I attended a Battalion council meeting which was held in the house of Maurice McGrath (generally known as the "Bogman") at Rath, near Carrick-on-Suir. Seán Treacy, the Brigade Vice Commandant, was present. It was on a Sunday evening and, after the meeting was over, he (Sean Treacy) instructed us to report again at McGrath's next morning at 10 a.m., i.e., on the Monday morning. That day, Monday, Seán Treacy put us through various kinds of drill, arms and field drill, and lectured us on Volunteer organisation, military tactics, etc. He was anxious to test some .45 revolver ammunition which he had with him and, as I had brought along the old pattern .45 revolver which I had taken from Barnes in the raid, already referred to, we decided to try the ammunition in this gun. We made a groove for the gun in the ground, steadied it with stones at either side and fastened it securely with a peg in the ground. We tied a long string to the trigger and, when we pulled this to release the hammer, the shot went off but it literally blew the gun into smithereens. I don't know where Seán Treacy got that ammunition, but I believe he was carrying out this test as a precautionary measure and that he destroyed whatever more of this particular lot of ammunition he had. He promised me that the gun would be replaced by the Brigade Quartermaster. Within a few weeks and before the promise was redeemed, he was killed in Dublin. However, when I mentioned the matter afterwards to the Brigade O/C, Seamus Robinson, Seamus told me that I could have the revolver any time I called to the Brigade

Headquarters at Rosegreen for it. He also promised to let me have two rifles for the Company.

In October, 1920, the Company was asked for volunteers for the Brigade Flying Column, the formation of which was then being considered. Four of us, Ned Glendon, Pierce Tobin, my brother, Jimmy, and myself, volunteered our services, but we were not called to the Column until January of 1921. From about this time onwards, I was fully occupied with Volunteer work and rarely, if ever, went home. Ned Glendon and myself usually slept together in an outhouse as it was too dangerous to sleep at home on account of the raids which were then being constantly carried out by the British forces.

For some time about the end of October or November, 1920, Ned Glendon, Pierce Tobin and myself scouted constantly in the neighbourhood of Glenbower R.I.C. barracks which was in my Company area and which then had a garrison of ten or twelve men, composed of R.I.C. and Black and Tans. We noticed that a patrol of five or six men generally left the barracks on Sunday afternoons. I came to the conclusion that it would be possible to take the barracks by a ruse while this patrol was out. My idea was to get a motor car and, with two or three Volunteers in it, to pull up outside the barrack door and, at the same time, to have another small party of men, armed with revolvers, ready to rush the barrack door when it was opened. It was a safe bet to assume that, when the car pulled up outside the door, one policeman would open the door and come out to the car to see what was wanted. Those in the car would then hold up the policeman who came out. I proposed to do this job on Sunday, November 21st, 1920, but the great handicap was

lack of small arms.

During the week before this date (November 21st), I went to the Brigade Headquarters at Rosegreen and, after explaining what I proposed to do, I asked for help in the carrying out of the job. The Brigade O/C decided to send Seán Hogan and Seán Hayes to help us. Jerry Kiely also came with them. Hogan, Hayes and Kiely stayed at Michael Hogan's house at Grangemockler, that is, in the home of Michael Hogan who was killed in Croke Park while playing a football match on Bloody Sunday - on the same day as that on which we proposed to take Glenbower barracks. Before leaving for Dublin to play the match, Seán Hogan gave Michael Hogan some despatches for G.H.Q. Michael placed these in a football which he was taking with him. John O'Keefe, the Battalion O/C, came out from Carrick-on-Suir to assist us, and the motor car was brought from Rathgormack by a youth named Thomas Kennedy. This car was the property of Dr. Halpin of Rathgormack. Another who came to assist us was Maurice McGrath (the Bogman) then Captain of the Mothel Company.

