ORIGINAL

ROINN COSANTA.

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STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

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Witness

Sean O'Neill,
"Ard na Greine",
Ballinamona Park,
Tuam,
Co. Galway.

Identity.

Adjutant, Tuam
Battalion, I.R.A.

Subject.

Irish Volunteers, Tuam, Co. Galway,
1913-1921.

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STATEMENT BY SEÁN O'NEILL,

Tuam, County Galway.

To the Director, Members of the Bureau and Advisory Committee, who must, of necessity, wade through these notes for something outstanding or worthwhile, I must offer my apologies. In the first place, I am unable to write in that lucid style which would tend to make your task easier. And secondly, because I have nothing spectacular or important to say which might make history a little more thrilling for those who compile, and a little more gripping or exciting for those who will have the pleasure (or the ordeal?) of reading the finished product.

You will bear with me then if I but merely recall and put on record some early and wayside impressions, and of little incidents which, to me as a boy, were of momentous importance.

My School Days.

I was born at Beaughroe, Tuam, on 22nd May, 1883, and went to a National School at Brownsgrove, Tuam, barefooted in summer and in stout brogues or clogs in winter - a distance of two miles with my Infant Primer in my satchel, a slice of bread and, perhaps, a sod of turf under my oxster. But I can well remember all as clearly as yesterday. I remember, too, the first thrill I got at school, at a later stage, when I read a chapter on the Battle of Benburb. It was, I believe, A. M. O'Sullivan's History of Ireland.

England could afford to be lenient and generous then. For nationalism was dead or dying in Ireland, and England felt there could never be any recovery. How then can we explain - (I mean - I) - and without any purposeful direction or promptings from the teacher -

why my blood warmed up when I read of the Battle of Benburb? All I know was: I loved my namesake Owen Roe and took pride in him and his glistening sword which he wielded on that occasion. This realisation I kept as a sort of secret in my heart as if it only concerned me and my nakesake Owen Roe.

My Father.

My father was a Fenian, a fluent gaelic speaker and singer - a man who always said the Rosary in Irish - there were twelve of us all told. We all answered the Rosary in Irish, the oldest having prior claim to say his (or her) decade in turn. The Creed, Litany, and the 'trimmings' would, I am convinced, put a severe strain on our great modern crusader, Rev. Father Peyton. From my father I heard the history of the "Hedge Schools" and how the English tried to wipe out our native tongue. The notches or nitches on the wooden tab which hung round the necks of the pupils was an indication and a record of the many violations the pupils were guilty of. For, whenever, unconsciously a pupil uttered a word in gaelic, he got the lash or a good flaking of the pointer - with a nitch thrown in for good measure.

I actually saw the old "Hedge School" - the ruins still remain - where my father got his early education, an old dilapidated, thatched house on the edge of a swamp known as the Turlough of Glan - close to the village from which I sprang and which was densely populated by the dispossessed Irish who were forced to live on this swampy ground. In this old house (school) which was barely a fit shelter for a donkey, with only a miniature "Bull's Eye" pane of glass to allow God's sunlight to penetrate and which was more like a dungeon than a school, Irish boys and girls got their early education. A piece of arán coirce (oaten cake) or a couple of

cold potatoes in their jackets for lunch, was not too conducive for assimilating the art of literature and learning. But the sweeter taste of a good raw swede turnip from, perhaps, a rich man's field made up for the deficiency of a four course lunch. The open door of the aforesaid "University" provided some means of ventilation, but the pupils must have eyes like a cat to read their lessons and to repeat their Á-agus í in order to master the gargantuan words of their famous "Spelling Book". In those days the pupils read aloud or spelled their long words in Gaelic.

The village schoolmaster, whose name I think was Marcus Cunningham, turned out some famous spellers, and the old Spelling Book of that period was as valued and as sacred as the Bible.

"McHale's Catechism", too, was highly prized by Irishmen and women of that period. My mother was presented with a copy when she was confirmed by that great man - "The Lion of the Fold".

"The Ceildhe".

In my boyhood days we had our social gatherings - a roadside dance, a Maypole or "Hurling" as they were then called. And when a shy maiden was collared and held until some eligible young man who was chased, was captured, there was great merriment and laughter. The girl was, of course, blushing and frightened to see what sort of a fellow was in store for her. After a few minutes and with a little gentle persuasion the partners danced to the delight of all on the dusty road. A "Ball" in a barn or country house, too, was a regular weekly feature especially in winter time. Each local village in turn would provide the use of a barn, or, better still, a dance in the kitchen where a blazing turf fire gave ample warmth and sent sparks up the chimney whilst Patcheen Míceál Ruadh and Maureen Kelly knocked sparks out of the flags as old blind Piper Reilly of Dunmore

played "The Blackbird" or "The Wind that shakes the Barley". Even though the beads of perspiration rolled down Piper Reilly's face, or Fiddler Kelly's, as the case may be, there was no respite but to play on. The cashier tapping on the tin plate and keeping time to the music encouraged the dancers and "challengers" so that the halfpennies rolled in with a challenging clink. And when a "double-fee" was paid, a penny was dropped with great pomp and ceremonial amid thundering applause, the dance became a regular marathon - an endurance test.

Our Native Songs.

It was at parties such as these I heard the first real Gaelic songs; songs of "Ned of the Hill", of '98, "Raftery", and the Fenians. Being a good dancer myself - even as a small boy - I was always invited and "took the floor" and held it for long periods, side-stepped and out-stepped my opponent until he was forced to retire. I may add here, 'Blind Reilly' was a left-handed piper, and whenever he squeezed the bags under his oxsters and began to play there was a pitiful wail or squeal like an old goat being strangled. Yet, despite all this, Reilly took second place in an All Ireland Competition in Dublin some years later. Blind Piper Delaney of Ballinasloe beat him. But then Reilly's pipes were too old. And so my old friend and colleague, Con Kennedy of Dunmore, who will figure later, presented Reilly with a new set of left-handed pipes.

My father was a sweet singer and when "Ned of the Hill" or "Raftery" was being sung, the older folk, I used to notice, would applaud loudly and utter a few words in Gaelic in praise of "Ned" (or "Raftery") as if he were an old colleague and friend. I can well appreciate now why they had a great gradh for "Ned".

Those who sang and those who applauded were of the Fenian generation.

The Fenians and the Grabber.

I knew a man named Burke - he was pointed out to me - a noted grabber who grabbed a farm nearby. He was carded with wool cards, tarred and put in a crude wooden coffin, but he recovered. Harsh treatment, perhaps! But when almost every house from Tuam to Dunmore was battered down and the people thrown out on the roadside - even on a snowy day or at midnight regardless of the howling wintry wind, can we blame them for "carding" Burke? Can we blame them when we see those lean-faced women and perhaps expectant mothers carrying their half-naked and half-starved toddlers to the shelter of a friendly ditch or nearby cave? No: nor can we blame those Fenians for discharging a volley of grape-shot into the body or sturdy thigns of some tyrannical landlord who was guilty of such violent evictions which led to the deaths of so many of our people both young and old!

The Land League.

The Land League, of which my father was a member, helped to deter some of those landlords from carrying out their evil designs. The "Blunderbuss" or the old "Muzzle-loader" was a true and trusted friend. The Cortoon Branch of the Land League was a very active Branch. Membership fee was one shilling and each member got a green card which, when occasion demanded, he displayed on the crown of his hat or pinned to the lapel of his coat. This local Branch was fortunate in having the services of a Fife and Drum Band and, whenever it played, the roll of the drum could be heard over three miles away. It was called "The Cortoon Band" and used to play mostly at the rallying point outside the little R.C. Church of Cortoon. I knew all the members of the band and of a Sunday we would follow them for miles in our bare feet.

Jim Godfry, a low-sized, delightfully fat man with a pleasant appearance, smooth jowel with a dimple, carried the drum; a feat which, to the mind of a small boy, was wonderful in view of the fact that the drum was almost as big as Jim himself. Neatly dressed in blue serge, Jim Godfry looked as solid as a gate-post - a miniature "Sam Weller". And when properly strapped to the big drum, with his Napoleonic profile, he looked somewhat like a military character. Since there were practically no guns of any consequence in those days the big drum "got the works". Godfry walloped it so hard that the noise became like perpetual thunder. Thus the volleying of the drum made good the deficiency in firearms.

In those early days the sight of an M.P. in our area was as rare as the presence of a swallow in mid-winter. But I saw Mr. Richard Hazleton, M.P., London. The local Land League branch invited, pressed or cajoled him and ultimately succeeded in bringing his along. And as Mr. Hazleton, the M.P. for North Galway, swung and swayed on an outside car to the meeting place at Cortoon, the Band played "The Wearing of the Green", and the people cheered madly as if a new Messiah had come. Mr. Hazleton addressed the meeting in Kenny's field opposite the Church. And as he spoke from a well-constructed platform bedecked with green banners and streamers, my interest was, by no means on the speaker, but on the Band, the cymbals and the thunder or rumbling noise of the drum which, at intervals, emphasised the importance of some remark or slogan uttered by the speaker. Mr. Hazleton was a tall, imposing figure, dressed in sombre black coat - somewhat like that worn by a Bishop, white boiled shirt, black cravat and tall silk hat. Even a small boy could realise that London's dress designers were of a different grade to the local tailors who made the freize "casógs" for the local Land Leaguers. If my memory serves me right I can but recall a word or two Mr. Hazleton uttered that day. A

reference to the "Ashbourne Act" or a repetition of the slogans "The Land for the people" to which the audience would loudly interject; "And the road for the bullock", "Down with the Grabber". During the interval created by Mr. Hazleton's speech a golden opportunity presented itself for the thirsty members of the Band - fife playing is a thirsty job - to head for the nearby thatched public house, Kenny's of Cortoon. And here, not only did they quench their thirst, but their slightly hoarse fifes as well. Each man, when he had gulped down three quarters or so of his tankard, poured a good dash of the "black stuff" down the gullet of his fife. Water was never used to wet their whistles, for they averred - whenever they gave a dash of stout to their fifes - that nothing was a good as porter. Indeed, I believe far sweeter music always issued from those wooden instruments after such a tonic operation. The majority of those who attended meetings of the Land League in those days could almost be classed as landless men, uneconomic land-holders who possessed a couple of acres of barren or swampy ground. In fact, we had nearly as many herds in our area as there were tenant farmers. The herds who were "loyal" enough to the big rancher or landlord - or what could be more properly called the Grabber element - were loyal simply because they had a few acres of "freedom" on the farm. This concession was the only payment they received for attending to and watering cattle, paring, healing and bandaging sheep's feet, dipping and keeping the Warble and maggot fly at bay. Of course, the herd had no rent or rates to pay and felt secure from the claws of the bailiff. But invariably they were very poor, the possessor of a miserable cow or calf which ran beside her. And while the glossy-skinned bullocks of the rancher still grew sleeker and fatter, the old herd's cow grew older and thinner, and any man with a keen eye could determine her age by the number of wrinkles on her horn.

Ballinlough fair was a noted centre for the sale of such animals and many a herd and poor farmer thought it wiser to take his old cow to Ballinlough fair and sell her for what her hide was worth alive than wait for the harsh March winds to send her to eternity, and then have the trouble to skin and burn her. Jokes aside, Ballinlough fair, on those days, was as widely known as Roscrea is today to the present generation - for the disposal and elimination of old and worn-out animals.

My Apprenticeship Years.

In 1908 or thereabouts, at the age of 14, I entered the business establishment of C.J. Kennedy. Mr. Kennedy was a wholesale and retail merchant who was the owner of two shops - one large business house in Dunmore, the other in Tuam. In addition to these he had a financial interest in two other business houses, Mullarkey's of Irishtown, County Mayo, and Mullarkey's of Garrafrauns, Dunmore. The Irishtown house had had close association with Michael Davitt. It was the headquarters for the Land League of Irishtown - if not the cradle itself of that movement. I worked principally in Tuam and Dunmore houses, and occasionally I gave a helping hand in Irishtown and Garrafrauns such as on the day of a sports, "flapper" meeting or football match.

The Battle of Gortnagraun.

In about 1910, a business house in Creggs, County Roscommon, was put up for sale by the Bank. Tom Glennon, "Scoobe", who was a Fenian, and two more businessmen of Dunmore, held a protest meeting in Creggs. Tom Glennon, Tom Walsh, D.C. and, I think, James Nestor were arrested as a result. Glennon did a term of three months; the others, I think, gave bail. T. Kilgarriff, I.R.B., held Glennon in high regard and informed me privately that Glennon was a Fenian.

During this period there was great agitation over a boycotted farm at Gortnagraun, Dunmore. Clashes between the R.I.C. and the people were not infrequent over this boycotted farm. Con Kennedy, my boss, and who was also a County Councillor, was a great champion of the people, and many a poor man's cow he helped to release from the hands of the bailiff, McNevin, when they were seized upon to redeem a debt. McNevin, a tall gaunt figure, the possessor of a hard steel-grey eye, carried a revolver in his pocket and was usually escorted by R.I.C. He had no soft spot in his "throbber" for the poor depressed woman whose cow was in the pound in the barrack yard. Nor had he any sympathy for the ragged, bare-footed, tear-faced children who clung to their mother's skirts, to see their <u>one</u> and <u>only cow</u> put up for auction! Scenes like this in those days were numerous in Dunmore, for the barren patches owned by the people on the hillsides of Shanballymore or Shanballybocht and Kilvine made such seizures inevitable.

But Con Kennedy always stepped into the breach, and many a poor man's cow was bought back again and sent home which act, on Con's part, brought a smile of hope and a ray of sunshine into that erstwhile depressed cabin. The children, after all, would not be deprived of a drop of milk while a high-spirited man like Con Kennedy was at hand!

But the agitation for the boycotted Gortnagraun farm continued. walls and fences were laid low. The Grabber's stock, Martin Kelly's, were driven off again and again. Things became so hot that Gortnagraun was verily in a state of siege. Night and day the people mobilised and a regular and protracted warfare continued between the R.I.C. and Emergency men on the one hand, and the people on the other.

Now the battle swung to the left and again to the right. A victory now for the R.I.C. when they put the stock back. A victory again for the people at the dead of night when they drove them out again. Night and day this farm had to be protected by the R.I.C. and 'Emergency Men', and a large number of those fierce-helmeted-big-black fellows, with baton, revolvers and carbines - always 'at the ready' were drafted in. But the people out-manoeuvred them for, when the R.I.C. were mustered to defend a danger point, the people would attack at another point of the defences and another breach was made in the walls. Public meetings, too, were a regular feature at Gortnagraun and hundreds flocked to hear their spokesman and champion Con Kennedy denounce the Grabber. Gradually the people were getting the upper hand. The police were forced to the point of exhaustion defending the farm and the Grabber's rights. And then a strange thing happened. 'Emergency men' under R.I.C. supervision erected a great iron wall of spikes 8 feet high to protect a weak point along the main road to retain the stock for the Grabber.

After addressing a meeting one night at the 'barricaded farm', as it was then called - and is today, Con Kennedy was arrested and sentenced to a term of imprisonment and lodged in Galway gaol. But he came out a victor and the people gave him a great reception. Torchlight processions and bonfires blazed on the hilltops to welcome him home. I may add that Con Kennedy, although not an ordinary newsagent, was the only local businessman who sold publicly in his shop "Irish Freedom", a paper then edited, I think, by Arthur Griffith.

Since the foregoing account was penned an old I.R.B. man named Andrew Murray of Dalgen, Miltown, tells me that he was present at one of those meetings, that he saw the Monivea Fife-and-Drum Band, which came a distance of ten miles, smashed by the R.I.C. The Drummer, Watson, was laid out like a corpse by a vicious blow of an R.I.C. man's

baton - and the instruments smashed to smithereens. He also informs me that 42 men from the Miltown area were arrested and handcuffed and taken on outside cars and lodged in Galway gaol. "There was no trial in those days" he said "but throw you in". There was no law in those days, and any man could be arrested at will, handcuffed and lodged in gaol as if he were a prowling wolf at large and a danger to the community.

Na Fíanna Éireann.

I am now sent on to Tuam business house. In 1910, or thereabouts, a young, sturdy, fair-haired boy, with genial and quiet determination, graced the roads of Ireland on a push bike. And so this kilted lad, with his saffron-flowing shawl over his shoulders, Tara brooch, green kilts, long stockings and shoes, arrived, and brought with him a ray of sunshine into our somewhat dull and drab town of that period. His name was Liam Mellows - a man who helped in no small way to change the course of history. When one looks back and visualises the scene, the colour and the beauty of such an attired lad on the stage - one wonders if it is possible that he is really dead! Indeed, as I write these notes, a strange feeling stirs up within me - to think that he is gone, that grim wee Cuchuilian who pedalled hill and dale, the high-roads and bye-roads organising an "English-Ireland", unaided and alone and without funds, but still confident and hopeful that one day Ireland would again re-assert herself and strike for liberty.

In Tuam, at least, a little of Liam's labours and toil bore fruit. But why he came here at all is a matter for conjecture. Perhaps there was an I.R.B. Circle in the background somewhere which attracted him to come to Tuam and that that was the principal reason of his visit? And perhaps the parable of the "seed of wheat" was not lost on Liam.

Here Liam made certain contacts; boys were recruited and a branch of Na Fíanna Éireann was formed. And as each boy was recruited he had to take a solemn pledge "Never to join England's armed forces, but to aim and work for the freedom of Ireland". These ideals were fostered in many ways. A talk or a lecture perhaps on ancient-heroic Ireland or of Finn and Ossian and the Fianna of old.

In a very short time all of us became familiar with the slogan or motto, "Truth on our lips, purity in our hearts and faith in our arms." The Irish Language and history had pride of place in our programme, and a practical and consistent effort always was made to support Irish-manufactured goods as, for instance, our complete Fianna outfit, tunic, knickers, boots, stockings and hats were of Irish manufacture. So also was our football outfit, including the ball itself. Funds were raised in many ways such as a concert or a lecture given by Liam Mellows on some Irish subject. And the kilted lad who knew so much at such an early age was a magnetic personality. The Town Hall, Tuam, was secured for social functions of this nature. But for a Fianna Hall or meeting place we managed to secure an old loft in High Street from an old Fenian named Simon Fahy. This old loft was, I think, given free of rent, but there were no windows, but wooden slats across a square opening in the walls here and there. It might pass as an old prison on account of the bars, but we were in clover. We were branching out and every Fianna boy became as busy as a bee in a hive putting the place into shape.

But one of our great problems was to get up into the loft at all from the outside. We used to climb up a rickety ladder to get in through a hole to reach the top floor. And as each boy reached the top he could crow "Excelsior". Our aim was even higher, and little obstacles like these were overcome.

"There goes the future soldiers of Ireland" said one serious-minded, prophetic sage, while another retorted, "And some of them not much bigger than a Knight on a chess-board". But we didn't mind; we had vision enough to know we were agrowing and getting stronger as the days and weeks sped by. And now, after careful consideration, we resolved that the best possible thing we could do was to start a football team. And when our team, which was known as "The Tuam Fianna team", was affiliated, recruits came pouring in. But no one was allowed to play on our team unless he was a member of the Fianna. Luck again was on our side, or, perhaps I should say, a Fenian link that never snapped or got rusty helped to weld the past and the present generation together.

An old Fenian named Malachy Concannon of Tierboy - a man who stored the Fenian guns - gave us free a rough piece of ground where we practised and played - sometimes as early as 6 a.m. before work, or again in the summer evenings until bed-time. And,as I mentioned "rough ground", a memory springs anew. One day as I went high for the ball I came down on a rut and badly sprained my ankle which,in a few moments,became like a baloon. My ankle was hardly better or back to normal when we had a jumping contest over a loose stone wall. I jumped over it and came down on a partly submerged rock on the other side. And so the other leg became as lifeless as a log and blackened up to the knee.

In rural Ireland in those days we had no "green flat lakes" or stadiums as we have today. Rough ground and still rougher play was the fashion. Malachy the Fenian had nothing better to offer than a patch of rough ground. The rich, broad acres were in the hands of others - the imperialist element. Our football togs were, I think, got from Whelan's of Dublin. So also were our Fianna badges. Our "All White" jerseys bore one significant emblem, which was artistically

woven into the jersey at the left breast or over the heart. Woven in coloured thread it represented the "Sunburst of Erin" - a golden sun rising over the green hill beyond. In other words, whenever we wore those jerseys we carried the green, white and gold - the future and present tricolour which now floats over the greater part of our partitioned land and which floats too, on occasions, in every free, great city in Europe and America.

Having practised so hard we were as muscular and as lively as mountain hares. We won every match or contest arranged under the G.A.A. rules up to the County Final. Some of the heftier teams we were pitted against believed we were an uncanny lot and somewhat dreaded the day when they would have to meet us on the football pitch. Although many of us were sometimes driven through the goal posts by a heftier opponent we had the happy knack of bounding off him like a football. We usually came down on all fours, resumed play, side-stepped and outplayed in passing the ball by hand and foot over their heads that they almost gave up in despair. A happy consolation for a team of youngsters to know that "Not by physical strength alone can a game be won".

The next big event we carried out was a field sports. We secured the Parkmore Race Course and ran off an excellent programme of events. The "Five Mile Championship of Connaught", a foot race, brought many entrants. And several crack cyclists took part in the mile and three-mile cycle races. The sports were thoroughly organised and, better still, our system of advertising struck a new note in the art of attracting a crowd. A Donkey Race too, caused a bit of a stir. Donkeys were numerous in those days for "here at the sports was the place to prove it". "Was Miceál Feeney right after all when arguing with Jack Keaney he asserted that he had the fastest ass within ten miles of Tuam!" Most decidedly Feeney's ass was speedy - speedier than Strahan's Spanish ass. I ought to know because I rode

Feeney's ass that day. He was speedier than Strahan's on the straight, but he had the devil of a kink in him. When all was going well, he'd dive to the right or left and hurl me right over his shoulders. I fell - I mean he tumbled me off three times in this way. His mouth was too strong and it would take 'Atlas' himself to keep him on the straight. However, I had some little compensation for this set-back in the foot race which was confined to the Fianna. I was third and won a pair of Winstanley boots. The winner, T. Nohilly, won a suit-length of Irish tweed and J. Moloney who was second a pair of football boots and a pair of running shoes. Certain members of the I.R.B., who were present on the side-line, roared encouragement at me by calling out my name and urged me on. Of course, I cannot say for certain whether my opponents - like my mount in the donkey race - "cut the corners", but the I.R.B. men averred they did, or I'd have won the race.