On the Sunday, we met at Dick Cahill's house at the Four Roads. Seán Hogan and Seán Hayes were opposed to going ahead with the job. They felt that the ruse would not work and that to attempt the job might only lead to serious loss of life. I was very disappointed but had no option but to call it off. To test my theory, I got into the motor car, taking with me my brother, Jimmy, Ned Glendon and the Bogman (Maurice McGrath). We drove to Glenbower and stopped the car outside the police barracks. As I had anticipated, a policeman opened the door and came out, leaving the door open behind him. We did not speak to him but drove away again and returned to Cahill's where



I told Hogan and Hayes exactly what happened.

Michael Hogan's funeral arrived at Clonmel from Dublin on the evening train on the Tuesday after Bloody Sunday. I mobilised the Company and we went to Clonmel to meet the remains. From Glenbower to Grangemockler we marched in military formation behind the hearse. He was waked that night in Grangemockler Church. We occupied the Parochial Hall and kept a guard of two members of the Company on the coffin all night, each two doing two hours' duty. After his burial next day, a firing party of four fired three volleys over the grave. The firing party were the late Denis Sadlier, Jack Brett, Jimmy Rahilly and myself. The rifles for the firing party were, I think, brought from the Mullinahone area. At no stage of the funeral arrangements did the British forces make any attempt to interfere.

During this same week, Ned Glendon and myself went to the Brigade Headquarters at Rosegreen to collect the replacement revolver and the two rifles which I had been promised. We went in a motor car which Ned hired in Mullinahone. We had to pay out of the arms fund for the two rifles. On our way back with the two rifles and the revolver, we ran into a large party of R.I.C., Black and Tans and British soldiers who were halted on the road between Rosegreen and Clonmel, at a place called Barna. The rifles were under the back seat of the car. I told the driver, a man named Edward Madden, to keep going but to go slowly. As we passed them, I put my head out the window and enquired if we could be of any assistance to them. They replied, "No", and allowed us to pass on. In Clonmel we met a man named Cahill from the Grangemockler district who invited us into Tobin's hotel for a drink.

Cahill was a Justice of the Peace, or a Magistrate as they were commonly called, but, on the quiet, he was very friendly to us. As a matter of fact, he, too, was on his way back from Rosegreen where he had driven Seán Hogan and Seán Hayes in his pony and trap. While having the drink in Tobin's, we noticed two R.I.C. men outside, standing near the car. The rifles were, of course, still underneath the back seat. We could only assume that these policemen had seen Cahill entering Tobin's and, thinking the car was his, they were keeping an eye on it for him. After a short time, we left Tobin's, parted with Cahill and drove back to Grangemockler.

With these two rifles, Ned Glendon and myself, or Pierce Tobin and myself, were able to do a bit of sniping. On fine nights, we generally went to the hill overlooking Glenbower R.I.C. barracks and, over a space of an hour or so, we would fire a few shots at the barracks. This generally drew a volume of fire from the garrison and they usually sent up Verey lights or flares. On two occasions, from Laurence's Hill, near Nine-Mile-House, we managed to snipe convoys of British forces passing along the Kilkenny-Clonmel road.

Immediately after Christmas of 1920, Denis Leacy and his Column came to the Grangemockler district. Although I knew a lot about him, this was the first time I had the pleasure of meeting him. He remained in the area for a few days, and the four of us, i.e., myself, my brother, Jimmy, Ned Glendon and Pierce Tobin, who had volunteered for full-time service the previous October, were then taken on the Column. Others who were on the Column with him when he came to Grangemockler were Con Moloney, Seán Fitzpatrick, Patrick (Pak) Dalton,

Paddy Ryan, Jim Kilmartin, Jim Doherty and Jack Quin.  
*John Joe O'Brien and Bill Flaher from ~~the~~ Kimerick were also with the Column.*  
 When I went away with the Column, Thomas Lawrence, a brother of the lady who is now my wife, succeeded me as the Company Captain.

From Grangemockler or, to be exact, from Breanormore, the Column moved off towards Glenbower where we stopped for a few minutes to fire a few shots at the barracks. Scouts, who were with us, came into contact with two R.I.C. men. The scouts fired a few shots at them, but the R.I.C. men made good their escape, getting away in the direction of Kilcash. We then went on to the village of Ballyneill where we had some refreshments. That night, we crossed the river Suir and billeted in Windgap in the County Waterford. Next evening, we went to Rath and billeted in Rath and Jonestown. Next day, we marched to Clonea. I remember it was spilling rain and we were drenched. As we visited each Company area, new recruits - two or three at the most - who, like ourselves, had volunteered earlier for active service, were taken on in the Column.

While we were in this area, i.e., Clonea and Rath districts, the Column leader (Denis Lacy) took a party of men from the Column into Carrick-on-Suir one night to attack a patrol in the streets there, but, owing to the large number of civilians who were on the streets that night, the job had to be called off at the last minute. Those of us who were only a short time with the Column were not brought into Carrick-on-Suir that night. This was, I would say, due to a trait in Lacy's character. He never trusted or depended on anyone until he knew them thoroughly and was satisfied he could rely on them. The same thing applied whenever the Column rested in

billets. No matter how good the scouts, he always insisted on one or two members of the Column remaining on duty to keep in contact with the scouts.

We remained a few weeks in Co. Waterford and then came back to Grangemockler and billeted in Templemichael, then on to Killeady and Drangan before going to Rosegreen where we picked up three or four more members of the Column. During this time, we had no engagement or contact with British forces. We occupied ambush positions on a number of occasions, but the expected enemy forces did not arrive. I fear our Intelligence system was often poor.

About this time, Dan Breen procured a machine gun for the Column, and the Column leader then detailed six of us to form a machine gun section of the Column. The personnel of the machine gun section was as follows: Seán Kennedy, in charge of the section, Jerry Kiely, "Sparkie" Breen, Seán Downey, Tom Bellew and myself. The machine gun was a white elephant for the moment for, while it fired .303 ammunition, of which we had a fairly good supply, we had no plates for it, and without them it could not be used. Nobody knew exactly where the plates were, but the Column leader knew that they were somewhere in the Fethard area, so he sent Dick Mackey and myself from Donaskea to Fethard to seek out the plates. When we got to the Fethard area, Mackey and I parted, after arranging to meet next morning at Whelan's of Clampsbridge. As I approached Whelan's next morning, I saw a party of British cavalry not far from the house. Mackey was already there. A man of the house yoked a pony and trap without a minute's delay and we drove away. We had just got away from the house when we met the cavalry closing in on it. They allowed us to pass, but apparently they had seen me going

towards the house, for they proceeded to raid it. We drove to Drangan. I cannot now recall who we saw in Drangan, but we were directed to Dillon's of Payfield where we got the plates. On our way back, again in the pony and trap, we were warned by a woman whom we met on the road between Cloneen and Killusty not to go any further as British troops were carrying out a round-up a little further along the road. Taking the plates with us, Mackey and I walked across country until we reached the house where I now live, and then owned by Lawrence's, in Nine-Mile-House. Next day, a girl named Lena Tobin drove us to Killusty, and the following morning we were again back with the Column, meeting them at Knockbrack, near Rosegreen. During the few days we were away, we heard all kinds of rumours that the Column had been captured.

We continued to visit areas in the various Battalions of the Brigade and, although we often occupied ambush positions the enemy usually failed to turn up. Once, on the Coach road between Tipperary town and the Glen of Aherlow, we were preparing an ambush for a party of British troops returning from escorting provisions to a military post in the Glen. The escort of about twelve soldiers, travelling in a horse-drawn vehicle, returned before the Column had taken up its proper position. We exchanged fire with them for about half an hour before we withdrew. Either two or three British soldiers were killed in this exchange of fire. We suffered no casualties.