But one thing I do know that a number of Fianna boys who believed they were 'dead certs' and would win hands down got a bit of a jolt. Tom Flanagan of Galway in kilts was there - playing his Pipes as only a veteran I.R.B. man could play them and, I think, George Nicholls who was present also wore the kilts. Flanagan and Nicholls who were I.R.B. men gave us every support.

The final event which was a novel affair in those days was "An Old Age Pensioners' Race". An 8-stone bag of flour as first prize and two pounds of twist tobacco as second prize steeled the contestants to their task. All eyes now were centered on the Old Folk, and Larry Lardner, I.R.B. of Athenry, the handicapper, for the start. Off they go in a staggering trot, but one Old Age Pensioner whose mouth was watering for the two pounds of twist when he started off began to halt and stagger backwards. Every time he raised his right or left foot

some incomprehensible force seemed to sway him back again - away from the winning post! And so O'Grady - a Fenian - won the bag of flour and O'Shaughnessy the two pounds of 'Bendigo twist'.

Our very successful sports raised our prestige and brought in ample funds from which we purchased a Bell-tent, pitched camp in our Playing Field, and so hail, rain or snow held no terrors for us. We could always repair to the shelter of our tent when circumstances compelled us to do so. Some of our Fianna boys pitched their tent as far away as Mount Bellew, twelve miles away. The presence of our boys in areas such as this had a certain influence for good on the people generally.

Another incident which I must recall happened as we were proceeding to Dunmore to play a match against Cortoon junior football team. We engaged Corcoran's brake - a long-car which was drawn by two horses. Packed like sardines in a tin, about twenty or more of us covered the distance at about four miles an hour. The hills were always an obstacle and we crawled along at a snail's place. And then a steep fall when a horse would slip and fall back on his haunch did not improve matters either. But on the level we went at a nice jog or trot. Breakneck speed on the road in those days was no great factor in the life of men or nations. There were no motor cars or aeroplanes in those days. An outside car was a Rolls Royce de luxe to the would-be traveller. About a mile outside Tuam on our way to Dunmore, two R.I.C. men followed close behind the brake in which we travelled. An R.I.C. man named McDermott, or "Skin the Goat", as he was called on account of his lankiness, was one: McEntire was the name of the other R.I.C. (By the way McEntire was shot afterwards during the Tan War).

We, of the Fianna, naturally disliked the idea of these two R.I.C. men following us as if we were a band of criminals. Our anger was roused when they cycled close up - all beaming, and caught hold of the brake and were pulled along without having to peddle at all. This, I thought, was too good and I could not restrain myself. I pushed McDermott rather violently and forced him to release his hold on the brake and knock him over to the side of the road. For this act he reported me to my Manager; the licensed premises might suffer and he tried to get me sacked but failed.

By this time the R.I.C. began to take an interest in the Fianna Movement. McEntire, as far as I know, was an oily customer engaged on political or secret service work. I am not too certain whether or not I was a member of the I.R.B. when this incident occurred. It was customary for Liam Mellows during his stay in Tuam on periodic visits to swear in some of the more advanced pupils of the Fianna Movement. Liam Mellows was the man who swore me into the I.R.B. at a quiet meeting place on the Galway road outside Tuam in 1913. With my right hand raised I - and in the Name of God - repeated the words as uttered by him. And that Oath which I took on that night was, I felt, binding and permanent. I only hope I've tried or made an effort to live up to it. I may add in passing that Tuam Branch of Fianna Éireann attended the first Fianna Convention which was held at the Mansion House, Dublin. Under the leadership of Liam Langley about twenty of us went to Dublin. And when we reached the city and saw O'Connell's tower as we passed Glasnevin and the big buildings, it was an awe-inspiring sight - a strange big world of noise, and of trams knocking sparks out of a wire on top - the driver only having to turn the handle to the right and now and again to the left and it gliding along on tracks. The noise of carriages and milk drays and Guinness' hairy-legged horses clattering, clattering as they drew

their spacious floats here and there. A place where the whole world of people seemed to congregate! And here, too, we saw coloured men, and men from China and Japan; people crowded together like wasps in a hive. All seemingly and aimlessly going here and there at a brisk pace and with nothing at all to do. If they had, we thought, they would be in their working clothes. All this movement seemed strange and incomprehensible to me. My mind went blank. There was no room to think in this great city. At least that is how I felt about it. Perhaps our heads became dizzy from looking up at big buildings and bumping into people. But our guide insisted that we must see the monuments. And then we saw a great bulky man with a cloak on him on an edifice in Sackville Street who seemed to be sheltering under his cloak a number of smaller men who were looking up at him. And round about at a lower altitude sat a number of strong-armed women with big busts and great wings and wearing wreaths in their hair. There they sat - perhaps they sit there still. But not a murmur nor a word did they utter! And so we went our way after having been informed that that was"O'Connell, the Liberator". Burke and Father Matthew were here too. And yet another man with a cloak whose head had room for ample brains, the author of "The Deserted Village", Oliver Goldsmith. Parnell was impressive. His dignified demeanour and with his right hand extended seemed to greet us. The indivisability of the Nation so clearly marked by the coat-of-arms of the four provinces and the inscription: "Let no man cry halt to the onward march of a Nation" also impressed us. But the towering pinnacle of Nelson - the one-eyed English Admiral, was a challenge to all this, and we felt we could have blasted himcout of the centre of the city!

Countess Markievicz.

It was only when we reached the home of that beautiful and graceful lady, Countess Markievicz of Rathmines, that my mental equilibrium returned to normal. Here all of us from Tuam wefe

entertained and put up for the night. And as that vivacious lady conversed with us, and principally with our leader Liam Langley, we felt we were in a sort of paradise. We were mostly a raw lot of country boys who had not acquired the art of even an embryo conversationalist. But we felt at home with her and as happy as a clutch of chickens under the wing of mother hen. Indeed our happiness was reciprocated in her glowing countenance - a reflection of that inner feeling and happiness which is so difficult to describe, but which - to Madame, was the cause of pride and hope; the Ireland of a new era was fast approaching!

During the course of her conversation with us I can only recall one memorable remark, "I hope the day is not far distant when I shall see those Red Coats swept into the Liffey". Indeed, before we met the Countess we saw scores of those red-coated soldiers sitting on the Liffey wall or hanging over O'Connell Bridge, or swaggering around, cane in hand, at street corners in their gaudy dress of Saxon red. And as our Chief Scout - Madame - sat or knelt on the carpet encircled by members of Tuam Sluagh who had occupied all her heavily cushioned and plush seats, we noted the grandeur of the place, the beautiful oil-paintings, everything in keeping with the grandeur and beauty of the lady with whom we conversed. Her versatility and the music of her voice was something new and rare in a peasant land which was shorn or bereft of such God-given gifts. Little wonder then that we felt that a new torch was lit in our hearts or that a strange sword of light had penetrated our souls. For, despite the comfort and luxury with which she was endowed, the wealth and culture stored up in the mind of that lovely woman, was she not <u>one of ours</u> and was she not prepared, at a moment's notice, to sacrifice all in an effort to free Ireland! There were also a few more male guests - men who carried on a quiet conversation as they stood some little distance away.

But I clearly remember the face of James Connolly. He was pointed out to me by Liam Langley. But, beyond the fact that I knew the great man's name was James Connolly, I knew no more.

James Connolly.

Many years have elapsed since then. But I still feel proud of the fact that I saw James Connolly in reality in the home of Countess Markievicz. To me, at first sight, Connolly was a rather stout heavily-built man with an untrimmed black moustache. Today, I feel I have seen the greatest living Labour leader in Europe - if not the greatest figure in world history of that period! Connolly, the author of "Labour in Irish History" which laid down the true basis of - not merely political freedom - but the vital and more important principles which transend the former - the economic emancipation of a people. Connolly, the man who, even in his own lifetime, moulded a monument more durable than bronze or iron, and which will remain a testimony to him for all times.

Con Colbert and Sean Heuston.

During our stay in Dublin we visited Fianna Headquarters which, I think, was located somewhere in Suffolk Street. Here we met a rather small dark-haired boy,with the eye of a seasoned veteran, whose name was Con Colbert. To me Colbert was, what I might term, a keen, energetic sort of genius who meant business, business without frills, and that alone only for Ireland.

Seán Heuston we also met, and with his genial smile and generous lips he greeted us, and happiness radiated from his countenance when we entered the office. They were both in Fianna uniform. History has already related how these two boys died in 1916. Seán Heuston's mother, to whom I often paid a visit in after years, lived at Fontenoy Street, Dublin.

Howth and Military History.

We held a picnic on the Hill of Howth overlooking that beautiful bay. And the shimmering waters stretched below upon which seagulls were gently bobbing up and down or alighting as softly as snowflakes on a sea of liquid jewels uttering their own peculiar shrieks of delight as if to tell us peace and happiness ruled here supreme. Indeed it did. For here the heather and the bees and the roll of the surf, as it bathed the feet of the cliffs below, murmured a yea unison with them. Oh, what a beautiful vista overlooking Lambay! Oh, what a beautiful country we possess? For some, the foregoing little tribute will have no meaning. It is detached from Military History. But to me it is not. Has not all this loveliness stirred up desires - as it stirred up in the hearts of others, a desire to free her? Men do not fight for an evil, or die for an ugly thing. They cherish that which is beautiful - and desire to possess it - or her - Ireland.

Fianna Concert in Mansion House.

At night we attended a concert in the Mansion House. And here I saw for the first time a man smartly dressed in Volunteer uniform. For no other purpose, I presume, than to show himself or, more precisely, his uniform he stepped out smartly before the footlights and got a thunderous applause. His uniform was, I think, of dark green material made up in the fashion of an American or Canadian outfit. A pair of green puttees and Sam Browne belt completed his attire. The Volunteer Officer (or Private) was, I think, Pierce Beasley. I am open to contradiction, of course. But if Mr. Beasley is alive and says it was someone else I am satisfied.

Back again to Tuam where I worked with Gerald Feeney as Manager. Gerald was an I.R.B. man and son of a Fenian of Dalgan, Miltown, Tuam. An outstanding footballer who later went to work in Dublin and, I understand, took part in the Rising of 1916, a fact which does not

surprise me for he was brought up in the Fenian tradition. He played with the "McHales" G.A.A., Dunmore, and as a boy, later I think, with the "Tuam Krugers". But why or how Tuam changed the name of its football team to the "Tuam Stars" instead of sticking to the indomitable "Kruger" often puzzles me. And now, we of the Tuam Fianna - and with renewed vigour, tackled some more serious work such as miniature rifle practice. The click of the trigger and report of the gun attuned our ears to what yet might come - maybe a "Howth", a "Martini" or a Lee Enfield rifle.

But a knowledge of such weapons in the country then was as rare as a knowledge of the "Táin" was to the child learning the first letters of his alphabet. However, as time went on we heard an odd crack of a "Bulldog" revolver. Tom Kilgarriff (I.R.B.), Dunmore, and who was "Centre" of the I.R.B. had one. It was grand to see and feel and grip the handle. Pleasanter and more exciting still to hear the volley or noise such a small instrument could make. But then a "Bulldog" is a "Bulldog".

The Kerry and Louth Match 1913.

In 1913 I accompanied Tom Kilgarriff and others to Dublin. We went to Croke Park to see the famous Kerry and Louth match. I think it was a draw and although I favoured the Kerrymen I admired the men of the "wee county". The hefty Kerrymen on the field looked tougher and heftier still as they swayed up and down on their outside cars to and from Croke Park, cheered on by vociferous roaring "Up Kerry!" and which was responded to by an equally vociferous chorus "Come on the wee county!" To the eyes of a small boy like myself, Croke Park presented an animated picture. Here were thousands of people to see the match and supporters of Kerry and Louth wearing their favourite colours. All types and

shapes of hats, both tall and bowler, and caps with long peaks and fasteners unloosed, were gaily bedecked to suit the occasion. And since the wind-swept Kerry coast and its environment demanded the use of a good fitting cap with a long peak I'd say the Kerrymen were in the majority. And here, too, a quaintly-dressed "Mrs. Gamp" or Dicksonian character aroused a chorus of cheers and laughter. Here, too, along the Canal bank - like the road to Caphernaum were assembled the lame and the blind. All crying out for alms in the "Name of God and His Blessed Mother", and exposing their wounds and deformities, their bandages, crutches and props or wooden legs. And here, too, at the entrance gates and inside the park were the spick and span, neatly dressed and attractive Dublin street traders in their persil-white aprons plying their wares and crying out in the sweet nasal accent of Dublin city - "Sweet oranges, apples and bananas". And the Dublin barefooted lads or newsboys were here who, in their sing-song, high-pitched notes tendered their "Programmes! programmes of the Match, Programmes!"

And when they met a bunch of Kerry or Louth supporters, as the case may be, it was "Up Kerry!" or "Come on the wee County! Programme, Programmes of the Match!" All this excitement and babble of voices was a veritable wonderland to me - an unforgettable sight which has left its impression on my mind down through the years. After the match Tom Kilgarriff told me a great secret. The secret was that a meeting of the I.R.B. executive was to be held in Croke Park immediately after the match. And strange enough that a man with a strange name, Eamon de Valera, was expected to attend. Kilgarriff said he was a "very clever man", but beyond that I know no more. Whether Mr. Eamon De Valera, the late Taoiseach, attended or was initiated on that occasion I do not know. We may have met Michael Staines, but I am not too certain. Kilgarriff knew all these fellows.

We also called and had lunch in Flaherty's of Abbey Street somewhere near the Quays. Flaherty was the proprietor I think and was, I believe, an I.R.B. man. I have a faint idea too we called to see a Máire Gleeson who had something to do with the catering business and to J.J. Walsh's next day. Walsh's was at the corner of Blessington Street where hurleys and all sorts of G.A.A. equipment were sold. We bought cigarettes and tobacco in a shop in North Frederick Street, but I do not recall the name of the proprietor. Perhaps the name was too sacred to be mentioned to me at all. It may have been Tom Clarke.

Dunmore I.R.B.

In 1914 (I am not certain of the date) late one night when our I.R.B. Circle met in a hollow in the centre of a field outside Dunmore we met a man of some importance - an incident which I will deal with later. Normally when we held a meeting of the I.R.B. we went in ones and twos to it by divers routes so as not to arouse the suspicion of the R.I.C. or anyone else for that matter. We usually met in a hollow in the centre of McWalter's field and posted a scout to scan the area round. The reason why a hollow in an open field was selected was to prevent surprise or more particularly eavesdropping on the part of the enemy. The explanation why a hollow was preferred was given in a few words by Tom Kilgarriff: "Walls have ears". On one occasion Kilgarriff was building houses in Tuam; he travelled to Dunmore with Mikey Farrell (I.R.B.), John Rowland, Dick Hanly and a man named Kennedy. On the return journey one evening as it was growing dark - there were six passengers, including the driver McGough, who sat on the dicky on top. There were two I.R.B. men on one side of the car, Kilgarriff and Farrell, and the two non-members on the opposite side and a man at the back with his legs dangling without any support. As they

reached the "twenty minutes hill" at Flaherty's half way between Tuam and Dunmore, Kilgarriff had a hunch to play a hoax on his fellow-passengers. Across the well of the car he uttered to Rowland, "John, what is that fellow running along inside the wall for?" "Where?" asked John. "Can't you see him? Do you see him peeping out again?" Kilgarriff was so serious and intense in pressing his hoax to a climax that four of his fellow-travellers did actually see a head peeping out here and there. And so coping stones became human skulls peeping out. The time now was ripe for action and Kilgarriff whipped out his "bulldog" and let a volley go while he shouted at the same time, "Duck lads, duck!" They all ducked and yet another volley over their heads was let off by Kilgarriff. His pals but one were pale with fear and trembling at the knees. When they were out of the ambush zone Kilgarriff drew a long breath and said, "I never injured a man in my life", as if he were ready to weep: "Did you John?" "Me, Tommy" uttered John: "never in my born life, Tommy!" When the car arrived in Tuam two of the passengers reported the matter at the R.I.C. barracks. Next day all the passengers were interviewed and a lengthy and monotonous investigation took place. Note books were filled by those great guardians of the peace, the D.I. and local R.I.C. And when the local Sergeant asked Kilgarriff had he any enemies or did he suspect or know of any person who might have committed the outrage, Kilgarriff, like a good actor on the stage with tears in his eyes answered in a baby voice, "No, not a soul in the world! I never injured a man in my life". I heard it said, and I can well believe it, Kilgarriff carried an onion in his pocket to extract the tears and confound the R.I.C.

The outside car was thoroughly examined for bullet marks; so also was the horse and harness. Many fruitful journeys to and from the scene of the "outrage" were made by the R.I.C. before they finally gave

up in despair. When I discussed the matter later with Kilgarriff, he said, "Nothing like keeping them busy, it will knock some of the fat off them".

News that Ireland would strike.

In a previous note on Dunmore I.R.B. I referred to an important stranger we met on the outskirts of Dunmore at about 10.30 p.m. after the business of our meeting had ended. His name was Seán MacDermott; a man with friendly eyes who carried a walking stick as he had a limp. As we were not quite eligible or sufficiently grounded in the deeper things that mattered, Tom Kilgarriff carried on a friendly conversation with him. Some little while later he told us that the visitor was Seán MacDermott from Dublin and that something great was going to happen or come off. From these remarks we gathered that Ireland was going to strike a blow and we were elated and happy. We were stronger after all than we really believed, or else why should Seán give such hopeful news and assurance. Seán was, I think, arrested in Tuam a couple of days later, but was released again. Beyond these few facts I am unable to record anything else except that P.J. Murray, a native of Dunmore and who was then in Dublin, used to call from time to time. History has always recorded how Seán MacDermott - one of the signatories of the Proclamation of 1916 - was executed by the British. May his soul and the souls of all the other great men who died with him rest in Peace.

An Illuminated Address.

And now in a lighter strain I will record an amusing incident and affront to British powers in Ireland. It happened in Dunmore, in our drab, unlighted, sleepy little backward town. To all appearances Dunmore was as peaceful as a corpse in Kilclooney graveyard. And Kilclooney is the quietest at night and the darkest too, owing to the woods, and the loneliest spot I know of. And whenever I passed

there at night, as it sometimes so happened, and conscious of the fact that an uncle or an aunt of my own was buried there, a cold shiver would run down my spine and my face would become as pimply as the dead carcase of a badly fed goose. But when I'd get out into the open again, away from the cover of the trees, I could breathe more freely and come back to normal again. But I did not tell that to anybody nor did those "other brave lads" who passed there tell me either of any of their own experiences. But Dunmore, to those who knew the other side of life, and to those who thought they knew everything, was not quite so peaceful after all as it appeared to be. In 1913, I should think, a D.I. named Fitzgerald was about to be transferred to another area. D.I. Fitzgerald of the R.I.C. was a big man with a ruddy face - a heavy headed fat man greying at the temples. He wore a thick bushy moustache which curled downwards and inwards towards the lips. And one could visualise how, whenever he dipped his moustache into a creamy pint, he curled his tongue round it and sucked in the foam which adhered to it so as not to waste a drop. He could swallow a ball of malt with the best whenever he got it for nothing - and that was often enough God knows. But then he was always genial and kind to those who wined, salaamed and saluted his highness. And for these petty concessions, a nod or word of recognition from the 'big man', the shoneen and shopkeeper element decided to raise a fund to present the D.I. with an 'Illuminated Address' on the occasion of his departure from Dunmore. All went well with the project and large sums were subscribed. And so the 'Illuminated Address' was prepared and set in a gilded frame 5 feet high by 2½ feet wide, and covered with glass to keep the flies off and the dust away.

The window of McDonnell's big shop, the biggest in town, was cleared for the exposition of this wonderful proof of loyalty and

affection for this great limb of the law. The 'Address' was placed in the window for all the world to see and to read the gargantuan words and flowery phrases of praise it contained. And so the architects had good reason to be as proud as peacocks - in fact they vied with each other like relatives over the estate of a wealthy namesake who died intestate, as to which of them could claim the major credit for this good deed! For a night and for a day - like the masterpiece of Leonarda de Vinci - it stood the test of the expert's eye and plebeian alike and attracted a goodly crowd. It might have stood the test a little longer, but the 'I.R.B. Circle' decided otherwise. Immediately the 'Address' appeared in the shop window our experts got to work. They scrutinised, reconnoitred and examined down to the minutest detail all doors leading to the shop from the back or from the great archway to the front shop window. Kilgarriff, who was an expert building contractor, a man who was equipped with all the necessary tools and who could outstrip and outwit a professional burglar in the act of house-breaking, was the man on the spot. John Doorly, another carpenter who used to deal in McDonnell's big shop and who was as "honest as the sun", had free access everywhere in examining locks and external layout of the premises, played his part. John was also an I.R.B. man. Michael Royanane, William McGill, Reilly, Togher, Molloy and myself, all played their parts as scouts or helped in case the R.I.C. would take us by surprise. And so the 'Address' was taken and never to be presented or seen again by the D.I. It was taken in a cart by Michael Nestor, I.R.B., to the village of Mark, Kilgarriff's native village outside Dunmore where it was buried. And now since the 'Address' was gone, there was gloom and desolation in the town,and wailing and gnashing of teeth. The D.I. who, on the day before as he poured down his ball of malt, averred that Ireland was the best of

all possible worlds, and that Dunmore was Ireland, had a mournful tale to tell the Castle and his friends. Indeed one must, in order to get a true picture of this incident, read the song composed by that inimitable poet and writer Brian O'Higgins and which appeared in "Irish Freedom" of the period. I will quote a line or two of Brian O'Higgins. (Air "Sean O'Farrell"):

"O Peeler dear and did you hear the tidings from the West
'Tis a land of rank disloyalty
Rebellion and unrest,
Where they curse the King and all his friends
And drill upon the sly
And never raise a caubeen to their own dear D.I.