Occasionally when we were in the vicinity of Tipperary town, Ernie O'Malley, who had escaped some time previously from Kilmainham Jail, visited the Column. He usually had some suggestion to make as regards an attack on the British forces. One which I remember distinctly was

that a picked party from the Column should go into Tipperary town at night time and raid the Railway Hotel which British officers, Black and Tans and Auxiliaries were known to frequent. The idea was that, if we saw any of the enemy in the bar or the lounge-rooms of the hotel, we were to fire a few shots at them, or throw a grenade amongst them. Four of us - "Sparkie" Breen, Tom Lynch, Sean Downey and myself - were on our way into the town when I remarked to Sparkie that we had got no instructions what to do in the event of there being civilians in the hotel as well as members of the British forces. Sparkie replied that he did not care who was there - he was just going to carry out his orders. Before we reached the hotel, we received word that the job was off.

On a ~~Friday~~<sup>Sunday</sup> evening, we again went into Tipperary town in two's and three's. This time, our objective was to attack a patrol. We took up various positions in the streets but again the job was called off. Dan Breen was with us on this occasion, and I remember him being very excited as he tried to get in touch with the various units of the Column to get them out of the town as quickly as possible. I understand that what happened was that, after we went into the town, the Column leader learned that the British were aware of our presence and that they (the British) were making arrangements to deal with the situation.

Sometime about March of 1921, the Column leader sent three members of the Column, Martin Quinlan, Andy Kennedy and myself, to arrest a spy named Looby. Our instructions were that we would get him on the road between Golden and Thomastown (Co. Tipperary) when he was on his way home from Thomastown. We waited for him from about 8 p.m.

until 11 p.m. and had given up hope of getting him that night when he came along, singing and shouting. When we accosted him and told him we were members of the I.R.A. and that we were taking him to an unknown destination, the singing and shouting soon stopped and he became very despondent. We took him to Grantstown Castle (then unoccupied) where Denis Lacy, the Column leader, and Paddy (Pack) Ryan were waiting for us. Lacy then sent for Fr. Matt Ryan of Donaskea to attend to the spiritual needs of the prisoner.

Fr. Ryan remained alone with Looby for about an hour and a half. He then came out of the room and chatted with me for a while, after which he went back to Looby and stayed a further half-hour with him. After Fr. Ryan had departed, the five of us (Lacy, Ryan, Quinlan, Kennedy and myself) took Looby back towards the road where he had been arrested. On the way, Lacy and I decided we would say a Rosary for him before we executed him. This we did, but I can't say whether Looby joined in it with us, or not. On reaching the road, the five of us formed a firing party and shot him at the side of the road. We then fastened a label around his neck. On the label was written, "Executed by the I.R.A. Spies and Informers, beware!". It was then near daybreak. We left him where we shot him. Lacy and I then went on to the house of James Ryan at Donohill and stayed that day there.

I cannot say what offences Looby was guilty of, or who gave the instructions to Denis Lacy to have him executed. So far as I was concerned, I was only carrying out the orders I received from Lacy.

In April of 1921, the Column was billeted in the Castlegrace vicinity, and the Column leader (Denis Lacy)

received a report that a large convoy of British forces was due to pass along the Cloheen-Cappawhite road that day. The Column was immediately mobilised and Lacy took myself, Seán Downey, Jerry Kiely and Sparkie Breen on to the road to select a suitable ambush position. We were standing on the middle of the road near the junction of a bye road which leads on to the Cloheen-Castlegrace road, when suddenly a party of twelve or fifteen soldiers in a horse drawn vehicle appeared on the scene. We had no option but to open fire on them at once. The soldiers dismounted from the wagon and started to run back the way they had come. A few of them fired a shot or two in our direction. The whole thing only lasted a few minutes and only a few shots were fired, but one soldier was wounded as were the horses. We went up to the wounded soldier and relieved him of his rifle and bandolier. He appealed to us not to shoot him. We reassured him that he was all right and nothing would happen to him. We searched the wagon to see if there would be anything in it which might be of value to us. I believe we got some bandoliers of ammunition and a few rifles which had been left behind by the soldiers who ran away. Lacy then shot the horses dead.

It was now necessary to get as far away as possible from the scene of this incident and as quickly as possible before the British started the usual round-up. The Column leader fell in the Column and moved away down the bye road which I have already mentioned. The Column marched in two's, a man at each side of the road. Jim Kilmartin and I formed the rear guard, being the last two to move off. As Kilmartin and I were about to turn into the bye road - a minute later would have made all the difference - a man came along the main road in a motor



car. We called on him to halt for, immediately he saw us, he made an effort to turn the car. I shouted at him to stop at once or I would fire. He did so, and I then told Kilmartin to get in beside him and to make him drive the car along the bye road, through the marching Column, and to take him to the Column leader who was at the head of the Column. I had no idea in the world who he was. He was in civilian clothes, but soon we were to learn that he was District Inspector Potter of the R.I.C.

The car containing Kilmartin and Potter overtook the Column leader just as he reached the end of the bye road where it meets the Cloheen-Castlegrace road, and, almost at the same time, two British officers appeared on this latter road, right in front of the bye road. They had a large party of troops lined along the main road. Apparently, they must have seen the Column advancing down the bye road and they were lying in wait for us. I cannot say whether the officers fired at Lacy, or whether it was he who fired at them, but shots were exchanged and the officers took cover. Lacy shouted to the Column to take cover. Taking Potter with him and under cover of fire from the Column, he entered a field beside the bye road and walking Potter in front of him, he crossed this field, moving at the same time away from the main road and the line of British troops. In two's and three's, the Column followed him into this field and across it. While two or three would be crossing the field, those still on the bye road, and those who had already crossed the field, kept the British soldiers pinned down on the road with rifle fire. At one stage, a party of the British soldiers did try to get up on our flank but they came directly under our fire and they soon retreated back to the road.

It took anything from half to three-quarters of an hour for the whole Column to cross the field to the new position where Lacy again assembled the Column. We moved off in the direction of Castlegrace, re-crossing the bye road but keeping to the fields and taking advantage of every bit of available cover. We had nothing to eat from early morning but we dare not stop for refreshments at any of the farmers' houses we met on our route. Twice during the evening, we were warned by scouts of the approach of British troops. Towards nightfall, we did rest at a group of houses where we got a cup of tea, but we were resting for only about an hour when the alarm was again raised.

That night, we marched across the Knockmealdown mountains to Ballybeacon where we arrived after mid-day next day. We had been marching almost continuously for twenty-four hours, the only refreshment we had during that time being the cup of tea which I have just mentioned. District Inspector Potter walked all the way with us and, after arriving at Ballybeacon, he congratulated Denis Lacy on the fitness of the men and on the manner in which the Column had conducted itself in the engagement the previous day.

We rested in Ballybeacon for a few days. We were visited there by Father Dwan, C.C., Rathgormack. He generally visited the Column whenever we were near his parish, and occasionally he said Mass for us in some farmer's house where we could be present. He told us that he had been to Cloheen on the evening of our engagement with the British troops and that there had been at least nine soldiers killed and several wounded.

We had Potter with us for about ten days. He was kept prisoner in various places in the Rathgormack and Clonea areas. In addition to local Volunteers, he was always guarded by one or two members of the Column. One night, when being moved from one house to another, he made an attempt to escape but was quickly recaptured. The Brigade Staff offered to release him, provided the British authorities reprieved a Volunteer named Thomas Traynor who was then under sentence of death in Mountjoy Prison. The British executed Traynor, so, a few evenings later, Potter was executed by a firing party of the Column under the supervision of the Column leader. His execution took place at twilight in a secluded spot beside the Clodiagh river in the Clonea district. One member of the firing party accidentally wounded himself in the leg.