Some time ago the publicans and gentry of the town
Who love the Constitution and are loyal to the Crown
Put their wooden heads together
And resolved before they'd die
To make a presentation to their own D.I."

Copies of this issue of "Irish Freedom" were snapped up on account of Brian's poem and sold with gusto and a hearty laugh by Con Kennedy of Dunmore.

No one was arrested after this incident nor was there any suspicion laid on the shoulders of any of our I.R.B. men. And so the test applied before a man was sworn in proved that none of our ancestors were traitors, bailiffs or agents of the Crown. That we would keep our mouths shut and live up to the high expectations of those who initiated us into the I.R.B. was a pleasing thought.

How Carson helped the Movement.

And now that notorious rebel Carson plays his part and so helps the Movement. Threats and counter threats and "Not an inch" and "We'll kick Churchill into the Boyne" should he stand in their path had an electrifying effect on the South and Men of the West generally. Volunteer Companies sprang up overnight. Men trained and drilled and equipped themselves with the crudest paraphernalia of war.(Indeed I remember converting a 1-lb. powder tin into a water bottle by making a pocket of khaki material for it).

Old cast-off haversacks and web bandoliers - formerly used by the British Army were secured and worn over civilian attire. Belts and straps - which were as varied as the faces of those who wore them - were donned for daily and nightly parades. Time marches on. And then some genius thought of a wooden gun and carpenters got busy with their spoke-shaves moulding and shaping pieces of timber to conform somewhat in appearance to that of a Lee Enfield rifle. These wooden guns were undoubtedly useful, for then we were more like real soldiers. We could 'fall in', shuffle smoothly into position, 'Take up our dressing' and 'Stand at ease'. The 'slope', the 'order' and the rest were performed with clocklike precision, and individual Volunteers and Companies vied with each other in the soldier's art and challenged and argued as to who or which Company was the more efficient. The I.R.B. men were in the thick of all this in Dunmore, Tuam and elsewhere. But the attitude of John Redmond in offering Irishmen to England, to guard the shores of Ireland for England, caused widespread confusion and division all over the country. The pro-British element in Ireland and ex-British Army officers - cum Civil Servants, took advantage of all this and butted in here and there by offering their services to train and drill the Volunteers for (but they did not say so) the purpose of consolidating British power here in Ireland. We were on the eve of another great war - and soldiers from Ireland may now be more readily sought for the British Army. I may be wrong but I sometimes feel convinced that many of those ex-Captains and big Land Commission fellows who came to drill us were British agents in disguise.

In 1914 a great demonstration of Irish Volunteers from County Galway took place at Athenry in the Show Grounds. Every organised Company in the County mustered there in their strange military attire and armed with wooden guns. One could find a lad of 16 marching behind his boss who was 50, this being my own personal experience as I marched with the Dunmore Company beside Con Kennedy, my employer.

We were reviewed by Colonel Maurice Moore who rode up and down through the ranks on a white horse. This was naturally a great honour to Colonel Maurice Moore. He was a good Irishman and we were glad we had a trained veteran like Moore behind us. Larry Lardner was there - a busy man in blue serge suit and a brand new sam browne belt, and a host of others who acted as stewards and marshals. Here, too, were the "doubtfuls" the pro-Redmondites and Hibernian element. We were, of course, all friends on the surface. But we, the I.R.B. Circle, wished to take control of the Volunteers in our own area, Dunmore. When the election of officers of our local Company took place, Tom Kilgarriff, Mick O'Neill and myself were nominated by the I.R.B. as officers of the Company. Kilgarriff and O'Neill, I think, were elected. But I was defeated by a few votes for the post 1st. or 2nd Lieutenant. A rather hot and agitated discussion took place at this meeting and this only helped to widen the gulf between those who held the Redmondite view and those who opposed it.

The great war of 1914-18 has just but started as I am due to leave Dunmore to take up a position as charge hand in the business premises of Mr. P. Kenny of Mountbellew. The fact that I had to leave Dunmore and my old and trusted friends brought a pang of sorrow to my heart and I sobbed like a child. I was going out into a new world where I would never again meet men like those of Dunmore. But before I left, Tom Kilgarriff commissioned me to act as I.R.B. "contact" for Mountbellew. He told me that James Heaverty was already "Centre" there but that I was at liberty to act on my own and to tap and test all likely recruits I came in contact with in Mountbellew. He gave me a copy of the I.R.B. Oath which he told me to guard carefully and to destroy when I had the words of the Oath off by heart. There was then an I.R.B. Circle in Mountbellew, as good as perhaps could be found anywhere else in Ireland,

but the local Centre was bereft of that steel which glistened in the heart of a man like Kilgarriff. And as far as he (Kilgarriff) was concerned I could sum up his opinion of the local Centre in Mountbellew even before I left Dunmore. Kilgarriff had his likes and dislikes as we all have sometimes. He had no time for a Centre who spent most of his time sitting by a blazing turf fire and telling stories of Caithlean Ní Houlihan, Brian Boru and the glories of the past. To Kilgarriff and - I may add with apologies - to me, all the glory was in the making - and Death or Glory was fast approaching. Seán McDermott's prophecy would be fulfilled. In Mountbellew area then we had James Heaverty "Centre", Michael Mullins, Jack Leahy, Paddy Mullins, John Higgins, Tim Healy and perhaps a few more all from the Moylough area which was about two miles from Mountbellew. But the Centre, Heaverty, did not know I also was a Centre red hot from rebel Dunmore. He knew, of course, I was a member of the I.R.B. We tolerated each other, however, but there was always that inexplicable aloofness which Tom Kilgarriff engendered as a result of his remarks to me about the man that I could never really take to him. The more he talked about "Caithlean" the less he impressed me. I found it rather boring then to have to listen or tolerate a lecture by this Solomon on the "Wisdom" or "folly" of doing this or that. I had my own private views and I kept them to myself.

However, I joined the local senior football team to which a number of I.R.B. were attached, and whenever we played a match I was always selected to mark some outstanding opponent such as a well-trained University player, or the like. I had courage enough to stick to my man like glue and would jump for the ball even higher than he could. This was due to my Fianna training. But it is not too easy to clear the ball when one is up against a knacky player.

However, whenever I succeeded in getting the ball in the air - even though I fell - I held on to it and frustrated my opponent. A hop or, perhaps, a 'free' in our favour always raised my prestige and I became a favourite for having outstripped the 'crack' footballer, and many a laugh was created. In Mountbellew I associated mostly with the younger lads such as shop assistants, went for long walks with them and talked about Ireland. I tried to imbue, by every means in my power, the spirit of independence. But the best way I found was to recall stuff like that of John Mitchell's Jail Journal or of A.M. O'Sullivan's History of Ireland, and about the confiscation, evictions, the coffin ships and the Emigrant ships and of '98, and the massacres of that period. And so my young friends began to see the light and their hearts beat a little faster. They were ready to avenge these cruel deeds perpetrated by England, and I found it easy to swear in a number of them into the I.R.B. and prepare for the future struggle. In Mountbellew, or I should say two miles away, Heaverty possessed an old Martini rifle; there was a Bulldog or two and, I think, a Miniature .22 revolver. We carried out a little rifle practice at Springlawn, Moylough and some miniature rifle practice. But the few rounds of rifle ammunition we possessed should, I thought, have been preserved for a better purpose. A good course of aiming drill, I suggested, would do as well rather than waste valuable .303 ammunition. I was well versed in the art of an alternative system of training by this time and I suggested the tripod and sandbag aiming drill system and moveable-disc, so as to conserve ammunition as it was scarce.

Discussion on how to take a correct aim became a topic as we walked along the road. Most of my colleagues were fully conversant with the principal of how to shoot straight. Nevertheless, I impressed upon them the rules of aiming as learned by myself and got them to repeat the formula, "Front sight in centre of V of back sight and in line with the shoulder, with the target resting like a full moon on the tip of the front sight."

We derived some amusement from the lesson.

As I have mentioned, the old "Martini" rifle of Heaverty's, which could only hold one bullet at a time when you pressed the lever down, was, I must say, effective enough. But the lucky man who owned it always treasured it as a sort of museum piece and very few of our members could lay their hands on it. It was always looked upon as a special concession to handle it at all. But I shall have something to say about this old "Martini' later in my story - how it was used, preserved and brought to light again.

The 1914-18 war was now in full swing and great excitement prevailed everywhere. Terrible tales of atrocities committed by the Germans were spread by certain British newspapers and by many of our Irish-British controlled newspapers as well. But the R.I.C. were special adepts in the art of propaganda in every town and village to blacken the Germans. They were Huns and savages and many were forced to believe they would be eaten alive when the Germans reached our shores. People, too, were warned systematically by the R.I.C. to be ready to evacuate their homes and move further inland. Indeed I believe some people along the coast were ordered to move inland in the direction of Athlone. And while all this was happening the Parliamentary Party at Westminster was helping to add fuel to the flames by propagating the suggestion that Ireland was about to be invaded, that Home Rule would be left in abeyance until the war was over and that Irishmen would guard the shores of Ireland. Arguments and divisions - pro and con - were the outcome in every town and village and hamlet throughout the country. And seldom a day was allowed to pass without a clash or an argument in the shop where I worked.

There was a strong Hibernian element in Mountbellew and most of its members were violently pro-Redmond - pro-British if you like.

The German Hun would have to be stopped. We must support John Redmond. "Do you want our country to be overrun by these monsters or agents of the Devil?" were some of the challenges thrown in my face. But one "Cock of the Walk", a tailor by trade and shop-keeper outstripped them all in this regard. Every time he called into the shop where I worked we had it out. "Damn it man",said another who believed he was the quintessence of logic, "do you want to down John Redmond like ye downed Parnell?" To which I replied, "You have two sons, haven't you? If you want to stop the Germans you'd be better employed in inducing them to join up rather than employing them giving turf free to Head Constable Cassidy to save them". Perhaps you will grasp the feeling at the time when I say: I know an I.R.B. man who chased a Britisher with a bacon knife out of the shop. The pro-Britisher ran a Post Office and two business houses and was young enough and big enough for the Grenadier Guards. But he didn't join up.

Sometime during this period John Redmond was billed to speak in Tuam. Nearly all the Hibernians of Mountbellew attended the meeting, so also did many of the local Volunteers and I.R.B. men, but not as an organised body in support. I managed to get a seat on an outside car and covered the distance, twelve miles, in the company of a few more Hibernians or Redmondite supporters. It was an unpleasant argumentative journey and an occasional blow at the man on the other side, across the well of the car, was paid back with dividends. And so we arrived in Tuam to find it packed with Volunteers in uniform wearing green hats and carrying wooden guns. Evidently the Redmondites were here in full strength. And when Redmond, in his black parliamentary attire, spoke from Guy's Hotel window, there was unbounded enthusiasm. I must admit I felt depressed when I witnessed the whole scene and in my enthusiasm or anger, if you like, I fired a question at Redmond.

Fortunately for myself (perhaps) I was pushed into Byrne's doorway by Willie Cannon and others who were I.R.B. men or I would likely be beaten up by these uniformed wooden-gunmen in my own home town. As time went on in Mountbellew some additional recruits for the I.R.B. from Ballinahuttna, Newbridge, and Caltra areas were sworn in. Most of our former members lived at Springlaw, Moylough, a distance of two miles from the town. Only three of us were living actually in the town, Larry Raftery, M. Leahy and myself. I tried to start a branch of the Fianna here but failed. In Tuam I found it different which prompts me to say that the environment had a good deal to do with my unsuccessful effort.

The Fenian tradition was not so strong here. Most of the shopkeepers and "men of substance", as they were wont to style themselves, were Hibernians and so we, the "men of straw", as they were in the habit of calling us, could make no headway. It was a town of the 'Big House' mentality. And the 'Big House', Sir Henry Grattan Bellew's, sent two sons to the Front - Officers in the Flying Corps - one of whom never came back. During the war British Officers occasionally paid a visit to Sir Henry. And it so happened that on the night of the Annual Show Dance in the Town Hall two of these officers and their ladies wore a fancy dress uniform with white soft belts of moleskin texture with fancy buckles. By the way, this Show Dance was run by loyalist elements, of course.

After the dance was inprogress for some time, the officers took off their belts and planted them in the cloakroom. I spotted them and with another I.R.B. man we took them. Next day a direct and indirect appeals were made to me to have them restored. But I did not accede to the most pressing and pathetic appeals or do anything about it. The officers had to go back without them. There were some who would and did class this little incident as an outrage. In many ways

I felt sorry for Sir Henry Grattan's household. The Bellews were gracious and generous in many ways and never refused us the use of their piano whenever we had a concert or play. But some of the townspeople were not too generous. And whenever we did meet with a refusal we had one back on them by going to Lady Grattan Bellew who always and promptly sent down on a float a far superior piano to theirs, and men to assist us. Indeed I often danced with the girls who were great horse-women. Never, to my knowledge, did they show the slightest hostility or dislike for us - even though they knew we were violently opposed to the army of Britain in which members of their family served. They never 'cocked their noses up', so to speak, when a footman or a servant approached them for a dance at some of our functions which they often attended. No matter who approached them for a dance, they sprang to the floor and were off in a gallop! Which reminds me I often found it difficult to keep the step myself whenever I danced with 'Miss Helena'. Having developed strong arms as a result of horse-jumping contests at shows everywhere, she would whip her partner here and there in long strides - even when 'The Blue Danube' demanded a more graceful style.

And so nothing more exciting other than that we held an occasional meeting of the "I.R.B. Circle" and attended Volunteer drill parades here in Mountbellew. However I may add that Michael Staines from Dublin paid us a visit one Sunday when there was a County Final played. I met him on the football grounds and I was requested by Heaverty, I think, to deposit his attache case in my room for safe-keeping. I was introduced to him, of course, but beyond this I know no more. He discussed matters with Mr. Heaverty, but I do not recollect that I or anyone else was informed anything as to the nature of his mission. Staines was, I knew, an I.R.B. organiser. I attended a few I.R.B. meetings in Tuam which were held in Farrell's Mill and met Tom Kilgarriff there and, I think, Larry Lardner, Barrett of Athenry, Tom Kenny of

Craughwell and others whose names I do not know. Only when the general mobilisation order of 1916 was issued did things get brisk. Paddy Mullins of Springlawn, Moylough, was the local mobiliser or courier who carried out the task of notifying all our local I.R.B. members. I think it was the evening or the Saturday before the Rising. Each man was told to be in readiness at a moment's notice - and to take his rations with him and whatever weapons were available.

Every man had his own means of procuring a single-barrel or double-barrel shot gun and a supply of Kynocks No. 1. or 11. cartridges. Many of our members from the country possessed their own domestic guns. But those of us who lived in Mountbellew or who worked in shops had free access to a number of guns. We could get all we needed at Noone's big hardware stores where they were stocked for sale, and at P. Kenny's where I worked. At P. Kenny's we sold a good "Johnston" and boxes of 25's of Kynock's cartridges with shot ranging from No. 1. to No. 8. I took two of those double-barrel guns, a good supply of Nos. 1 and 11. cartridges and some rations.

We met - it could be Sunday night - about 15 of us in the vicinity of Sir Henry Grattan Bellew's back gate or avenue leading from the main Tuam-Mountbellew road. Here we were informed by James Heaverty, who was evidently contacted before this (likely from Tuam), that the Rising was going to take place. Hence the previous mobilisation order, and that a further word from Tuam would come as to what we were to do.

We waited with intense excitement and expectation but no word came. Flushed still with expectation we waited until dawn the next day but no word came. Puzzled and wondering still and hoping that a messenger would arrive until Heaverty suggested that we slip back

quietly to our homes. I distinctly remember Heaverty saying he was going somewhere - or home to Springlawn. And although no official news came from Tuam a rumour was afloat that a countermanding order was issued calling off the Rising. We were still ready and still had donned our Sunday clothes and met again on Monday night. But on Tuesday, I think, we noticed that there was great activity on the part of the R.I.C. and that they were heading in the direction of Ballinasloe. I believe, although I did not know it then, that they were concentrating on Athenry. By this time through the medium of the R.I.C., or otherwise, everyone had the news - "They are out in Dublin!" A great Rising was taking place. Hundreds of British soldiers were killed. The Rebels were winning, and such rumours were afloat which raised our hopes and thrilled our hearts. And again still another rumour, "Dublin is in a blaze and levelled to the ground". And we watched and waited.

A small number of us again met on Tuesday evening and as we watched and waited or eat our meagre ration in the shadow of the wood our hopes began to wane and no word came from Tuam. Something had gone wrong. It would appear - and now it can be ascertained as a fact - that the Tuam I.R.B. had arranged to run a train from Tuam to Athenry to take their members as well as the Dunmore men to that centre or mobilisation point. We of Mountbellew could (but I do not know how things were arranged) board the train somewhere else along the road to Athenry. But as this is only a conjecture we felt that one man and one man only knew the position of when and where we were to go - and that man was James Heaverty. Unfortunately, however, the three men who cycled from Dunmore to Tuam and who were armed with revolvers were captured on the outskirts of Tuam by the R.I.C. They were Tom Kilgarriff, I.R.B. Centre, Michael Ronayne and Willie McGill.

All three were interned and are now dead. Sam Browne of Tuam, an engine driver and I.R.B. man, was to drive the I.R.B. troop train. But we of Mountbellew, who were disbanded by Heaverty, did so with a heavy heart and an occasional tear drop. We were sad, not because we were ordered to disband but, because force of circumstances prevented us from being in the thick of it and to help our gallant comrades in Dublin. I knew the spirit of the times and, without any undue stress to paint anything but a true picture, I wept and felt a choking feeling in my heart which prevented me from speaking audibly. Many of us felt we'd rather face the bullets unarmed in trying to do something than to stand there helplessly while brave men were fighting and dying in Dublin. Many years afterwards Mr. Kenny told me that he made an application for compensation to a Dublin Government for these two guns but without success. He is now dead, and so the matter ends.

Of course, it must be remembered that in 1916 the system of communication was very poor. The Post Office system could not be used for obvious reasons and the bodies who ran them were loyal to Britain. The courier system was safer but slower and here, too, there were many dangers and obstacles to overcome before a messenger arrived safely in some distant town like Tuam. By the end of this memorable week came the news of the surrender and many hearts were sad. The newspapers again flashed the news in bold capitals, mostly in condemnation of the "appalling and dastardly outrage". To many the defeat of the Rebels brought a sigh of relief. Their petty bussinesses here and there had suffered and; above all they deplored, some in their innocence, the destruction of much valuable property. While others, even men in clerical garb, in their great charity called them anarchists, athiests and traitors.

It was painful to listen to all these slavish, unchristian and uncharitable remarks and, as in the case of Joan of Arc in former times, they were crying out for the blood of these "heretics" who dared to challenge the might of England. The "Bastiles" of Dublin were too good for them. They wanted their pound of flesh or, like the Jews who howled for the Blood of Christ, nothing else would satisfy but rich red blood.

But in a short space of a week or two when the newspapers published the photographs and history of those poets and dreamers, literary men, artists, authors and sculptors they, like Judas, were sorry at heart. And now what a glow of pride it brought to the hearts of those of us who were associated with the Movement to know of the noble qualities and genius possessed by those heroic men and women who led the Movement and made the Rising possible.

And then came the executions. And still more executions to appease the thirst of that execrable Empire England! What an appalling and unnecessary slaughter of men and boys in their teens - the cream of our own small nation, and which no other great power could equal if merit alone was to be the basic test for such a judgment. And then again in a little while a great surge of pity and of admiration seemed to sweep the country. The very men and women they condemned a short time ago were now becoming heroes. England's hypocrisy to some degree contributed to this great change. For was she (England) not the champion of small nationalities and the defender of little Catholic Belgium! Did she not, with her co-partner America, proffer to accept the principle of Self Determination as the basic rule of law for all nations, great and small alike.

And as the Irish people saw through the veil of British hypocrisy, the wolf in sheep's clothing, I am prompted to say that the Irish people after all - though often misled - were really sound of heart

and could distinguish the difference between fundamental principles and fraudulent platitudes! And so hourly, daily, England was put in the dock by the Irish people as a fraud and a hypocrite. The empire which, while holding a bible in one hand, as it advocated liberty for Belgium, kept a sword in the other to crush and slaughter Irishmen should they dare to vindicate those selfsame principles!

Deportations by this time and wholesale arrests had crammed the jails of England. A great change was now taking place and, as truly as a great calm often indicates the fury of an impending gale, this change foretold another upheaval, another challenge to England. The Volunteer Movement was not dead; it was only stunned momentarily. A system of reorganisation was again on foot and re-grouping took place. Sinn Féin clubs began to spring up everywhere and this political organisation was a wonderful asset. Gaelic League branches, too, were formed and,as if by magic, every national movement, including the G.A.A., seemed to vie with each other in grasping the tricolour and waving it wherever they went. The flag of 1916 was now being hoisted on derelict castles, could be seen floating proudly in the breeze at the top of telegraph poles, on Sinn Féin Halls or worn as miniatures on the lapels of coats at football matches, ceilis and other such national functions. Celluloid miniature portraits of the executed leaders followed and these were worn extensively. In fact, a Pearse, a Connolly, a McDermott and a Plunkett could be met anywhere and everywhere.

And then came a test of political strength as to whether the Parliamentary Party led by John Redmond did really speak for Ireland or the men who spoke through the rifle-barrel under the tricolour during that historic week of 1916.

A bye-election in Longford was pending and the result would be an indicator as to who would be our future spokesman. The Parliamentary

Party, confident that they would retain the seat and maintain their falling prestige both at home and 'on the floor of the House', were too cocksure of themselves. They rated their opponent, the Sinn Féin candidate, too low. After all, they thought, he was 'a man of straw' and of mushroon growth, an embryo orator who knew nothing of parliamentary procedure, decorum or etiquette. In fact - and I do them no wrong - they believed he had a colossal cheek to stand at all. So they said and so they thought. And, besides, their opponent was a fellow who was in jail. Little wonder that they giggled when they marked the contrast between a felon in 'broad arrows' and an impeccably dressed Member of the House of Commons. A big difference, too, indeed between a jail and a parliament. And so the election was now in full swing and at fever pitch where clashes and baton charges by the R.I.C., principally on Sinn Féiners, added fuel to the flames whenever rival meetings were held and oratory let loose.

But what Sinn Féin happened to lack in the way of oratory was doubly compensated for by the indelible poems of the men of '98, '48 and '67. And those songs and recitations spoke more directly to the hearts of the people than all the flowery oratory the best brains of the parliamentary spokesmen could muster. And so when the count was over the parliamentary nominee was under. The felon had topped the poll and was declared elected. And Ireland rejoiced and Sinn Féiners were happy to see those recruiting agents of Britain lick their wounds. We, too, in Mountbellew shared in that victory - even in a small way. Immediately the news came through I was determined to celebrate. I mustered a number of small boys and got them to collect sufficient turf and firewood for a good bonfire on the square. The boys made a great collection as the people were more sympathetic now - a great blazer was started on the night of the victory. In those days, I may add, shop assistants had to work as late as 9 or 9.30 p.m.

I waited for the stroke of 9, then headed for the bonfire, and as we wished to 'Tom-Tom' the news I told the boys to take out the big drum. When a youngster wielded the drum sticks and walloped the drum Sergeant Kilcoyne and three more constables of the R.I.C. with carbines on their shoulders advanced from the barracks towards us in a most aggressive mood. "Get away. Get away to hell out of that", ordered Kilcoyne. We failed to move. Flushed with anger at our refusal to move he caressed his carbine, then his baton. But we didn't move. He then advanced towards the drum and put his heavy boot through it and kicked it around the street. At this my blood boiled and I felt very angry and protested. "You shouldn't do that - you shouldn't do that". It was a fine new drum too. But my protest only afforded him an opportunity to attack me. He at once drew his baton and swiftly moved towards me followed by the other armed constables. I happened to skip one side or I'd get my head battered in. And so I had to move away. This was the Sergeant who a short time before threatened that he would hang us from lamp posts, riddle us with bullets or drag us out to the fields of Flanders. Indeed I am convinced that he meant it all and would gloat in carrying out his threat. Even this small incident I will never forget. It is as vivid today in my memory as it was on the night of the bonfire.

From now on the National Movement gathered momentum. Volunteer Companies and Battalions were getting into stride and Sinn Féin clubs sprang up overnight. Every Volunteer was a member of Sinn Féin and practically every male Sinn Féiner was a Volunteer. The Mountbellew Battalion of which I was Adjutant embraced Monlough, Moylough, Ballygar, Newbridge, Caltra, Skehona and I think Ballymoe, and it meant practically a wholetime job for certain members of the

Battalion staff. Volunteer parades, Battalion meetings and regular visits to Company areas had to be paid, which often entailed an arduous journey on a push bike. A constant stream of messages, both oral and otherwise and dispatches, had to be attended to, and to add to this Sinn Féin club meetings had to be called, a roll of members kept, membership cards issued, agenda prepared, functions to raise funds organised, Comhairle Ceanntair meetings to be attended at Ballinasloe twelve miles away. There was no time to save for rest or leisure. Nor did we desire it. We were so intensely wrapped up in the Movement that even at night we'd remain awake, plotting and planning and sometimes arguing with "an imaginary figure" - mostly an opponent, as to what line of thought, action or slogan we'd adopt which would help our cause and raise Ireland's prestige. Notwithstanding all this we, from time to time, attended Gaelic League classes in the Town Hall at night which were run by Seoirse Conneely, organised a splendid dramatic class which could hardly be equalled anywhere and staged "The West's Awake" two nights running in Mountbellew before a packed audience. About £60 was collected as a result of this venture and funds were available for the Volunteers. No one bought a cheap ticket. The people were prepared to help and bought the dearer ones. We also staged the same play in Ballinasloe and we gave a free night in aid of the Monks at the Monastery, Kilkarin, where over £40 was taken. Indeed we were received graciously and catered for sumptiously by them and their thanks and kindliness I shall not easily forget. The full regalia for this play and the big number of characters it involved filled two large hampers. The articles included 'Robert Emmet' &c., costumes of the period, Saxon redcoats in plenty, '98 period guns, blunderbusses, daggers and swords and frills and shiny to-boots with gold tassels. All arrived intact from P. J. Burke's of Frederick Street, Dublin,

and all for the sum of £7 carriage paid and with the right to use them for a fortnight. In addition to this we staged "Paid In His Own Coin", a play by Malachy Muldoon; "The Election of a Dispensary Doctor" and a couple of others of which I will have something to say later.

And now we are on the crest of the wave. Sinn Féin completely takes over the stage and militant pòlitical organisation to sweep out of power the mismamed "Constitutional Party". Sinn Féin was determined to draft an Irish Constitution and to ignore Westminster constitutionalists. Over forty well-organised Sinn Féin branches were affiliated in East Galway alone. Each branch had a large membership and was tuned up like a well-trained army.

Our East Gälway Comhairle Ceanntair which had Dr. Dignan - the late Bishop of Clonfert as chairman, Professor Tierney as Secretary, Professor Murphy of Ballinasloe, Father Malachy Brennan, Dr. Ada English, Father John Fahy, Father O'Loughlin and a host of others - including I.R.B. men and Volunteer Officers, was an impregnable force.

We were now ready for the coming political struggle at the polls. And having assigned and filled the various departments with the best and most efficient men in our ranks we were ready like greyhounds on the leash. A Director of Elections, and Sub-Director, Directors of Literature, Communications and Transport and Sub-Directors, all got to work and were faster and, I should think, more efficient than a well-trained Civil Service organisation. Dr. Dignan was a wonderful man; a man who tapped his pencil and allowed no time to be wasted on trivialities; a man of steel and vigour, and every representative present had to render an account of how his or her respective area stood. And be it said no branch shirked its task. Our branches and members were as trained and as eager as an All-Ireland team entering the playing pitch at Croke Park.

During this time, too, there were many clashes here and there between the R.I.C. and the people over the possession of a Tricolour. In Mountbellew the R.I.C. were refused permission to enter the football field during the course of the match. In other districts where they forced their way in the players refused to play while the R.I.C. were present. In Caltra R.I.C. men were forcibly pushed out of a Sinn Féin Hall during a concert. Pandemonium reigned for a considerable time as there was a large number of women and children present. I was at the concert and a collaborator in the disturbance - I mean I helped to push them out. But the R.I.C. returned with carbines and chased us upon to the stage where we helped to keep them at bay withbbroken legs of chairs and pieces of broken furniture. After some time the R.I.C. withdrew and the concert again resumed. During the concert I may add the Tricolour floated over the hall. I may add that an Irish teacher, a Mr. Curly, was a powerful influence for good and a great intellectual force in the Caltra area.

By this time Sinn Féin flags were being hoisted everywhere. Drapers did a good trade and Sinn Féin machinists were kept busy. If I remember rightly one was planted on a chimney on the gable of an R.I.C. barracks by a bootless climber. The R.I.C. were kept busy taking them down, and busier still when they had to carry crosscuts as well as their rifles to cut down an occasional stout high tree from which we cut the lower branches so that these burly men would be frustrated from climbing to pull down the Tricolour which floated proudly at the top.

At this period, too, there was another war of cattle driving and land agitation which added immensely to the already heavy burdens of that much hated force. Indeed the R.I.C. now were like corks in a turbulent sea.

When a cattle drive took place in the Newbridge area, the R.I.C. had to dash to the scene and scour the countryside to collect the cattle

and put them back again. And when the police returned the stock was driven out again, a game of hide-and-seek.

Being pretty well known as a Volunteer and Sinn Feiner, a number of these Newbridge folk who possessed an acre of bog used to come to me in the shop and say with almost tears in their eyes, "The devils put them back again". To which I would reply and with well-intentioned reciprocation, "Drive them out again". And in order to raise a laugh - God forgive me - I'd say, "And if there are any fat lambs, kill an odd one and eat him - and there will be always one less to put back". At this they'd raise their arms and laugh and give me their blessing for having incited them to commit a felony. Most decidedly my sympathies were with these poor hardworking people who always tried to meet their obligations and pay their 'shop bills' whenever they sold a pig or a yearling calf. Were they not the rightful owners, the children of those who were evicted by the tyrants of a former generation, the dispossessed sons of the Gael to whom John Mitchell in his wonderful story referred when he described the desolation which he himself witnessed in this very area of Newbridge.

And as I am dealing with Newbridge it may not be out of place to put on record a story of an incident which happened in the early days of the Land League. It would appear, to me at least, that the Irish people had a genius for waging war - even without guns! Only the other day as I discussed the past with an old colleague, Michael - well, we'll call him Michael Dee, as he does not wish me to mention his name for certain reasons. And the story-teller Michael Dee I have known for 40 years, so I can believe his anecdote and must record it. Let me quote Michael: "In the very early days of the Land League - long before the 'trouble' there was to be a big Land League meeting in Newbridge. The meeting was proclaimed by the R.I.C. County Inspector Rodgers of Ballinasloe and D.I. Morant of Mountbellew held a council meeting in

Mountbellew. Father O'Keeffe, who feared there would be bloodshed, and there would, tried to reason with them but he failed. O man, there would be hell to play and there was great excitement. A big force of R.I.C. were crowding into Ballinasloe and next day they were to advance on Newbridge to see the law was carried out. I was, as you know, working in Noone's Hardware shop when a number of customers from Newbridge called in and told me their sad story about the meeting being proclaimed. 'What will ye do' I asked, 'What can we do?' 'We don't know', they said, 'but I think we'll hold the meeting'. 'They'll come on bikes, wont they?' I said, 'and mostly from Ballinasloe. What about sprinkling the road here and there, outside Mountbellew in the shadow of the wood and the other roads leading to Newbridge'? I said 'Sprinkling the roads!" They didn't know what I meant. Sprinkling the roads with plenty of carpet tacks. Well, they jumped to the idea at once and I gave them all the boxes of tacks I had on the shelves and some of them were very strong. They gave a great dash of the tacks to the road from Ballinasloe and when the R.I.C. passed over them it was nothing but punctures. A lot of them had to walk like stragglers coming from a fair. A fellow whose bike wasn't punctured would cycle a bit and then sit down and wait for the others. The meeting, though proclaimed, was held at another place called Ballinlee near Newbridge.

And now Caltra took a hand in the Land agitation. Caltra was a hot-bed of Sinn Féin in those days and cattle-drivers here were of a warlike kind. Wattles of all kind and stout ash plants were not merely used to drive the cattle off the rancher's land, but on the R.I.C. as well. More and more R.I.C. were drafted in. And still another drive was successful. An up-and-down battle. But Caltra found a remedy to checkmate the R.I.C. from putting back the stock.

They discussed the matter with Father Malachy Brennan who was then C.C. of Caltra, who, more likely than not, suggested to them that when the R.I.C. were about to put back the stock to ring the chapel bell. And rung it was. Whenever a scout saw the R.I.C. had the stock collected on the road leading to the farm, he'd peddle at breakneck speed towards the church and pull the chain vigorously so that all the people of the neighbourhood would hear. And then the people of an area covering two square miles would down their spades and rakes, and slanes and wheelbarrows and dash from field and bog with sticks and pitchforks and hold up the cattle and the R.I.C. on the road. They invariably selected a strong point on the road where stout walls on either side would keep the cattle in position and the police at bay.

With the R.I.C. then on one side and with 50 or 60 big bullocks in between there was a regular jam. And as the R.I.C. tried to drive on the cattle the people blocked the way and walloped the cattle back. Pitchforks have an awful effect on strong cattle: they set the cattle mad, and the bullocks would lash their tails as if a swarm of wasps were among them, and move towards the police so that very often the R.I.C. had to jump back and retreat from the horns or hooves of those weighty beasts.

Battles like these were possible at any hour of the day. And here I will relate an amusing incident and a true one. Father Malachy is still alive. As a battle such as I have described was at its highest and the R.I.C. were being forced back step by step by the weight of the bullocks, an R.I.C. man was dispatched to see Father Brennan and to ask for his assistance. Father Brennan - though hated by the R.I.C. - was the only man who could call a truce. But as the Reverend Father was about to say Mass he couldn't possibly listen further to the R.I.C. man's mournful tale. He smiled graciously; he knew the people were getting the upper hand and to quote his own words - God bless him - will suffice -

"It was the longest Mass I ever said". Indeed, some members of the congregation thought he said two Masses.

And now as the General Election of 1918 was fast approaching, a meeting of the East Galway Sinn Féin Executive was held in Ballinaloe. Delegates from every branch in the constituency and well over a hundred delegates were present - not as individuals - but as men who represented thousands of people all over the constituency.

As secretary of Mountbellew branch and delegate to the Comhairle Ceanntair, I cycled the twelve miles to Ballinasloe in the company of another delegate from our branch, James Heaverty, a man who was itching to be nominated as a candidate. But prior to this I had discussed privately with some of my I.R.B. colleagues and Volunteers who were members of my branch, the question of who should be selected. We banked for Mellows. But the question always cropped up again and again as to who should be the candidate and was put as a sort of feeler to find out a little information for an interested individual who believed that he should be the man. I regret I have to touch a personal note, but subsequent events, which had an important bearing on national matters, compel me to do so. And so Mellows was the man and Mellows would be the man as far as I was concerned. In my private talks with the more reliable members of my Branch we all agreed that Liam Mellows had prior claim but we kept the secret to ourselves.

Mr. Heaverty and a few more of his friends were always quietly and slyingly suggesting "James". But when the matter was put to a vote of our members, and as a way out, we suggested that our two delegates be given a free hand to decide the matter at Ballinasloe Executive meeting, when, as we suggested, we would get a decent lead from men like Dr. Dignan and others.

On my way to Ballinasloe I was badgered by my co-delegate, Mr. Heaverty, as he ran off a list of likely nominees. But I kept my mouth shut. "Seán Forde", he said, was a likely candidate but he was only a Gaelic Leaguer, Alban O'Kelly was only an anti-partition Leaguer". Martin Finnerty, another likely candidate, "was only a Land Leaguer". And so there was nobody left but James. I noticed, too, that he never mentioned George Nicholls who was in jail. I felt tired of it all and then I blurted out "What about Liam Mellows?" "Ah", he replied, "Mellows is in America". True, Mellows was in America. I was only too well aware of that. Mellows was in America, an exile, an outlaw who would be in quicklime had the British captured him. And it was these very arguments which I put up to certain members of our branch that swung support from Mr. Heaverty. "If Mellows is the man" I contended, "it will be a challenge to England who exiled him and it will spread the name and fame of Ireland all over the United States if he is elected". And so, as Heaverty conjectured, Sean Forde, later District Justice Forde, Alban O'Kelly and Martin Finnerty were nominated. But the bombshell was too great when George Nicholls and Liam Mellows were added to the list.

And there the one and only mé fein aspirant had to sit and wait and wait in vain for someone to propose him. During the speeches which followed Sean Forde approached me and said "I know you are for Mellows, but should there be a vote or a danger that some undesirable would slip in, are you prepared to toss a coin as to whether Nicholls or Mellows should be the man?" "I am", I replied. A very fair suggestion from a man who was himself nominated as a candidate. Sean Forde then graciously withdrew in favour of better men. So did Alban O'Kelly. But Mr. Finnerty had a 'tender spot' somewhere, for he referred to "cliques and coteries" who tried to prevent him from being nominated that day. However, he withdrew and the air was purer

now. George Nicholls the Felon and Liam Mellows the exile were then the only candidates to choose from. And so these two names were submitted to headquarters for ratification and a direction from Sinn Féin Headquarters was sought. Headquarters replied and suggested that another convention be called to decide the question as to which of these two men we wanted as a final candidate.

At the next convention Liam Mellows won by two to one on a vote by ballot. Everybody was pleased at the result and we of Mountbellew were delighted that Liam would be the standard bearer.

And now the Redmondites and Hibernians of East Galway were at their wits ends to find a candidate. They called a convention at Ballinasloe but a Mr. James Cosgrave, 'the apple of their eye', refused to stand for the seat as I believe he felt it was a hopeless proposition. They were now in such a dilemma that any old thing at all would do as a candidate. But they all seemed to get cold feet. Nor could they produce a man with even sufficient courage to face the electorate. And so Liam Mellows was returned unopposed. This was a great victory for us, of course, but it did not surprise us in the least. Our opponents hadn't a dog's chance in East Galway. To my knowledge there was only one man who felt slightly disgruntled, my co-delegate Mr. Heaverty, and more particularly because he was not nominated by me. And for this he had his petty revenge at a later date and which I will deal with in due course. In case my motives may be misconstrued with regard to Mr. Heaverty I must give the reason why I did not nominate him at Ballinasloe. Tom Kilgarriff, my colleague and friend who was imprisoned in Frongoch, informed me six months earlier that he believed that James Heaverty signed a paper in jail before he was released and that he, Mr. Heaverty, secured his release before the general release of 1917.

But in addition to this news - be it true or false - I do know from practical experience that before the actual Rising was finally quelled Mr. Heaverty took out his spring cart gathering eggs - eggs which could not be railed or shipped at the time, and this was done for the purpose of showing himself to the R.I.C., that he was about his own business.

Friendliness, assumed or otherwise, with the R.I.C. during that period was not a way to ensure confidence. No one was deceived - not even the R.I.C. Indeed I am trying to be as lenient as I can in this case and I regret I have to record the unpalatable facts. If I failed to do so history, as I know it, would be but a fake.

Having secured the election of Liam Mellows without a contest we were now free to assist Dr. Brian Cusack the Sinn Féin candidate who stood for North Galway. Dr. Brian Cusack was still in jail, but he was opposed by a very able and popular candidate in the person of Tom Sloyan who was a noted Land Leaguer, shopkeeper and secretary of the "Old Age Pensioners' Committee". Mr. Sloyan's qualifications were good enough in many ways. He had a pull as a local and a pull as an Old Age Pensioners' friend. In fact, he was a very strong candidate.

On the morning of the poll our Company mobilised and headed on bicycles and sidecars armed with ashplants which were tied to our bikes or stored in the well of a jaunting car we arrived at the North East Galway border. We spread out and covered a number of polling booths. Our Tricolour flags were sufficient evidence that we were in full strength and would tolerate no interference. At Cooloo polling booth an old illiterate woman who we thought was well primed by us decided to enter and record her vote, but when she was inside she got confused. The presiding officer, who was a Sloyanite, helped to confound her still further. Her name and address he demanded like an R.I.C. man about to charge her with having committeed a felony. "There are two names on

this ballot, Cusack - Brian (in a low voice) and Sloyan, Thomas (in a more impressive tone). Which of these two are you going to vote for?" "Musha who'll I vote for but the man in jail" she replied. "But that wont do" he retorted, and badgered her until she got almost weak with fear. We peered in the door and shouted "Up Cusack!" "Oh", the old woman shouted, "that's the man, that's the man. I'll vote for Cusack the man in jail". And so ended our task for the day in North Galway. Cusack topped the poll - another victory for Galway and Ireland.

On our way back at about 9.30 p.m. we called into a business house in Moylough for some refreshments. And while most of our men were inside a small organised mob made an effort to snatch the Tricolour which floated on a pole on top of the sidecar. The ashplants were useful now and we chased them back into the yards from which they came. a few bottles and stones were thrown at us, but the incident ended there.

After the 1918 election I was arrested by Sergeant Kilcoyne and two more Constables. I was taken from behind the counter one busy market-day. I was handcuffed and marched to the R.I.C. barracks. After some time I was bundled into an old dark van and taken to Ballinasloe for a preliminary trial and charged with having "assaulted and obstructed a constable in discharge of his duty", Constable Kelly being the complainant, and all for preventing him from tearing down a poster which contained only the map of Ireland. When put in the Dock I refused to recognise the British Court or the right of any representative of the Crown to try me. There was a great silence. My voice seemed to rebound off those gray drab Courthouse walls. "Remanded in custody for seven days" uttered the Judge. The handcuffs were again clamped on with more vigour than before and I was taken at

full speed by an armed guard and lodged in Galway jail. But to the older generation the word 'jail' has only an ordinary meaning. Thousands of our people are only all too conversant with jail and jail life. Yet I feel in retrospect as a young man and novice, I would create a blank in my story if I fail to give my first and candid impressions of Galway, as a prisoner.

Galway ~~Carol~~ jail over the bridge beside the Corrib is encircled by a thick, high, ugly wall. It presents the appearance of an old circular fortress. And fortress it was down the ages to hold those who would dare to assert Ireland's right to freedom. Here, many a good Irishman spent his days in solitude or awaited the hangman's rope. And now I am at the main gate which opens like the jaws of a shark to receive its victim, then closes with a snap and rattle after having satisfied its voracious appetite in swallowing the body of a boy named O'Neill. Thence to the office where the R.I.C. man receives a receipt for my carcase where handcuffs are removed from off my weary wrists. The chief snuffles and eyes me very keenly. "Your name and address, your parents' names, age, occupation and the rest. "On to the weighing scale", and then the colour of your eyes and hair are noted and written in a book. "Blemishes?" Any blemishes. This is an all important question. A few warders who are good judges - like a jobber at a fair - examine the finer points of my frame to see whether I am the possessor of a hump, lump or a faulty shoulder-blade. "Any property to declare?" I hand them over the only property I had in my possession when I was arrested which included some small change, a Rosary beads and medal and two 3-inch nails. In the midst of this operation I lit a cigarette and began to settle down to a quiet smoke, when I heard a roar - I thought a lion had entered the office. "Where in the hell do you think you are - in a hotel or a what?" My cigarette was snatched from my mouth and trampled under foot. I had unconsciously committed a crime.