The months of May and June of 1921 were particularly fine and dry. This was all in favour of the British forces. Equipped as they were with lorries, armoured cars and field kitchens, the fine weather enabled them to keep their forces much longer in the field and to carry out more extensive round-ups. The Column at this time had a strength of sixty-four and it became increasingly difficult to feed and billet such a large number of men in anything like a compact area, not to mention the difficulty of avoiding the round-ups. I remember one night the alarm was raised after the Column had been in billets for only a few ~~hours~~ <sup>days</sup>. The Column leader seemed very worried on this night and, after the Column had fallen in, he came to me and told me that the information which he had received led him to believe that we were completely surrounded. He asked my advice as to what I thought was the best thing to do. I told him that I considered that he should decide on a

particular way to go, to stick to that way and that, if we did come in contact with the military, we could then decide the best way to fight our way out. He agreed with me, and we moved off in a direct line towards Mount Melleray Abbey in the Knockmealdown mountains. That night, we got outside the round-up and far up on the Knockmealdowns without seeing even one British soldier.

About the middle of June, 1921, it was decided to disband the Column and for the members to return and form small columns or active service units in their own battalion areas. Before the break-up took place, an incident happened which resulted in the tragic death of Denis Sadlier, then Commandant of the 5th Battalion and a member of the Column from its inception. It was on the day of Dan Breen's wedding, and Lacy was absent as he had gone to the wedding festivities. Sadlier and another member of the Column engaged in what we called "caffling", that is, pointing their guns at each other and passing remarks, such as, "I had you covered first", etc. Several times I told them to stop the "caffling", but they took no need of me. It was a practice which was strictly prohibited. Both men were great friends and the best of chums. Unaware that there was a bullet in the breach, Sadlier's friend pressed the trigger of his rifle and Sadlier fell back, dead, into my arms. I had just time to whisper an Act of Contrition in his ear. Jimmy Kilmartin, who was in charge during Lacy's absence, had the man responsible put under arrest and sent him, under escort, to the Brigade Headquarters at Rosegreen. Everyone knew that both men were great friends, so no action was taken against him, and he was allowed to rejoin the Column a few days later. We buried Denis Sadlier at two o'clock in the

morning in the cemetery at Grange, near Nine-Mile-House.

We had a spy, named Stone, a prisoner with us on the day of Denis Sadlier's death. Stone was later executed, labelled in the same way as Looby, and his body was left lying in the village of Clonee. I cannot give full details of his execution as I was not present at it.

The Column disbanded about the middle of June, 1921, and it was at Kilcash that we parted company. Dinny Lacy returned to the Brigade Headquarters. Pierce Tobin, Ned Glendon, my brothers, Jimmy and Ned, and myself returned to Grangemockler and were joined by five other ex members of the Column to form the 8th Battalion Active Service Unit. Before we parted at Kilcash, Dinny Lacy asked me to take charge of this unit, but I said I would prefer if he appointed Pierce Tobin, and he agreed.

During the few weeks remaining until the Truce, we visited some of the Company area but, except for another visit to Glenbower to snipe our old enemy, the R.I.C., in the barracks there, I cannot recall any incidents of note.

We were in Churchtown at the time of the Truce. The news of it was brought to us by Maurice McGrath (the Bogman) who was then the O/C of the Battalion. I had the A.S.U. on parade in a field, giving them some drill, when I saw him approach, so I called them to attention and saluted. When he told us that a Truce had been signed in Dublin and that hostilities had ceased, we thought at first he was joking and we could scarcely believe him. However, his news was welcome, for the previous twelve months had been trying ones. We did no more drill that day but went off to enjoy a good swim in the river, Suir.

The news of the Truce was first brought to Dinny Lacy by my wife, then Miss Lawrence. She conveyed it to him by a despatch which was given to her for him by Mrs. Lucy of Callan. Lacy was then staying with people named St. Johns of Tinlough, Nine-Mile-House.

SIGNED:

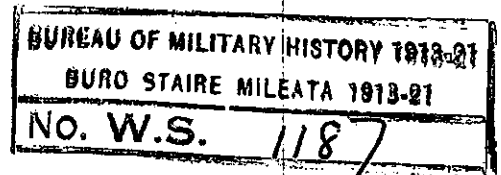
Patrick Butler

(Patrick Butler)

DATE:

14<sup>th</sup> June 1955

14th June 1955.



WITNESS:

Grace.

J. Grace.