And so this is jail after all, I thought to myself. "Empty out your pockets, man!" And now as they had an inventory of everything, they label my precious goods. And so to my cell. The steel cell door closes with a clang and I'm held like a rat in a trap. I felt I could cry but I restrained myself. I committed no crime that I need be ashamed of, was my only consoling thought. But it was the vulgarity, the harshness, as compared with the respect and kindness which I was used to in Mountbellew that affected me most.

After a short time a warder returned with some bedding. The bedboard was already here, a low wooden affair like the large lid of a coffin. The mattress was here too and partly enclosed in the big coffin lid and rested lengthwise by the cell wall. The bedding, a couple of dirty-looking threadbare loose rugs and a short pillow-case to cover a stump which would pass for a cement block. A few hints as to how I should make my bed and as the door was again about to close with a bang the warder utters, "I'll bring your supper now". I began to scrutinise my cell and the furnishings. A small crude table containing a wooden salt-cellar, a slate and a napkin which I mistook for a tablecloth instead of a towel, and a big horn spoon - the biggest I had seen up to then. A miniature stool which, whenever I sat on it, humiliated me to the ground, it was so low; a small tin basin and an indoor lavatory in the form of a sweet can. My supper arrived. "Your supper" said the warder and with the air of a man who had laboured hard to provide it. A badly discoloured handless quart tin half-filled with the brew of shell cocoa. A junk of dry bread rested on top bedecked with a speck of margarine which, in proportion to the size of the junk of bread, figured like a tom-tit on top of a giant oak tree. No knives are allowed in prison so you must wield the horn shovel to spread your precious morsel-margarine.

The smell of the cocoa almost made me vomit. Supper! My supper was ordained for the swill-tub. And so to bed.

"Put all your clothes and personal belongings outside the door before you go to bed" ordered the warder. And as I was not too readily anxious to put my clothes - shirt and all - outside the door he grabbed them and threw me a big rough long nightshirt, slammed the door and switched off the gas from outside and left me groping in the dark. The black hole was too much for me and I rapped on the door and asked could I have a candle. "Arrah man" he roared, "do you think you're in the Shelbourne". There is a dead and lonely silence. Sleep fails to come and you think of home and of parents and friends. Happier scenes at a ceilidhe, a football match or a concert keep running through one's mind. And then the Movement. Your grit and determination returns. You resolve to fight it out with the foe - even as a helpless prisoner in that prison cell.

And now I am due for trial. The armed escort is waiting and so are the handcuffs. I am marched to the station linked with another R.I.C. man. They take no risks. I couldn't jump into the Corrib and take the other big fellow with me. If I did a posthumous verdict of wilful murder would be laid at my dead heels. Ballinasloe station at last and then through the town I'm paraded like a criminal until I reach the Courthouse to find myself in the Dock. Here they try to impress you with the importance and dignity of the Law. Here was a Court of Justice with a capital J. I again refused to recognise the British Court. The case has ended. "Three months with hard labour. But as this is the first offence I will bind him to keep the peace for twelve months and find two solvent securities etc. "Are you prepared to enter into a bond to keep the peace?" he queries. "No, never", I replied.

And so down the steps I go feeling happy that I had won the first encounter with the Law. And now I set up home in my prison cell. The only concession I was allowed was to wear my own clothes. Old lags

in jail are very sharp and tell at a glance whether you are a novice, a professional burglar or a cattle driver. John Cross, a prisoner in 'Broad arrows' whose job it was to sweep and dust the corridor, walks up to my cell door as lightly as a cat, looks in the peephole, "They have you, the devils, what are you in for?" he said in a loud whisper. "Oh", I replied, "just a bit of a tiff with a policeman during the election". "What are you in for?" "Stealing a cow", was the swift reply. But in order to justify his action he added, "I took too much of the Mountain Dew one night and I drove the cow". That ended it for me. I felt I had committed a crime against the Movement to have spoken to him at all. Our ideals were so high that verily we were living in the clouds. No Volunteer would ever dream of stealing a cow like John Cross from the County Clare. But time and circumstances sometimes make strange bed mates and I was forced to alter my opinion of John; in fact, I got to like him very much.

John was doing six months for stealing a cow. I was doing three months for a halfpenny poster containing the map of Ireland. John was eternally knocking down cobwebs or chasing spiders which weren't there at all. The feather-duster worker whenever a warder was at hand was one of the busiest in the jail. But when the warder's back was turned he'd dive like a swallow into my cell, plant a woodbine and a match behind the slate or under the wooden salt-cellar. This good deed usually happened while I was at 'exercise' in the stone yard. And then - after having tasted my first cigarette for days - I'd sniff here and there like a bloodhound on the trail until I'd find it. It is true that you can acquire a very keen sense of smell in jail. And should a prisoner by any chance possess a chew of tobacco in the heel of his shoe you could at once pick him out as a man of property.

Routine here is as regular as clockwork and when the prison bell rings at 6 a.m. it means 'Out of bed'. This, of course, is 'exercise".

There are no drones here. We are all at exercise. And having tidied up our living quarters each man stands 'to attention' at his door. And what a line of stubble-faced, battle-scared wrecks stood there. The man who killed his mother with a blow of a tongs, the Confidence Man, the thief and the morally depraved - their 'broad arrows' tending to conceal somewhat their individual characteristics. The order 'Fall in' is given and every man springs a pace forward and clicks his iron-clad heels on the hall flags. "Right turn, quick march" and away we go in sections under a number of warders and are assigned to our various tasks. The nature of my 'exercise' was ashes, ashes, cinders, coal and eternal ashes, from here, there and everywhere! Half choked and exhausted at times I felt that I would prefer if the final solemn words "Remember man thou art but dust" were uttered over my grave. For dust I was from top to toe..

And now to the coalyard for another hour's exercise. Here heavy barrows of coal were loaded and carried stretcherwise - a man in front between the shafts, an other behind between another pair. Thence to the cookhouse, a long journey, up this steps and that and straining under the load. I was not then fully developed; my arms became numb and lifeless, my grip gradually loosened and I'd drop the load. Another hour of this before breakfast was not too consoling either. I often wondered why the consignment of coal should have been deposited in such an outlandish place. But experience taught me it was all for exercise. I may add here that I had by this time demanded political treatment and I was compelled by force of circumstances to bide my time so as to get to know the place and more about it.

One morning as I was almost exhausted I stumbled with my load outside the Governor's house. "Damn it, man" shouted the warder, "don't leave it down here!" "Oh, to hell with the Governor" I uttered, and dropped my load, while the fellow in Broad Arrows in front, to save his

heels, jumped out of the way and cursed and damned me for trying to injure him. Was it any wonder then that my high moral standard was moving zerowise. John, the cowman, carried a feather duster while I carried the coal. Thoughts like these run through one's mind. And again, if I had stolen the cow it's more likely than not I'd be chasing imaginary spiders instead of John Cross.

At 8 a.m. the prison bell rings again. And what a relief, breakfast is ready. You don your white slippers and what a match, a 7 and a size 10. However, a strip from the old horse rug keeps the loose one in position and all is well. Prisoners are now standing at their cell doors like ravenous wolves to receive their rations. I sat down and surveyed my own. A small quantity of porridge in the depths of a black handless tin, a 'basin' of milk - the warder always called it a basin - a small tin bowl containing a naggin, shell-cocoa brew again with the usual adornment on top, the junk of bread and speck of margarine. I managed the porridge and drank the milk, but I could not stomach the oily looking cocoa. "It's good for you" encouraged the warder. It may be. But experience told me later it would be good physic for an ailing cow. And now we've peace until 10 a.m. The warders are gone to rashers and eggs - and maybe a sausage. I walk up and down my cell like a panther at bay, in my white slippers, take a pinch of salt from my wooden salt sellar, and read the inscriptions on the walls. "John or Patrick Somebody sentenced to two years hard labour this year of Our Lord 1901". At 10 a.m. we march like soldiers to the stone yard for exercise. Sledges, cross-cuts and hatchets are issued out and men take their exercise. A dangerous looking man in goggles with a 10-lb sledge while he knocks splinters out of a rock - as numerous as sparks from an electric drill - is at exercise. Cross-cuts that move as fast as a sugar-shaker is exercise, and an effort to split knotty timber, timber that is as tough

as an old puck-goat's horn is all exercise. As I split my logs in an alcove or open cell, big Jack Lynch, an old customer, throws me a few tough junks of timber and by way of encouragement says, "Arrah cheer up man, you'll never feel it". And with his twisted mouth so that the warder would not hear, "Have you a chew?" I often saw Jack before at fairs and markets singing on the streets. He had a voice like a foghorn and as he sang he held his hand under his lobe as a sort of amphlifier. But it was Jack's song and not really Jack that interested me. His one and only was about the taxes and it embraced everything from pins and needles to a ship's anchor and from a newly hatched chicken to a Christmas turkey, each verse ending up in those lines, "Arrah hunt them with their taxes, they'll tax us more and more, you never saw such taxes in ould Ireland before."

The bell again. "Dinner" Tools are dropped as if they were red coals. Dinner consisted, say on Monday, of watery soup made from the sinews of a cow which should have been sold ten years before at Ballinlough fair. A net of watery-eyed potatoes, a piece of bread and margarine. After a few days in prison one became expert in the art of economics. I peeled off carefully the membrane of my potatoe as I held it over my soup tin so that should the tiniest morsel happen to fall it would drop into my tin. The bread and margarine I also put in and then used my horn spoon, ate and drank the lot. But unlike Oliver Twist I couldn't have asked for more although my 'inner man' was crying out for it. We suppered at 5 again and after that each prisoner got his ration of ship's cable or a mat-making frame with a supply of cord called 'whipping' which was issued to some. Oakum picking from 5 to 8 p.m. was my first nightly task. The cable is thick and hard and stuck together like glue. Tar is a wonderful binder and picking is a tedious job and hard on the thumb nails. I did not pick much to be sure, so I was tried at mat making.

I was getting on fine until Governor Shewel called to inspect one wet day as we were confined to prison. "Morning O'Neill" was his salutation. Then he admired my work and said rather pleasantly, "Evidently you have been at mat-making before?" "No", I replied, "I've never been in jail before". I then caught the frame and partly made mat and hurled the lot out the door.

By this time I had found my way a little. John - the cobweb man - informed me that there were two more Sinn Féiners after arriving and through him I contacted them. The two men were from Moycullen and were charged for hoisting a Tricolour on the top of a telegraph pole. We three demanded again and again political status. The only answer we got always was, "You are free to leave any time you wish to do so. Find two solvent securities; in other words give bail. "Bail! No, never" was our reply. "Then write to the Lord Lieutenant". "Aye, and recognise one of England's principal tyrants in Ireland, no".

One morning at 10 a.m. in the stone yard when all tools were issued and we were in possession of dangerous implements we created a bit of a stir among the criminals. We refused to work. Even the criminals ceased work and stared at us and began to chuckle and wander about. The warders became pale with fear. Anything could happen now and a riot may break out. The warders became very friendly. "Why, John, why? Now lads let ye be sensible, just paddle about like reasonable men". "No", we replied, "we wont work". "Well, alright then, so. I must send for the Chief". And so the Chief came, but he was more confounded than the warders. "I'll have to send for the Governor". And so the Governor came, but the Governor didn't send for the Lord-Lieutenant. He came armed with a proclamation dealing with prison rules, insubordination etc., which the Chief read out with legal solemnity. "Whereas and wherefore" and a lot of such ramois.

After that we were marched back to our cells and this tended to bring us much closer together as now we could discuss matters much more effectively. As john Cross, the cobweb man carried oral messages, John even provided me with a scrap of pencil and this was an ideal gift. And any spare edge left in my Bible was torn out and my message pushed under the door to John who carried it to my pals at the other end of the corridor.

We had resolved to go on hunger strike and we acquainted a number of political prisoners in another wing of this decision, but they did not approve of it. And so we dropped the idea.

Solitary confinement was a hard life and not easily defined. A man may be strong physically but break down mentally. Lack of fresh air or freedom to expand beyond those narrow whitewashed walls becomes unbearable and you pray to God to leave you your senses.

But for the first few days and nights for me at any rate it was all hard thinking. Thinking and plotting and planning an escape. There is no place in the world like a jail for scheming thoughts of this nature. One begins to sweat out his thoughts and feel that he had something in common with the Bards of old who sweated out their lines in praise of their respective Kings or Chieftains. And here, too, are we like them sweating out our plans and desires to pay tribute to our Queen and in order to exalt her - Ireland. After about ten days we were taken out for a walk round the asphalt circle in a small yard. I found it difficult to walk straight or keep to the circle. I felt a bit heady and always inclined to go to the left. But in the cell - in one perpetual march up and down - it was different. The cell walls at least would prevent you from going too much to the left or right.

"And now lads" said the warder, "in God's name will ye be reasonable and not destroy your health. Ye ought to do an odd little job. We wont ask ye to do much. Ye wont be sent to the stone yard with that other bunch of quare fellows - an odd little job. And now will ye think it over. Maybe an odd barrow of ashes or coal or the like". The warder gave us a chance of having a quiet chat. And very quickly we decided. The coal yard was the ideal spot to hold up a warder and gag him. And besides there was a fine long ladder chained and locked in the open shed. We can gag him with a muffler and tie him up with the "whipping" which was supplied for mat-making. We'll get over that high wall in no time. But our plans went awry. We waited and waited for an order to the coal yard. Night after night we'd visualise what the headlines in the newspapers would be once we had smashed the padlock of that fine long ladder in the coal yard and got away. It would help the Cause too and encourage others to fight on. A failure, a great opportunity had dodged us. And so our day of release drew near. The big gates open at 7 a.m. and we feel we are in a strange world again.

After breakfast of rasher and eggs we called to see the barber. Indeed at a glance he knew who we were and uttered "After getting out?" The razor and the scissors were something new to us as we were not allowed to shave inside the prison.

Back again to Mountbellew where I received a rousing reception. I again resumed my activities as Adjutant of the Battalion and as Secretary of the Sinn Féin Club. I was first appointed to the position of Adjutant of the Battalion early in 1918. The Battalion Commandant was James Heaverty of Springlawn, Moylough. The Quartermaster was Patrick Mullins of Springlawn, Moylough, and I cannot remember who was the Vice-Commandant or whether there was any. It could possibly have been Patrick (Pakie) Ruane of Menlough.

One little incident which happened during my short period of imprisonment was the fact that when the annual general election of officers of the Sinn Féin branch took place I was nominated as Chairman of the Branch, but defeated by the outgoing Chairman James Heaverty by two votes. Martin Leahy, who was then acting as Secretary in my absence, rather regretfully wrote to me in jail to tell me of my defeat. The letter, of course, was read by the Governor before he passed it on to me. I was sorry, not because I was outvoted, but because I, as a felon, failed to secure the little honour, and more particularly that my gaolers knew it. And so Mr. Heaverty had his little victory and revenge for not being nominated by me as candidate for East Galway! This record of a trivial and local incident may appear as a petty personal affair. But it is not as trivial as it would appear on the surface. Bigger and more important issues followed from it which I will recall at a later stage.

Things now were going well in the Mountbellew Battalion area. Another additional Company of Volunteers sprang up in Ballygar. And so we had Nos. 1 and II. Companies in that busy little town. Andrew and Sean Lohan and Sean Hanley were a tower of strength here.

In Monlough Company area men like Pakie Ruane, Collins and others were very active. In Caltra the brothers Kilroy and Kilcummins were outstanding. In Newbridge Gavin and a number of others were very active. It would be futile to praise the officers of one particular Company lest I do an injury to another who, perhaps under more difficult circumstances, was equally as good.

1919 is now upon us. The Dáil Loan and all the work it entailed is in full swing. Organisers, canvassers and collectors are moving from house to house and funds roll in, not in silver, but in bundles of notes, daily. Official receipts are issued and accounts are kept.

More concerts and ceilidhe are run for the Volunteer Arms' fund. We all have a busy time. But notwithstanding the verdict of the 1918 election and the sweeping victories in every field of endeavour we had our opponents too in the person of an odd old P.P. here and there who thundered, threatened and condemned "Secret Societies". On a number of occasions as I saw listening to a serious and solemn condemnation of the organisation of which I was a member I felt that everyone in Mountbellew Church was pointing at me and saying, "There he is, that fellow with the long mop of hair who works in Kenny's!"

The grave warning to parents to guard, control and advise their sons not to have anything to do with such secret societies or persons in the garb of a lamb but who in reality were prowling wolves was almost too much for me and at times I felt like leaving the Church. But I held on and had to listen to a long catalogue of sins which I was guilty of. "Secret societies were sinful morally and socially and those who tried to promote them were agents of the Devil".

Very Rev. Canon Fallon, P.P., V.G., said what he had to say for the best of all possible reasons. But he merely took his cue from another very old man who had long since passed the age of reason, Most. Rev. Dr. Gilmartin, Archbishop of Tuam. His Grace thundered a good deal too, and at the most crucial and critical moments of the 'Days of the Terror' that followed. His pronouncements got into the newspapers, what was worse, and tended to weaken the morale of some of our supporters. A statement such as this, after the sack of Tuam by the R.I.C. and Tans gone mad, was not too consoling either. "I say, I say, my dear people" uttered His Grace, "the first man who will fire another shot in this parish of Tuam will come back an example to the parish".

Local papers are extensively read in rural Ireland. They are verily devoured. And a simple countryman reading an edict from such

an exalted personage must have come to strange conclusions. He had good reason to ask himself who is right and who is wrong. But with all due respect to His Grace and his memory I think I can say with assurance the frieze-coated countryman gave us the vote. Father Glynn, P.P., who later succeeded Canon Fallon followed in a similar strain. In Monlough too, we had a less important theologian in the person of an old P.P. named Father Burke.

Father Burke was a rather bulky, well-nourished man who mixed farming with his other sacred duties. He could buy and sell a bullock and seldom gave a wily farmer anything like the first price he asked. He knew no art of 'splitting the difference'. It is true - most decidedly true, he flailed his own oats in the barn, and flailed us far more vigorously from the pulpit. Every Sunday as regular as the clock he flailed those "Sinn Feiners" and "tin-pike soldiers who think they can beat England". Whenever a Monlough customer came into the shop where I worked they'd tell me "He was at it again on Sunday last and it was as good as a pantomime to hear him". I know some people who were not his parishioners at all but who, for the sport of it, used to go to hear Father Burke in order to get a close-up. His peculiar mode of speech and all-out attacks on those "Sinn Feiners" gave his congregation plenty of time for thought and amusement. As one Monlough man said to me, "Faith an' he's trying to serve two Masters as hard as he can every Sunday - God and John Bull".

A public demonstration too in those days was a great attraction and the centre of gaiety for all Sinn Feiners, Volunteers and supporters. A big number of us travelled to Ballinasloe to hear Darrell Figgis and Sean Milroy. The only opponents I could see were a hundred or so of the R.I.C. dour and gloomy-looking. Darrell spoke.

He was an excellent speaker and many of us felt that here indeed was a man fit to represent Ireland at the Peace Conference. Sean Milroy, with his slightly-greying hair and somewhat ruddy appearance and firm chin, had a voice as strong as a first class amphlifier. He gave us his best in great style. His wise-cracking and genius for creating a laugh could not be excelled, and he brought rounds and rounds of applause from his huge audience. In winding up, Sean put a question to the multitude, "Is there any man or woman in this audience who is opposed to the freedom of Ireland. If there is, now is the time to prove it. Hands up then, all those who are opposed to the freedom of Ireland?" Not a hand went up. "Splendid" said Seán, "not even the R.I.C. men over there"! Mrs. O'Sheehan then (and perhaps Jack) gave us an excellent concert, a novel idea in those days. She sang like a nightingale, "The Jackets Green", a song which I believe left a more lasting impression on the audience than any of the previous speeches by Milroy and Figgis.

In Mountbellew, not only had we sermons in condemnation from the pulpit, but a tough old opponent in mundane things, Canon Fallon, who was a very tall man and taller still when he wore his silk top-hat, who snuffed a good deal (I often dold it to him), a blend of "Princess Mixture" and ordinary brown - Very Rev. Canon Fallon, P.P., to give him his full religious title, was a "Big House man", an intimate friend of Sir Henry Grattan Bellew and with whom he dined from time to time, an incident which, God bless him, was no harm.

But I must be truthful and give the facts or else Military History to me, at any rate, would be a sort of French-blind to keep the light out! We, of the Volunteer members of Sinn Féin and Gaelic League, had occasion to make an application to the Trustees of the parochial hall of whom the Canon was chairman.

We needed the hall to stage "The West's Awake" for the local Volunteers. But we were refused the use of it! Not only were we all Catholics but we were members of the hall and the mainstay of that institution. Here we played and paid for our game of billiards and our annual subscription towards its upkeep. But refused we were. As a member of the deputation I asked the Canon what was his objection. He replied, "In view of the fact that the atmosphere is charged with political electricity you cannot have it". "But why" I persisted, "refuse your own parishioners for the use of the parish hall?" He got very angry, "We are all members of a Catholic community and the mainstay and support of the hall", I added. "You will not get it" he said even in an angrier tone. He then took a pinch of snuff to settle his nerves. But we fought it out and there was tit for tat. "Only last week" I continued "you gave it to a cheap travelling show from God knows where, the members of which didn't go to Church, chapel or meeting on the Sabbath and who produced the smuttiest stuff imaginable. But Your Reverence took no notice of that or protested. Yet you refuse us because we want to stage "The West's Awake". It ended here; but later he relented and we got the hall. Of course, we had made up our minds to take it over!

Rev. Father Glynn, P.P., who succeeded the Canon, as far as sermons went, followed in his footsteps. I am not anti-clerical but I do think that there was a time in Ireland when the R.I.C. had a very powerful ally in Ireland. British Law was a sacred thing to the majority of the clergy. The men of 1916 exploded that myth. A Rebellion, of course, could never become a revolution? But it did. And so the Devil's agents became glorified saints.

In 1919 (or much earlier) the whole of Galway county constituted what was termed the Galway Brigade. Seamus Murphy was Brigade O.C. Mr. Murphy, the late chairman of the Dublin Commissioners, often paid a visit to Mountbellew and called to see me in Kenny's shop.

Mr. Murphy, who was also manager of a paper called "The Galway Express" and which was sold in Kenny's, coupled "business" with Volunteer work. The Express naturally gave him ample scope to move about so as to find out how the Volunteer Movement was progressing. But beyond this I have nothing spectacular to record. Perhaps Mr. Murphy can, if he has not already done so, throw a little further light on the Galway Brigade of which he was Brigade General.

During this period, too, I remember travelling into Tuam, a distance of twelve miles, to hear a lecture on how to make hand-made bombs, by a man named Michael Hoey, who was fairly well versed in the art of making a crude bomb out of ordinary 2-inch piping with a time-fuse. Anything was useful in those days but I certainly could at a later date make a landmine. Michael Hoey lives in Howth I think or in some part of Dublin or County Dublin.

In the Menlough area a man named Seán Seóighe, a Dáil Loan organiser, is arrested. Seán is a Gaelic speaker and when accosted by the R.I.C. answers only in Irish. "What is your name?" Seán answers in Irish. "What is your business and where do you come from?" He again vaguely answered in Irish. "Are you deaf, dumb or 'mute of malice'?" were fired at him by the Sergeant. But still he answered in Irish. The R.I.C. had to give up in despair, so they took him to the D.I's headquarters, Mountbellew, where again he was interrogated in English. But Seán gave tit for tat in Irish and they were confounded. However, a short time after his arrival in Mountbellew R.I.C. barracks I was acquainted of the fact that an Irish speaker was a prisoner there. I sent him an excellent lunch and plenty of cigarettes. At the sight of the neatly arranged tray Seán beamed, gave his blessing in Irish and a final "Go raibh a mile maigth agath". But I met him later in Galway gaol.

In addition to our Volunteer, Sinn Fein and Gaelic activities, our local dramatic class was going full steam ahead. We had decided on Malachy Muldoon's "The West's Awake". Parts were allotted and copies of the Play distributed. I happened to be allotted the part of the rebel leader, MacMurrough, in handcuffs and tried for treason against the Crown. At night, book in hand, we read and re-read our individual lines. Candles burned low or drained down on the pillow to the ground in our enthusiasm. When it burned so low, out of bed in a jump to stuff another into the socket of an enamel candlestick which, on this occasion, I placed on a chair beside the bed for safety. And whenever I doubted my lines I'd pull my book from under the pillow and lean towards the candle to scan my lines. But on this occasion I leaned too far and held my head over the candle and in a moment my mop of black curls was in a blaze. This was a bit of hard luck, of course, but I didn't cry about it. I simply had to laugh with all the others who laughed at me. One half of my head was singed to the bone.

After work each evening our dramatic group would meet in the local hall for rehearsals and in this particular we had the assistance of Mr. G. E. Condell, Customs & Excise, who acted as coach. To 99% of the people Mr. Condell would pass as a loyalist. But to me, who knew him better simply because he lived in Kenny's, I'd say his heart was really with us. Mr. Condell formerly came from Rathgar, Dublin, but I met him some twenty years ago in Dublin where he held some executive post in the Castle. But here I must leave the history of "The West's Awake" for the moment and deal with other events.

Conscription for Ireland, especially when the Bill was read the third time, caused widespread gloom in Ireland. But I am glad to say that the Volunteers or Sinn Féiners were not the gloomiest section of the community. The well-to-do and former supporters of Redmond and pro-British types were all now looking to the Volunteers and Sinn Feiners

for a lead. Bank Clerks, Excise men and such like would come to me and discuss conditions in the trenches of Flanders and Gallipoli and when they'd stroke their well shaved chins and comment on the difficulties of having a decent shave or a bath in a slushy trench in Flanders I could not resist laughing into the faces of those gloomy-looking men. A very large number of those 'would not be soldiers' flocked into the local Volunteer Company. And indeed it often gave me a thrill to give them a good long route march and very often 'at the double'. The R.I.C. were usually the only spectators. Night after night the big drum would head the parade to the show grounds where I'd put them through their paces. Indeed, many of my new recruits were philosophers: they deemed it wiser to take their drill instruction from me rather than from a British officer. And then, there was the possibility too that their skins might be saved and that they would have their usual morning shave and nightly bath in Mountbellew.

A big anti-conscription meeting - after the people had signed the anti-conscription pledge - was held outside the Mountbellew Church. Our local P.P. and even Sir Henry Grattan Bellew, Bart. himself, graced the platform. I will quote a line of Sir Henry Grattan Bellew's speech, I mean revolutionary speech: "Lives there a man with soul so dead who never to himself has said 'This is my own my native land'". Lord Byron likely. Sir Henry's two boys, who were not then eligible for the British Army, joined the local Volunteer Company.

But when the threat of Conscription had passed, all these footmen, land-stewards, gardeners and servants faded away like a freak snow shower in mid-summer.

In or about 1919 a special seditious document was issued by Headquarters with a request that it be read publicly outside the various

Chapel gates throughout the country. The minimum penalty for reading this document was six months imprisonment. The onus for reading this document was placed on the shoulders of Mr. James Heaverty, Battalion Commandant. But he failed to turn up to carry out the contract so I swiftly jumped on to the Church wall immediately the ten or twelve R.I.C. men were stepping smartly towards the barrack. From the Church gates I read the document. Had the R.I.C. wheeled round I'd be "wheeled in" for six months.

In 1919,I, together with Tom McGrath, Treasurer of our Sinn Féin Club, attended the Sinn Féin Convention in the Mansion House as delegates from our branch. It was a fine representative and enthusiastic gathering which showed there was no dearth of leadership in Ireland. The details of this Convention are, I am sure, only too well known so there's no need for further comment. But I must say something about my colleague and friend Tom McGrath. He is now dead. He came from Ballinasloe to take up a position as charge hand in Noone's grocery and wholesale stores. Tom was a tower of strength to the local I.V. organisation and Sinn Féin, a dashing hurler and a man of ideas. To Tom must go the major credit for establishing our fine dramatic class which helped so largely to finance the local Volunteer and Sinn Féin movements. He had a wonderful sense of humour and it would be difficult to find his equal in any amateur dramatic society. He was so versatile that no part of any play presented a barrier to him and he delighted his audience on the stage. But this little incident which occurred in Dublin always brought tears of laughter to his eyes whenever I mentioned it - even 20 years later.

As we were passing McBirney's, Tom, who was always impeccably dressed, felt that he could do with a new hat. We entered and purchased a good one. Having satisfied himself in the mirror as to the style, fit and proper tilt, we proceeded on our way and crossed the Metal Bridge.

But a sudden gust of wind like a "fairy wind" sent his new hat over the iron railings of the bridge. It floated grandly for a few minutes, then turned over and sank like a stone. "Where did you get that hat? Twenty paces from the metal bridge" or such like jokes were some recompenses for the loss of the hat. And so we train it home and reach Woodlawn at 10.30 p.m. to find that there was no car or vehicle to take us home to Mountbellew, a distance of eight miles. We had to walk. Tom's boot began to hurt him at the heel and in order to relieve himself he walked part of the way in his stocking feet. It was a tiring journey, one in front the other straggling behind. We reached Mountbellew at about 1.30 in the morning.

During my absence from home the R.I.C. raided my rooms and ransacked Kenny's where I worked and found an old revolver and 60 rounds of leaden bullets. I was arrested that morning, handcuffed and taken to the R.I.C. barracks. Later I was taken to Ballinasloe for trial but I refused to recognise the Court and was sentenced to three months hard labour which, of course, meant I would not be accorded political status. I demanded political treatment but was refused because the carrying of arms and ammunition or being in possession of same or using anything in the nature of physical force against the forces of the Crown constituted a criminal offence and so a criminal I was in the eyes of British law and a criminal status was the only one to reform me.

But I decided to test the matter. I got in touch with some more political prisoners in another wing and told them that we - Jordan from Islandleady, Castlebar; McCann from Loughrea, and the writer would go on hungerstrike. We had expected that there would be a sympathetic hungerstrike in the other wing, but for some reason or other it did not materialise. One can visualise how loathsome it must be when one is forced to associate with old lags who spent practically their whole lives in prison. Take Sweeney from Loughrea as an example. This old crony when approached by the chaplain in the stone-yard and asked,

"When do you intend to go to Confession, Sweeney?" His answer was, always, "Next week Father". "But you told me that last week" answered the chaplain. "I know I did Father". "You are getting old now Sweeney and isn't it about time you made your peace with God and cease coming in here?" "I am coming in here now, Father" said Sweeney with a roving eye under his bushy eyebrows, "I am coming in here for 45 years, Father. I was here five years before 'Salmon the Trade's warder' got the job and he's here now 40 years". "And what are you in for this time, Sweeney?" "A biteen o' mate,Father". "And how did the bit of meat bring you in here?" "Well, I was working in a butcher's shop and I threw a leg of mutton into a poor man's cart and he had a large family". And then he continued, as if he deserved a service medal. "I was in another time for knocking the eye out of a girl. She was giggling and I threw a stone and knocked the eye out of her". Such is life in jail and little incidents like these are as natural in the life of these habitual criminals as rain is to a duck's back.

Then take the 'Arab King' of Galway City. An old sly rascal who used to hold up women on a lonely part of the road and empty their baskets.

I should have stated that before I actually went on hungerstrike I did the usual prison tasks for obvious reasons. John O'Donnell, who was in the clothing department, took a fancy to me and always brought me along to the stores where the "Broad Arrows" are kept. The "Arab King" arrives. "We must get this man, John, a new suit and give him a bath" said John O'Donnell. And so the warder, the 'Arab King' and myself headed for the stores. "Strip off there you Arab" roared John. Nearly all warders roar in jail. The Arab peels off. "And now,John, we must take an inventory of this man's property" said John with a slight twinkle in his eye.

"What has he got?" "A jacket". "I'll write that down". And what a jacket! "Any waistcoat, John?" "No" I replied. "A trousers?" Yes, but it would take a tailor to determine which was the original piece used when that thing called a trousers was put together. "Any braces, John?" "No" I replied as I poked them to one side with a brush handle. "Well, then, how does he keep his trousers up?" retorted the warder. "He has only a piece of twine" I assured him. "A cap?" "What about the shirt?" asked John as he eyed the Arab's shirt keenly. All that remained of the Arab's shirt was the neckband and a portion which covered his hairy chest. "Do you call that a shirt?" said the warder slyly to me. I passed no comment. But John forced a smile when he said, "I think I'll write down half a shirt". The Arab had no socks but a pair of tattered shoes.

Then the bath was prepared and the Arab gets in but not a word he uttered. Nor did he even pretend to see us with the only eye he possessed. O'Donnell then got a long-handle mop and pushed the Arab's head into the water and stroked him down in order to get some of the mud out of him. I was rather young and had a sense of humour and it would be difficult to blame me if I enjoyed the scene. I often saw sheep in a dipping tub when their heads were pushed under and whenever I see men dipping sheep I always think of the 'Arab King'.

And now we are on hungerstrike. It is amazing that at one time I felt as happy in that jail prison cell that I prayed that God would grant me a short period of imprisonment before I'd die. Well, it was death or freedom now and I will say, from practical experience of having undergone three separate hungerstrikes, that whether a hungerstrike is undertaken individually or collectively it is won or lost before you start. Won if there is the will to win. Lost if you weaken and surrender! After about a week I collapsed in my cell. Some dead feeling like a paralytic stroke in my side affected me.

I was then examined by Doctor Kinkaid, an old British Naval Doctor who, in appearance, would pass as General Von Hindenburg, the greatest German General of 1914 to 1918 war. I was ordered to be taken to the prison hospital on a stretcher. Why did they ever call such a gloomy place a hospital? The meals were always brought in whether you refused or not. The prison authorities then made an offer. I would be treated, they said, as William O'Brien was treated in that very same room. But I failed to respond, but demanded the status of a political prisoner. "Write to the Lord Lieutenant" was always the reply. I don't like to send a man to hell but when one hears the Lord Lieutenant's name too often I felt like giving expression to my feeling. When all your muscles are jumping and you feel that another part of your bodily substance is melting away every moment it is terrible to have placed in front of you a savoury chicken. It takes terrible will-power to resist the craving and desire for food. But I stuck it out. J. McCann, Loughrea, was released a couple of days before me, then Jordan and then I heard the news that I was released by the Lord Lieutenant, but that I would have to return to the prison after a period of three weeks. I was then driven to the County Hospital, Galway, in a cab and attended to by the kindly nurses there.

After a short period I decided to go into Galway where I got my beard off. But when I returned to the hospital the nurse did not know me nor would she believe I was her patient until I pointed out the bed which I occupied in the hospital.

And so back to Mountbellew but feeling very weak. I again got a great reception. Milk and arrowroot biscuits was my diet but even this light food caused a peculiar tickling feeling whenever I partook of it. It was a sort of diet which tended to stimulate laughter.

"The West's Awake" was due to be put on the boards in a fortnight so I again rehearsed my original part which was mainly one long speech in defiance of British Law. Manacled on the stage and tried for treason seemed to stir the audience to great heights and it was difficult to control their wild enthusiasm. I was to be executed and the scene was so real that I would find it difficult to describe the feeling of the crowd on these two memorable nights.

After a period of three weeks and although ill at the time I was arrested in the early hours of the morning by the R.I.C., ordered to dress, then handcuffed and taken back to Galway jail. Indeed I must admit I had the full sympathy of the whole countryside. Even those who were formerly opposed now came forward to shake hands and wished me luck regardless of what the R.I.C. may have thought of their action.

Christmas in jail was not a very consoling thought. And here in Galway on a damp depressing Christmas Eve I spend my day as an assistant to Hartney, the trade's warder. It meant for me bricks and mortar rather than the mead and honey and sweet cake and glass of wine so customary at home to celebrate the great feast of Christmas 1919.

But there was at least (I thought so) one consoling thought. Trade's Warder Hartney would bring me the packet of Woodbines which he promised. I would at least have a smoke on Christmas Eve. His promise proved as empty as my cell was of champagne. I did not ask him for cigarettes. But a broken promise on a Christmas Eve, especially when one is in an empty cell, is not easily forgotten. It is as vivid today as it was on Christmas Eve of 1919. But an ex-British soldier-cum warder gave me a small orange. The Englishman opened my cell door quietly, unbuttoned his greatcoat and pulled out the orange and gave it to me. I thanked him but he told me to be

careful about the skins in case anyone would see or smell them. Good luck to him wherever he is. He meant well and even that simple kindly act of an Englishman made some amends for Hartney's broken promise.

On one occasion I was asked to bring some soiled linen to the laundry in the women's section of the prison. "It will be a grand change for you" said John O'Donnell, the warder. Another prisoner in broad arrows was also brought along. Nurse Kenny, the wardress, received us kindly and scrutinised me keenly since I was practically one of the first prisoners she had seen in civilian garb. The above named lady took us into a quiet corner and gave us a cup of tea and a few biscuits. It was a dainty cup of tea, I must say, but entirely too small and I often felt it would have been better if she had never introduced it. It only whetted our appetites and anyone with a keen eye could easily determine that our manners had deteriorated a good deal. I threw my eye around and felt like waiting for another miniature cup. But she did not respond. "Come this way" was her remark and right into the laundry she brought us and started her lecture on the art of washing clothes. "Women prisoners usually do this work" she told us, "but there are practically no women prisoners at the moment". I eyed the mountain of clothes. "All for the wash" I said to myself. "Now" said Nurse Kenny "this is the hot-water-tap the clothes must be thoroughly soaked in hot water first, then use plenty of soap powder and soap and give them a good lather. Rinse them out again in luke warm water and finally in cold. And all the blankets and sheets must be put through the mangle". "Would you mind to repeat that all over again" I suggested. The nurse repeated the formula and would continue to repeat it. But I bluntly told her I would not wash any clothes. She blushed to the two ears - in fact she felt horrified. Had she not lectured me gently on how to wash clothes and then had she not gracefully and secretly supplied me with

a miniature china cup of tea! I knew she felt badly over my refusal. The other prisoners felt that it would mean solitary confinement for me once I had refused to work. But whether it did or not I was not going to wash clothes for anybody. "I don't wear any prisoners' clothes" I replied "and that ends it. I'll tell you what I'll do" I said,"I'll turn the handle of that mangle for a little while". She got into a frenzy and was nearly in tears. Indeed I believe I heard her say. "And after I giving you a nice cup of tea, too". Miss Kenny, God bless her heart, was as much a prisoner as myself. She came from Ballygar, a few miles from Mountbellew. I was released in February, 1920, and again resumed my former duties.

I may have already stated we staged "Paid In His Own Coin" and a few more short sketches, and having been so successful in Mountbellew, Ballinasloe, and Kilkerrin, Rev. Father Glynn, P.P., solicited our help for parochial purposes. I think he said he wanted some money to repair the Church. And so he invited Tom McGrath and myself to the presbytery where Bridget, the priest's girl, even during the operation of feeding a lamb with a baby's bottle in the kitchen, did practically all the talking. Refreshments were supplied in plenty. Bridget seldom checked us whenever we resolved to have another "ginger wine" but she always warned Father Glynn that he would have to see the Archbishop in the morning. Father Glynn, with all his faults, was a kindly and generous man that night. Of course he may have counted the chickens before the eggs were hatched. He most definitely was looking forward to a 'tidy bit' by way of receipts from the play we intended to put on the stage. He left the whole matter in our hands and never questioned our ability or genius to decide what play to produce.

We had decided on "The Dawn Mist", a play by Frank Hugh O'Donnell. I knew Frank when he worked in Dunmore. He was a neighbour and an

author and, what was better, he wrote a grand little play about the 1916 Rising which suited us down to the ground. Having rehearsed it in a short time we were now ready to stage it on Sunday night.

Advertisements figured in the local press and posters glared at you everywhere. "The Dawn Mist", a play by Frank Hugh O'Donnell!" But on Saturday afternoon, the evening before, Head Constable Cassidy called to see me and warned me that if I attempted to stage the play I would suffer the consequences. "Why come to me?" I challenged. "You are the ring leader. It is a seditious play and we will suppress it", he replied.

At about 9 p.m. on Saturday night about thirty R.I.C. men arrived in Mountbellew and took over possession of the hall, and so our time, labour and expense went for nought. And what was worse, Father Glynn would hardly look at us. And there was a whispering tongue here and there that "we tried to get the Reverend Gentleman mixed up in sedition". Had the play been a success everything would be alright. Or if the Reverend P.P. had a flair for literature like his opposite number in Paul Vincent Carroll's "Shadow and Substance", it's more likely than not we'd get no lemonade or"ginger wine" for bringing sedition into the poor man's life.

In 1920, I think, an order was issued to the Volunteers to raid the Income Tax Offices all over the country. I discussed the matter very seriously with some of my immediate colleagues in Mountbellew. Ours was rather a difficult task in some respects. The Income Tax Offices adjoined the R.I.C. barracks and were situated on the top floor of John Kennedy's, general merchant, Mountbellew. The gable of the R.I.C. barracks acted as the only dividing wall between the Income Tax Office and the former. But having scrutinised the place thoroughly and reconnoitred the interior of Kennedy's I found it was quite feasible to raid the place.

Whenever I went in for cigarettes or matches I'd always go through the shop and come out the hall door and slam it after me. Kennedy's hall door was within a few yards of the barrack door and the stairs led straight up to the Income Tax Office. The best plan was to enter through the shop door, pass through and up the stairs. But there was always the danger of a couple of R.I.C. men coming in on top of you as Kennedy's was a haunt of theirs, it being a public house as well. My plan then was to get a few of the Volunteers from the country who were not too easily recognised to take in a few shotguns when it was growing dusk and plant them for us in a quiet secluded spot. Leahy, Raftery and myself were to take cover behind Father Glynn's cement wall and cover the R.I.C. barrack door, and if any R.I.C. man advanced from the barracks to order him back or send a volley over his head if he failed to do so.

The Volunteers from the outlying area were to enter and carry out their task of getting all the papers. Only one man from Springlawn, John Higgins, turned up. The dead hand of the Battalion O/C. Heaverty frustrated our plan because he considered it too dangerous. At least that is what I could gather from John Higgins who lived in the same village as the O/C., some 2½ miles outside Mountbellew. The three shot gun men were quite prepared to carry out our end of it. But we were too well known to the staff in Kennedy's. But certainly we could keep the R.I.C. at bay in their barracks until the raid was over. The raid was called off.

And now the General Election of officers for the Sinn Féin Club was due to take place. Mr. James Heaverty, Battalion O/C., was chairman for the previous year. And so nominations were accepted by him for the positions of chairman, secretary and treasurer. Mr. P. Kilgannon proposed his friend Mr. Heaverty as chairman. I was also proposed by Tom McGrath and seconded by P. Leahy. But Mr. Heaverty's proposer

suggested the unanimous selection of Heaverty and paid him his little tribute by way of a speech. I was reluctantly compelled to rise and said, "I have been proposed and seconded and if I do not receive another solitary vote but these two I will oppose Mr. Heaverty for chairmanship". I then reminded the members of the branch that when I was proposed last year - even when I was classed as a felon in Galway jail - Mr. Heaverty hadn't the decency to stand down, but on the contrary defeated me and the wretched news of my defeat was sent to the Prison Governor. And so I beat him and was elected chairman of the branch for the coming year.

In a week or two after this, February 1920, I was due to take up a new position as Manager of Michael Henry Whyte's of Clara, Offaly. But on the eve of my departure the Volunteers and Sinn Féin branch made me a presentation of a wallet of notes and a writing set. Indeed I felt I was not deserving of such a great gift. I merely tried to do my duty. Even the staff in Kenny's where I worked made me a presentation of a fine gold ring, a gift which I regret to say I lost on the football field in Clara when I played against Tullamore.

I think I stated that I was lonely when I left Dunmore. But I was far lonlier leaving Mountbellew. For here I spent the six most enjoyable years of my life. When I was leaving I do not believe that a citizen of the town failed to turn up to say goodbye. The proprietor of Noone's great stores pressed me hard to take up a more remunerative post in his establishment. But this I refused because no man could be treated with such kind consideration as I was during my stay in Kenny's. Although my boss was a Hibernian he always showed his sympathy like a father and at times,with a sigh, he felt I was on the way to the gallows. Before I actually left for Clara I had contacted, through the agency of Michael Whyte and Con Kennedy, the Clara Volunteer Company. But I found things different here. Clara was a town of ex-British Army men as far as I could see. And

as I strolled through the town with a few members of the Clara Company I could sense the hostility towards us whenever we met a bunch of these ex-British Army men.

On another occasion about a week after I had arrived there I was in the company of another Volunteer when we met about ten of those aggressive bullies. They surrounded us on the footpath and asked, "Where are your guns?" One man rubbed down my hip pocket like a detective and another gave me a sudden and unexpected blow of his fist on the cheek. We had to retreat on this occasion until we met some more of our Volunteer friends when we again proceeded on our way to find that they were not too anxious to repeat their former challenge.

To me, all this pro-British feeling and hostility towards Irishmen who only desired freedom for Ireland was the cause of sadness. How different it was west of the Shannon where men, instead of raising a hand to strike, raised their hat to salute the men who stood for Ireland. Never in my whole life up to that period do I remember any man aggressive enough to raise his hand to strike me. Clara then to me was a garrison town of ex-British soldiers. There were over 400 of them all told in this small town and when one adds to this number their parents, sisters and wives in most cases, one can visualise the strength of the opposition in Clara. Some of these men were maimed - lost an arm or leg or maybe an eye in the 1914-18 war. Many of their fathers before them, too, were in the British Army and were equally aggressive as their sons. Most of these formerly worked in Goodbody's factory and all those who returned from the war were again re-employed there. In fact, before these men joined up they were assured by Messrs. Goodbody & Co. that their jobs would be waiting for them when they came back. So one can appreciate the power and influence of a capitalist and industrialist over his employees when

it comes to the question of defending the rights and liberties of small nationalities, or more correctly the lust for power of a dastardly and corrupt bloodsucking Empire, England.

None of the local Volunteers had any desire to pick a quarrel with these ex-soldiers. Personally I've never had a desire to pick a quarrel with any man who was misled such as the tens of thousands who were misled by John Redmond. In after years I soldiered with some of these men in the I.R.A. and I knew a Fred Foyle who deserted the British Army and who fought an engagement and kept an armoured car at bay in South Galway.

During my fourteen years in Dublin some ex-soldiers were the first to offer me safe quarters and kept the guns high and dry when occasion demanded. But that's not a part of this story. The Clara type were of a different hue. Tradition speaks volumes. In about April 1920, Liam Dignam, O/C., Clara Company, while alone, was accosted by a number of these toughs and beaten up and kicked all over the streets of Clara. This challenge could not be allowed to pass. It would be a grave error to let the culprits get away with it, for if action were not taken we would only be inviting more trouble. And so the local Volunteer Company mobilised in full strength one Saturday evening and we dashed to the homes of the more aggressive agents in their semi-slum quarters. The women started to bawl and tried to block the way, and some of the culprits got away hastily out the back. Some of us carried revolvers and in order to prove to them we meant business we sent an odd volley through the roofs inside. On our return through the town we noticed a few of these ex-soldiers dashing towards the R.I.C. Barracks. But the door was closed and they could not get in. I particularly noticed one man with a celloloid patch over his eye who tried to brave it out as he had his back to the barrack door who said, "Shoot me now, shoot me now if you like". They were in a tight corner and they knew it.

And the R.I.C. were not looking for fight either. On the contrary they were very tame and appealed to us, "like good men to go home and be peaceful". This very spirit of the Clara men who hemmed their aggressive opponents up against the barrack door, regardless of what the R.I.C. might do, impressed me very much. Undoubtedly the right metal was here and I will always admire the Clara men with pride.

During the big hunger strike of 1920, all the shops of Clara were closed and candles were lighted in the windows in honour of Terence MacSwiney. We paraded through the streets, about 600 of us, as a protest against England's heartless treatment of that great patriot. But on our way we met an opposition march of about 400, mostly ex-soldiers, who used foul expressions as we faced and passed through them on the street.

Later that evening a gang of these bullies approached certain shopkeepers and public houses, including Whyte's where I was employed, and threatened to smash in the windows if they did not open their shops. But no business men acceeded to their request or succumbed to their threats.

In, I think, May, 1920, a very heavy and well organised attack was launched on the Clara R.I.C. barracks. The men from Tullamore, Rahan, Streamstown, Ballycomber and Clara were in full force. At about 12 midnight the tramp of marching men through the streets could be heard. But before this, men were posted or assigned to the various tasks, cutting communications, felling trees across the roads at vital points, to prevent surprise and keep the military or reinforcements at bay. The Sergeant and his wife were the first to be removed from their quarters which were attached to the gable of the barrack facing one of the main streets. The other gable or end of the barrack was attached to a part of Goodbody's Mill, and men had taken up their positions here.

Then the glass windows of Williams' shop went in with the butt end of the riflemen who took up their positions right opposite and facing the barracks. The men in Williams' barricaded the top windows as best they could with mattresses, furniture etc., and the attack opened. Willie Dignan and myself and a few others occupied McGlynn's yard at the rere of the barracks. One could hear the sledges and crowbars moving in the Sergeant's house as the men bored a hole for an explosive whenever there was a lull in the fighting.

Then a loud report or explosion denoted progress on our side. But the R.I.C. replied vigorously through the apertures of the steel shutters which blocked the barrack windows. Bombs and grenades and rifle fire and revolver shots added to the din and undoubtedly a very vigorous attack was now in full swing. While we were in the yard showers of multi-coloured verey lights came down on top of us. When the verey lights were fired they went right into the air like a star, then spread out like miniature fiery balls of many brilliant colours. The R.I.C. were looking for assistance. It was their only means of sending out an S.O.S. On several occasions the R.I.C. were asked to surrender but there was no response. The men in Goodbody's, who were in charge of Martin Fleming, shouted through the gaping hole in the gable to the R.I.C. to surrender. I think it was Martin who approached the hole and demanded them to surrender, but instead they hurled a bomb through the hole and almost blew the arm off him. It was not, as far as I know, the desire of the attackers to kill the R.I.C. inside. Otherwise bombs could be hurled through the hole to put them out of action. Across the street in William's shop Seery from Tyrrell's Pass received a serious rifle wound in the chest and Ned Brennan of Tullamore was wounded in the hip. This was a serious set-back and at about 3 a.m., as it was then almost breaking day, the attack was called off. The three wounded men had to be attended to and Sean Robbins took, I think, Seery to Father Bracken's house where

he was annointed. Phil Kenny and myself and some others assisted Martin Fleming and Ned Brennan who were also taken to Father Bracken. It was not a pleasant scene in view of the failure to take the barracks to see the footpath strewn with the blood of our men. I shall not easily forget the condition of Seery who had a large hole in his chest and Fleming whose hand, from above the wrist, was almost completely severed. Seery died some short time afterwards. I attended his funeral at Tyrrell's Pass where he was buried and there was a large concourse of people to mark their sympathy to a gallant man. Martin Fleming, whom I met later, carried an artificial arm.

Among the most active men in Clara were Liam Dignam, O/C. Company, Tom Fleming, Seamus Grennan, Mick McCormack, P. Beirne, Tom Gavin, Phil Kenny. I regret I cannot recall the names or at least the surnames of many more of those fine young Clara men, God bless them all. There was no coward among them. Sean Robbins was an untiring worker - a man who was "on the run" from an early period. I remember on one occasion when Clara played a football match against Tullamore, Seán, who was then a 'wanted' man, played with the Clara team. And I remember too, on that occasion, that a hefty Tullamore man gave me the hardest rap in the back I ever got in my life. I didn't go under but I thought all the internal works were knocked out of gear.

After the R.I.C. barrack attack Phil Kenny and myself crossed over the backyards to get into Michael Henry Whyte's. Leo Whyte, an ex-British officer who was prowling about in house shoes in the yard, was held up at revolver point by Phil. We were not so sure who he was at the time. But Leo was alright and he admitted that it was one of the wildest and most restless nights he had experienced even though he was out in France. Leo then took us in and supplied us with a much-desired refreshment.

I then went to bed, but on afterthoughts I got up again and went out town to see how things stood. Everyone in Clara was up all night and had I gone to bed and the soldiers raided my rooms they would probably conclude I was on the job. I went into Williams' to find the place in a mess. Decoy bottles of Powers' were broken all over the place. A certain Gaelic Leaguer named P. óg Ó Connaire deplored the destruction of property, whereupon I dipped my fingers in the liquid on the floor and replied, "Sure it was only coloured water or tea which was in the window as a display". Indeed I did not like nor did I expect that this patriotic Gaelic Leaguer with his "Tá an lá breá" business would comment so adversely on the action and struggle of brave men who were trying to achieve an Ireland - not merely Gaelic but free, as well. The R.I.C. barrack door was open now and people were crowing round the door. I entered with others to see how things were. The R.I.C. were pale and their clothes were white with dust from the white-washed walls. Clara was such a busy little town and so densely populated for its size that the R.I.C. knew but little about any individual Volunteers or their actions.

Our weekly Company parades and drills took place as usual and the Dáil Loan was actively supported. I think a man named Seamus Robinson was organiser for this area. I know Michael Henry Whyte, my boss, took substantial shares in the Loan and even subscribed a second time. Michael Henry stored too, an occasional webley under the floor boards in his shop. I would be correct in saying he kept one safe for Sean Robbins, for I remember on one occasion when the little trap in the boards was lifted to secure the revolver when I think Sean paid a secret visit to the shop.

In order to raise funds we ran a series of ceilidhe and again we staged "The West's Awake" in Clara and also in Moate. On this occasion Phil Kenny acted McMurrough, the Rebel Leader. I financed the play

and paid for the costumes and advertising. But, as a result of the tragic death of Liam Dignam, accounts could not be finally squared so the Company benefited to the extent of my initial contribution of about £10.

After a short time the R.I.C. evacuated the R.I.C. barracks and went, I think, to Tullamore. And now the town was clear of any semblance of police and of any of the aggressive ex-soldier element. For after the attack many of them cleared off to Scotland or England. They realised now that there were far more guns available than on the night I got the wallop on the chin, or when they had the temerity to kick Dignam around the streets of Clara.

The Volunteers now took up duties to maintain law and order in the town and regulate closing hours for all public houses. On a few occasions a Lancia car or a semi-armoured protective-covered-caged car passed through Clara from Tullamore to Moate and back but nothing untoward happened.

One Saturday evening a Lancia car laden with R.I.C. and Tans came from the direction of Tullamore and as they passed through Clara I had a good look at them through the shop window. But they were sporting their rifles in a dangerous fashion as if they were going to fire into Whyte's shop. I moved back quickly out of range. They passed, but did not fire. Michael Henry Whyte was a well known Republican and County Councillor and at times we anticipated a volley or that the premises would go up in smoke. The R.I.C. were furious since they had to evacuate the barracks. Liam Dignam and myself entered Cowan's public house to ask those present to leave as it was past closing hour. Neither of us were taking any intoxicating liquor but there were a few men at the bar who were inclined to discuss

the merits or demerits of this county or that. We again asked them to leave and drop the discussion and went out into the street and had a chat when, all of a sudden, a Lancia car came down the hill as silent as a ghost and the Tans and R.I.C. jumped out and fired at us without the slightest warning. I dashed round the corner and over a wall and Liam dived in the opposite direction and headed for "Minor" Whyte's door. He got a bullet in the back at the point of the kidney. I heard him moan and say he was shot. The R.I.C. jumped into their vehicle and sped off as fast as their engine could take them towards Tullamore. I immediately returned to find Liam on his face half-way in the door calling for his mother. It was pathetic. Liam the O/C. of our Company; Liam the only son of a widow who actually adored him! The other men in Cowan's shop remained where they were and escaped the deadly bullets of those murderers. Had we remained it is possible that we, too, would have escaped. When Liam's back was examined I could see a large wound and I suspected that the Tans or R.I.C. used split or'dum-dum' bullets.

Liam, as he lay on the floor, complained that something else was hurting him. He was lying on a tin box - a 50 tin cigarette box of .38 revolver ammunition which he had in his jacket pocket. We anticipated that these fiends might return so we used a little wooden gate and mattress and carried him to a local house in a safer area. Sometime afterwards Liam was sent to Dublin. But he died as a result of an assassin's bullet.

It must be remembered that ambushes were not in vogue at the time Dignam was shot and besides it was too late in the night to expect the Clara men to be in readiness for an unexpected event of that kind.

For a considerable time after the barrack attack Mrs. Whyte was in a state of hysterics in case the shop and premises would go up. Mrs. Whyte was not a Republican and I could not agree with her on many

business and domestic matters and so in August I gave a month's notice and left the job.

I got a transfer to Tuam and took a .38 revolver, my own, with me and landed back in Tuam about September 1920 to find that the town had been sacked by the R.I.C. and Black & Tans, as a reprisal for the Callagh ambush.

Lest that in my hurried account of Mrs. Whyte I may do her injustice I hasten to say: Mrs. Whyte (née Hession) formerly came from my own home town, Tuam, and after the sack of Tuam she was naturally very nervous, and besides she only a few years before married into a wealthy and thriving business firm.

On my way back to Tuam I trained as far as Athenry, then secured a seat in a car and proceeded to the outskirts of the town. As I carefully entered and passed through the town everything was in a state of darkness. There were practically no lights. I then went directly to my own native home at Browne's Grove. But from that moment onwards I never entered Tuam in daylight. I was verily a stranger to the R.I.C. there as I had been so long away from the place both in Dunmore, Mountbellew and Clara. I may add that with regard to Gallagh ambush that I can only give the details as I heard them from some of those who participated in the attack.

Tuam, at this time, barely represented one quarter of the Brigade area as it existed in July 1921. It was a loosely-organised Battalion which embraced areas such as Sylane and Belclare and constituted not highly organised units or Companies but the best individual Volunteers from over a fairly wide area.

Michael Moran, who was a fine determined type of man, was, I understand, in charge at Callagh and "Con" Michael Fogarty was also a very good man who later acted in the capacity of Brigade O/C when

the Brigade was reorganised. Michael Moran was arrested some time after the attack and taken to Galway and released. After about a fortnight he was again re-arrested and murdered by the Black & Tans. Con Fogarty who worked on the railway was forced to keep "under cover" and later in about the end of January, 1921, was arrested when he came out into the open. I may add here that Paddy Conway, Brigade Quartermaster, who formerly worked in Moran's was an excellent soldier. So also was Tommy Ryan, Battalion Quartermaster, T. Wilson, O/C. of Cartoon Company and a number of others.

But I am not in a position to say who was actually in the Gallagh attack. I'll leave that to others to determine. I was not in the area at all at the time. But experience tells me that if I were to write an authentic history of military events and accepted the many claims so profusely put forward by individuals as a guide I would be at sea to segregate the truth from the lie. The 1924 Military Service Pensions Act provided ample scope for any unscrupulous men to make and seemingly substantiate their false claims. Practically all Republicans or "Bolshies", as we were then called, were ostracised under the 1924 Act, and so there was a free field for certain people to make any exhorbitant claims they wished. I know a man who completely dropped out of the Volunteers in 1919 in Tuam and who had no association, good or bad, after that with the Volunteers or I.R.A. who, to my surprise, received a pension under the 1924 Act. This man gave bail when he was arrested on some trivial political offence in 1919. There are others too, who managed to secure medals etc., but for what puzzles me. And the act of 1934 did not tend to improve matters. In fact, both Acts, although perhaps well intended, were motivated for political reasons.

Act, No. 1. was passed to aid those who supported a particular regime. Act, No. II. was introduced to even up matters for an opposition group. But in stating this fact I do not wish to minimise

the pre-Truce service of those who supported the Treaty. But I do say frankly that both of these Acts tended to introduce a desire on the part of some to make false statements to justify or substantiate their various claims for a Service Certificate. Military History then, to a great extent, must of necessity be compiled on the basis of individual statements be they right or wrong.. And I feel it will be a difficult task to compile a true history from the Fenian times to the 11th July, 1921. Never in the history of Ireland perhaps had we two armies in deadly conflict like that of 1922. And I find it difficult at times to confine one set of circumstances only to pre-Truce period when men and matter are so closely connected with post-Truce events as well!

The men who gave bail in the Tuam area in 1919 are John J. Waldron, The Square, Tuam, Matt Connolly, Galway Road and P. Dwyer, Vicar Street. In Mountbellew, too, another prominent Volunteer, Martin Leahy, who was getting a month for drilling, gave bail. Acts of surrender or recognition of British Law in any given area had a bad effect on the general populace and created a bad precedent for other Volunteers.

Tuam town itself was not a model of tenacity and grit. That grit was to be found mostly in the sons of small farmers, simple honest souls who meant to do their duty and who were always ready to respond and were even superior to those who, by subterfuge, reaped a reward as a result of such confusion. But these matters are beyond my power to rectify, so I will continue my story.

After the death of Michael Moran the Tuam Battalion was badly disorganised. But a number of us got together to try and build it up again. A meeting was arranged at Cortoon Co-Operative stores at which the following were present: Tom Dunleavy acting as Battalion O/C., Tom Ryan, Battalion Quartermaster, Martin Mannion, Tom Wilson, O/C., Cortoon Company, Michael Cleary, Cortoon; Stephen O'Neill, Cortoon

Company, Edward O'Neill, Cortoon Company, Mark Ryan, Peter O'Neill, Tom Hynes and a number of others, mostly from Cortoon and the Barnaderg areas. The Battalion staff was then properly constituted with Tom Dunleavy as Battalion O/C., Tom Ryan as Quartermaster and Sean O'Neill as Adjutant. It fell to my lot to reorganise a somewhat badly shaken battalion area. And so Companies were again well organised in separate areas such as Cortoon, Barnaderg, Milltown, Tuam, Belmount, Kilconoly, Sylane, Corofin, Abbey and Cordenfield.

Prior to my acceptance of the position as Adjutant I was pressed strongly by a number of men who were present to accept the position as Battalion O/C. But I felt that, owing to the fact that Tom Dunleavy's house was burned out by the R.I.C., I could not very well deprive him of the honour. Everything was arranged very amicably, but I found I had a difficult task, not because of the nature of the work, but because I had to do far more than my share of it. The Battalion O/C. was practically an illiterate and I found it most confusing to work with a man who depended too much on oral, or vague memory to carry out the task at hand. As a soldier he was alright, but his system was too slow. But I obeyed, as indeed I must say all men of my battalion obeyed, without question or murmur. But an officer who is addicted to drink does not instil confidence in men, and this was a problem which had several repercussions on future activities in the Battalion area.

I know one house where there were four brothers who practically neglected all their own work to serve the Movement. Ryan's of Ballaghalode (3), O'Neill's of Beaugh (4) and so on. But some of them didn't get the semblance of a Medal nor did some of them look for it.

The ten Company areas were visited as often as possible by me and put on parade under their own O/C., and given suitable instruction. But the only available guns in each area were a number of single or double barrel shot guns.

In or about this time too, the R.I.C. had called in or collected many shot guns all over the area. But those who were more friendly disposed towards the powers-that-be and who sought permits to hold a gun were granted them. And these houses we noted,and they were later raided for arms by the I.R.A. The majority of such possessors of a gun or guns gave them up freely enough to the Volunteers who called and to these we gave a receipt in the name of the I.R.A. of the locality.

The Dáil Loan too, was a great success in North Galway and the I.R.A. Arms Fund was amply subscribed to. With regard to the enrolment of members for the "Flying Column" which were ordered by Headquarters to form in October, 1920, every Battalion in the Battalion area was put on parade separately. The details, duties and responsibilities of such a Column were briefly stated and all those who were prepared to join such a Column were asked to put up their hands. Practically every man in some Company areas put up their hands: in others 50% or more were prepared for action. The object in view by the Battalion Officers in having these special parades was to collect information as to the number of men available for active service with a view to selecting the most suitable. A "Flying Column" was not formed on this basis. The operations carried out subsequently were in the main done by men who were 'on the run' and who were brought together as the necessity arose. Men who were never obliged to go 'on the run' also took part in these engagements.

And now for the moment I must break off my details with regard to activities in Tuam Brigade area as I forgot to insert an account of an earlier incident. Some time before my departure from Mountbellew to take up a position in Clara a Convention was held in Tuam for the purpose of selecting candidates for the County Council. I was then chairman of the Mountbellew Sinn Fein Club. But it was

only when I was actually in Clara that I got to know that such a Convention was held. Mountbellew was always in the East Galway constituency for parliamentary purposes. But it would appear that for the purpose of Local Government and County Council affairs Mountbellew had to be embraced with North Galway, and so an invitation was sent to the Mountbellew Sinn Fein from the North Galway Executive asking us to send two delegates to the Convention. The notification was handed in in Tuam to James Heaverty where, on every Saturday, he used to attend buying eggs. But the notification was never handed to any member of our branch but kept a secret by James Heaverty. To my big surprise when I read The Tribune in Clara I read the names of the selected candidates for the County Council. James Heaverty was one of them. I was puzzled to know how James Heaverty could be selected without I knowing anything about it. I was in Mountbellew and chairman of the club when this actually happened. And I wrote to the chairman, Professor Wheelehan of Tuam and pointed out to him that our Club never received any notification with regard to the Convention at which Mr. Heaverty was selected; that there was no meeting of our Club held to discuss the question of selecting candidates for the County Council. Nor were any delegates duly appointed or instructed to attend that meeting, and that the whole thing was a breach of the Constitution and rules governing Sinn Fein. James Heaverty brought another egg buyer with him to the Tuam Convention and got himself nominated on the sly!

Professor Wheelehan replied and informed me that another Convention would be convened and that in due course I would be invited to attend and explain all matters relative to the irregularity. I received an invitation from the Secretary, Mr. D. Guy (the late District Justice Guy) and I hired a car from Clara to Tuam to attend the meeting.

Professor Wheelehan stated that the notification intended for our branch was given personally to Mr. Heaverty and that he should have delivered it, and that Mr. Heaverty's action deserved a strong vote of censure. In fact, the Convention was unanimous in passing a vote of censure on Heaverty. But as someone suggested that, in order to show that there was no serious division in the Sinn Fein ranks, it might be as well to stand by the original nominations. This proposition was carried, but Dunmore and other areas and men like Kilgarriff and Ronayne (I.R.B.) were strongly opposed to Mr. Heaverty's candidature.

Mr. Heaverty was elected a Sinn Fein County Councillor. And it was a bad day for Ireland when he was elected. Mr. Heaverty, six months prior to the Truce, was the author of the famous or, more correctly, the infamous Galway County Council resolution, calling for a Truce. An action which not only ignored Dail Eireann but the I.R.A. and every other movement which stood for and had pledged its allegiance to the Republic! No wonder Lloyd George felt happy and asked himself "Is there going to be a general surrender?" Many believe that this infamous resolution was the cause of prolonging the struggle for another six months.

After the Truce of 1921 I got a cheque for £4. 10s. from Mr. Guy for car hire expenses, from Clara to Tuam.

The reorganisation of the North Galway Brigade I.R.A. was now fairly complete as the Dunmore Battalion was fully staffed. Tuam constituted the 1st Battalion, Dunmore the 2nd. James Moloney was Battalion O/C. here, Jack Knight Quartermaster and Martin Ryan was Adjutant. I am unable to say how many Companies were in the latter. But in the 1st Battalion, of which I was Adjutant, there were ten Companies. The Company Officers on the 11th July, 1921, were -

Peter McHugh, Tuam Company, Tom Feerick, Miltown Company, Tom Hannon, Belmount Company, M. Fleming, Abbey Company, William Feeney, Corofin Company, Michael Kelly, Gardenfield Company, Tim Dunleavy, Barnaderg Company, Patrick McHugh, Sylane Company, Tom Wilson, Cortoon Company, Frank Cunningham, Kilconly Company.

Prior to the 11th July some changes had to be made for obvious reasons as, in the case of Corofin Company where Tom Feeney the O/C. was succeeded by William Feeney, Gardenfield, where the O/C., Wm. Higgins, was courtmartialled and replaced by Michael Kelly; Tuam Company where Peter McHugh succeeded the former O/C., Patrick Geoghegan.

Of the above mentioned officers only three now remain in Ireland. There are four in America and three more died in recent years. Out of the Battalion staff there is but one survivor, Seán O'Neill. The others are dead. The Brigade Adjutant, Tom Tormey and the Brigade Quartermaster, Patrick Conway, are in the U.S.A. The Brigade I.O., Tom Kilgarriff and the Brigade M.O., Dr. Mangan, are dead. So very few of the Brigade, Battalion or Company officers now remain.

During the early period of activities men from Tuam Battalion area took part in the attack on Castlehacket and Castlegrove R.I.C. barracks. These attacks were not confined or carried out as an operation by any particular battalion or body of men but were, as far as I know, directed by what was then known as The Galway Brigade. I do not know who was in charge as I was not then in Tuam or Galway County. But I think Seamus Murphy, who was former O/C., Galway Brigade, ought to know. Tommy O'Grady, U.S.A., former Brigade Adjutant, Con Fogarty, Jim Moloney and Joe Cooney all who claim to have been there may have already given their version of the attack.

Another night's attack was carried out on Loughgeorge barracks. The late Dr. Paddy Mullins with whom I was a prisoner in Galway, or Seamus Murphy may have already given an account of these two

engagements. Many contradictory statements and claims have been made with regard to night operations as to who was actually engaged and who was not, especially when widely separated groups or individuals were involved. Under such circumstances men may have met for the first time and never again afterwards.

I was specially sent with Con Fogarty many years age to investigate a case where a number of men from Ower Bridge area on the Mayo, Galway border, were involved. The applicants for a Service Certificate swore and were vigorous in their affirmation that they took part in the attack on Lough George R.I.C. barracks and gave Dr. Paddy Mullins' name as the man who could verify the facts for them. But a certain verifying officer who was accepted by the Pensions Board as a post Truce certifying officer stated that they were not there. I may add that this verifying officer, V. Corcoran, did not accompany Con Fogarty and myself when we met the men of Ower Bridge area. He considered it wiser to steer clear! When we reported back and asked Mr. Corcoran how he knew these men were not present he was not able to answer. And when further pressed to state who was actually present and who was in charge he could but give a hazy answer. The Ower Bridge men did not serve under him. In fact, they told me they never knew or heard of his name until the Civil War period. This verifying officer's only defence was (when I confronted him), "I told the Pensions Board that they were not there and I cannot go back in my statement". "But", I suggested, make it clear to the Board that you are not too sure and leave the matter of verification to Dr. Paddy Mullins". I am fully convinced that these men were there - and if the truth were known - had a stronger claim than the verifying officer who claimed to know all about it!

The absence of many of those who could verify made the task a difficult one for many applicants and left an 'open door' for others

who had no scruple in taking an advantage of the position in making an exhorbitant or false claim.

Twenty years after the Truce some claimants paraded their service so as to convince the unwary that they were the men who won the 'Tan War'. I regret I have to be severe. But the truth is severe at times for all of us and I would cease to write further if I were not free to tell the truth.

In the late stages of 1919 a considerable sum by way of a Volunteer fund was built up in the Tuam Battalion area. Arms were then practically unprocurable at any price, and as a local estate named Barbersfort was then about to be sold the local Volunteer Executive decided to purchase the house and estate on behalf of the Volunteers. This was done principally for the purpose of preventing a grabber from securing the estate. And so the place was purchased out of Volunteer funds and the following trustees on behalf of the Volunteers were appointed :- Michael Moran, Tom Kilgarriff, Paddy Conway, Dr. Mangan and, I think, Tom Dunleavy. The estate was set for grazing to the local uneconomic landholders and local members of the Volunteers and the rents were collected by a Mr. Hughes.

But as a result of the Civil War all the trustees were forced to go 'on the run' or were captured or imprisoned. Michael Moran, one of the trustees, was shot by the Black & Tans in November 1920. Doctor Mangan, Brigade M.O. and Tom Kilgarriff, Brigade I.O. died; Paddy Conway, Brigade Quartermaster, and Thomas Tormey, Brigade Adjutant, emigrated to the U.S.A. and so Barbersfort House and estate fell into the hands of an ex-Captain of the Free State Army.

This assignment of property purchased out of Volunteer funds was quite feasible at this unhappy period, and political bias and patronage played an important part in the matter of transfer. But immediately

after the Truce of 1921 there was a good deal of discontent and agitation over the estate and clashes between the Dunleavys and local uneconomic landholders took place from time to time. Unhappily, it fell to my lot on one occasion to arrest a couple of men who were agitating for this estate. I was reluctant to do so but I had my orders from the then Brigade O/C., Patrick Dunleavy. The men were arrested, blindfolded and taken to a secret place of detention for some time. Indeed these blindfolded men would receive severe physical punishment from certain would-be aggressors who accompanied me were it not for the fact that I asserted I was in charge of the prisoners and that the first man who again would attempt to trip or strike them would run the risk of getting a .45 bullet. On receiving an assurance sometime afterwards that the prisoners would not again interfere in the dispute they were released.

But I often felt afterwards that the one big mistake the Battalion made was to purchase this estate at all. To make matters worse neither the local Volunteers nor the landless men of the area benefited as a result of the purchase. It simply became the property of one individual.

In 1933 Barbersfort House was burned and a substantial claim for compensation was made against the Galway County Council. But subsequent investigation by the Garda Siochana proved that the house was not maliciously burned but was a deliberate act of arson on the part of those in occupation in order to get compensation. When Mr. Patrick Dunleavy and other conspirators were charged with arson and the wilful destruction of the house the case was put to a Jury before Mr. Justice Wyse-Power at the Galway Criminal Sessions. But a friendly Free State Jury aquitted the accused. But Mr. Justice Wyse-Power disagreed with the Jury's decision and warned the accused that if the matter were left to him he would teach them a salutary lesson and send them to jail.

This is the most unpalatable part of my history and I find no pleasure in recording it. Hence my reason for saying at an earlier stage that I find it difficult to record only events up to 11th July, 1921, especially when matters relative to the Volunteers and Volunteer funds were so closely connected with subsequent happenings.

In 1919, Tuam was the first town in Ireland to initiate the Boycott of Belfast goods. Sinn Féin and the local national movements gave every support to the project. Traders and businessmen refused to buy Belfast goods and Belfast travellers had to go away empty-handed. This movement gathered momentum and practically every town in Connaught followed in the footsteps of Tuam and trade between Belfast and Connaught became negligible or non-existent.

Furthermore,if any such goods were found in a train or railway-siding it was liable to be destroyed by the I.R.A. so that there was no alternative but to cease trading with Belfast altogether.

At this time too, Sinn Fein Arbitration Courts were in full swing and practically all litigants recognised the Sinn Fein Courts and submitted their cases to that body. English Courts were boycotted or ignored and no patriotic Irishman or woman would submit his or her case to the jurisdiction of a foreign power or invader on Irish soil. The majority of cases were amicably settled with justice and fairness between the parties in dispute and litigants generally became friendly and strictly observed the findings or rulings of the Sinn Féin Courts. Mrs. Thomas B. Costello (or Senator) was one of the principal local judges. Patrick Maloney, Brownsgrove, and A. B. O'Connor of Cortoon were her colleagues on the Bench.

In 1919-1920, the following R.I.C. barracks were evacuated and subsequently destroyed by the I.R.A. - Castlehacket R.I.C. Barracks, Castlegrove R.I.C. Barracks and Barnaderg R.I.C. Barracks. An R.I.C.

hut at Abbeyknockmoy which was also evacuated was destroyed by the I.R.A.

On the other hand the R.I.C. and 'Tans' destroyed or burned down the Sinn Fein hall at Adergoole and the Sinn Fein hall at Sylane.

After the Kilroe ambush in the Headford area the R.I.C. and 'Tans' carried out a number of reprisals. Three men named Hoade, Keville and Collins were murdered. McHugh's dwelling house at Sylane was burned and a number of others shut up.

After the attack on two R.I.C. men at Blake's public house, Kilconly, more indiscriminate shooting at civilians on the roads or in the fields were indulged in by the enemy whenever they passed in lorries or Lancia cars. A man named Banks of Sylane was fired at and wounded. Another man named Martin Kelly of Brownsgrove, on his way home from the Tuam market, was fired at and wounded in the arm. Other civilians who were working in the fields would have to throw themselves flat on the ground to save themselves from the volleys aimed at them by the murder gang as they passed on their lorries.

Regarding the actual attack on the R.I.C. at Blake's, Kilconly - an area which our men were not well conversant with - faulty information was the big factor in the failure of the attack. The local scouts who were well known in the public house were afraid to enter to find out exactly the strength of the R.I.C. force within. One messenger told us that there were six R.I.C. inside and another, three. However, the attack would have been successful had the Battalion O/C, Tom Dunleavy, taken the Battalion Adjutant's advice and entered the shop where the R.I.C. were drinking. We were ordered to wait until the R.I.C. came out - and waiting for an hour and a half outside in the cold has a depressing effect on men who are impatient to get the job over.

When the two R.I.C. emerged at about 11 p.m. they were given order to halt and then a volley was discharged at them. The R.I.C. roared for mercy and evidently threw themselves flat and crawled some distance away. The night was black dark which helped them to escape. However, I am informed on reliable authority that one of them was wounded.

In April, 1921, an attack on an armoured car and three Lancie cars took place at Carrorea on the Tuam-Dunmore Road. At about 5 a.m. our Active Service Unit took possession of a couple of cottages overlooking the road through which the enemy passed on certain days to and from Dunmore to their Headquarters at Tuam. It was usual for the R.I.C. and Tans to travel by a different route and return by some other unexpected way. Their hours of travel were unsettled and varied so as to ensure the safety of their force. Even if a well-planned ambush was prepared at any point they may not come that way but by another and unexpected route. The I.R.A. had to contend with many disappointments as a result of these tactics and lightly equipped I.R.A. units were at a disadvantage against armoured cars, Lancia or caged-in vehicles. Shot gun men at the latter stages, in our area, would be of little avail against machine guns concealed and protected by armour. On this occasion only the best possible riflemen were engaged or permitted to take part. Our rifles were concentrated with good effect and I am convinced that accurate fire was brought to bear on all the vehicles that passed that day. Proof of this could be gleaned later as the R.I.C. issued a statement in the press that a machine gun was used on them. All the enemy cars accelerated and raced without a stop to Dunmore. But as traces of blood later were revealed on the road and in Dunmore it was concluded that at least a couple were wounded. Tom Dunleavy, Battalion O/C., and Sean O'Neill, Battalion Adjutant, were in charge.

Tom Ryan, Battalion Quartermaster, Tom Wilson, O/C.; Cortoon Company, Michael Cleary, Brian Cunniffe, F. Dolan and a number of others took part in the attack. But to the surprise of many, the Brigade O/C., Patrick Dunleavy, made some lame excuse and left the scene of the ambush a couple of hours before it came off. As all the available rifles in the Brigade area were mustered and used on this occasion many of the participants felt that there was no earthly reason why the Brigade O/C should leave the scene of action when his services were so urgently needed.

After this attack a chemist named McKeevers of Dunmore was taken out and brutally murdered. His arms and legs were broken and he was mutilated before they riddled him with bullets. Another man named Mullins - a civilian from the Clonberne area - was shot dead as he was unharnessing a horse from under a cart. Another man named James Kirwan, Ballinstrack, Tuam, was also murdered.

An attempted ambush some time afterwards was prepared at Pollredmond near Dunmore. All our men were keyed up and enjoyed the hours of expectation. I do believe that every man would have given a good account of himself had the enemy turned up, as we were all confident that our position was a good one and victory would be ours. But the enemy failed to put in an appearance.

Another prepared ambush took place at Pollacopple near Barnaderg on the Tuam-Ballinasloe Road. Over forty shot-gun men and all the available rifle men were lying in ambush on this occasion. All the shot-gun men, when spread out, had the protection of a good strong stone wall right beside the road. The coping stones here and there were removed so as to place the double-barrelled guns in position. The rifle-men were placed on a rising ground a little to the back on the right. Another failure. But had the enemy

arrived I have no doubt but that they would suffer heavy casualties as every man was ordered to use his double-barrell effectively.

And still another -or what might be termed a concerted attack on pickets in Tuam, Miltown and Dunmore. Our rifle-men split up into three sections. One section was to go to Tuam at night; the other to Miltown and the other to Dunmore. I, together with Tom Dunleavy, Battalion O/C, and Tom Ryan, Battalion Quartermaster, went through cross-country into Tuam and searched the greater part of the town for a patrol but failed to locate any. At this time there were 400 soldiers billeted in the Parkmore Race Course beside the town and about 30 R.I.C. and 'Tans' in the R.I.C. barracks. The Brigade O/C. and his men failed to go to Miltown! This heavy concentration of military and R.I.C. etc. in Tuam during the Anglo-Irish war was due to the fact that the British had not forgotten that Tuam and Dunmore and North Galway generally were pretty active during the Rising of 1916.

Another sniping attack on two lorries took place at Moylough about June 1921. Moylough is outside the boundary of the Tuam Brigade area and should normally be in James Heaverty's Battalion area. But as there was little or no activity in that area the R.I.C. had greater scope to concentrate on Tuam and North Galway.

An attack on an R.I.C. patrol at night on the outskirts of Miltown was successful. Two R.I.C. were killed and a Black & Tan had a narrow escape as the crown of his cap was pierced by a rifle bullet. Two Lee Enfield rifles were secured here. Thomas Dunleavy, Battalion O/C., was in charge. Some few days after the Truce of 1921 I visited the Miltown Company area for the purpose of reorganisation and further training in military camps which were about to be established. I met Thomas Feerick, O/C., Miltown Company, and Dan McCormack, 1st.Lieutenant of the same Company, in a business house named Sheridan's of Miltown.

A Black & Tan entered and volunteered to stand a drink to those present, but we refused. The 'Tan' evidently was glad to be alive and wished to show no ill will. However, he pointed to his cap and showed us the bullet hole. Certainly he had a narrow shave. I may add here that Tom Feerick was an excellent soldier. He is now dead. An excellent soldier also was the genial Dan McCormack whose very soul was centered on his task; a fearless man who, I am sorry to say, lost his arm and leg in the Civil War. Even though Dan received a bullet through the throat in addition, he survived and was as ready to joke and issue his hearty and familiar laugh which was contagious for all those round. Dan too, is dead. May this overgrown boy with the hearty laugh rest in peace.

As there was but little activity in the Mountbellew area of which Mr. Heaverty was Battalion O/C., we decided some months prior to the Truce to relieve Mr. Heaverty of his old "Martini" rifle. A couple of men from the Tuam Battalion were ordered to go to Mr. Heaverty's house and demand the rifle. They had definite instructions not to come back without it. Mr. Heaverty took the warning and handed over the gun. And this old rifle was used in the Tuam Brigade area prior to the Truce of 1921 and afterwards again during the Civil War.

Shortly before the Truce of 1921, a great force of R.I.C., "Tans" and military, aided by a spotter plane, covered systematically a wide area in search of our Active Service Unit. And, although some of our men had a very narrow escape, the enemy failed in his action to round up any of our men. Indeed, the day they searched the hills and bogs around Kilkerrin and gave a rough time to the natives of the little town itself, our Active Service Unit entered the village that same night and got a full account of the day's happenings as we purchased some cigarettes and boots for our men in Finegan's shop of Kilkerrin.

And as I remember Kilkerrin, I remember on another occasion having walked one night from Tuam to the village and three miles beyond it - a distance of 14 miles - to what we considered a 'safe' house. But when we got there at 2 a.m. to our surprise we found Mr. Stephens awaiting us 'on the run'. The owner didn't consider his own house a safe place for a man to rest his head in case of reprisals. However, tired and weary limbs must rest somewhere so we resolved to remain for a couple of days rest. I was accompanied on this occasion by Tom Dunleavy, Battalion O/C., and my true and fearless friend Tommy Ryan, Battalion Quartermaster.

Tommy Ryan is dead. I soldiered with him in after-years. But the memory of Tommy will always remain vivid in my mind. It was his carefree, natural and utter fearlessness which seemed to make life happier on the rough and rugged road. Aye, even when death stared one in the face and stalked the land. And as we - on many occasions - lay down at night with a webley under our pillow, our three Lee Enfields near at hand I often felt that had we more men of Ryan's calibre, the Tans would hold no terrors for our people.

From Lavally School to Blake's, Kilconly, is over 11 miles, and 11 miles back is 22 miles. But such a march was all in an evening's work in those days. Our only security was our trusted guns. To know the bye-roads rather than the high-roads was always an added security for a small force of I.R.A. men such as ours.

And now I must say a word about our local blacksmith Tommy Kelly of Lavally. For a considerable time prior to and up to the Truce of 11th July, 1921, there was a light cavalry force in Tuam. And this force used to exercise their horses from time to time on the road leading from Tuam to Dunmore. At one given point on the road a flat low-lying area near the Garrauns Race Course - where there was no shelter from rifle fire - they would gallop fast. Their hours and

days for exercise were varied and irregular, but the gallop at the danger point was always the same. Tommy the blacksmith (and who often repaired a gun for us) said he could bring their gallop to a halt. "I can make a triangle" he said, "which will bring every man and horse to the ground". Tommy then outlined his plan and in his spare time made dozens of those deadly spikes. No matter how you threw this novel triangle, a strong steel spike pointed upwards - a most dangerous weapon for any animal to tred on. However, for other reasons - especially on account of the danger to the farmers' horses, we decided not to use them. Tommy meant well. He had a genius, like many blacksmiths of old, to manufacture something which would serve the cause of Irish freedom. Indeed, Tommy Kelly claimed to be one of the direct descendants of the O'Kellys the blacksmiths who shod the horses for Patrick Sarsfield before the famous ride and exploits at Ballyneety. May his generous spirit and heroic soul rest in peace.

Details such as these are of little moment, but I shall leave to others ample scope to fill the blanks and complete the story of events in Tuam Brigade area during the Anglo-Irish War of Independence.

Signed: Seán O'Neill
(Sean O'Neill)
Adjutant, 1st Battalion,
Tuam Brigade,
1st Western Division 1921.

Director of Organisation,
1st Brigade 1922-'23,
1st Western Division.

Date: 27th July, 1955

Witness: C. Moynihan
(C. Moynihan)