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ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1229

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,229

Witness

James Mansfield,
9 Garvan's Terrace,
Dungarvan,
Co. Waterford.

Identity.

Commandant Third Battalion
West Waterford Brigade.

Subject.

Irish Volunteer activities
Dungarvan-Ardmore, Co. Waterford, 1913-1923.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S. 2539

Form B.S.M. 2

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY/1913-21 BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1229

STATEMENT BY JAMES MANSFIELD

9 Garvan's Terrace, Dungarvan, Co. Waterford.

I was born at Crobally, Old Parish, Dungarvan, my parents being farmers and, in my young days, was a member of the local G.A.A. football and hurling teams.

When a company of the National Volunteers was formed in the district in 1913, I joined up and was 1st Lieutenant of Old Parish Company.

There were about 25 of us in the company, but we had little or no guns and most of the time was spent marching and drilling.

When the split in the Volunteers happened in 1915, the Old Parish Company broke up and I took no further part in Volunteer activities. There was no Volunteer company in Old Parish when the Rising of 1916 broke out in Dublin.

On the reorganisation of the Irish Volunteers in mid-1917, the company was got going again with myself in charge. We had about ten men who included my two brothers, Mick and Charlie. There were a few shotguns in the company and a .22 rifle which we used for target practice.

Late in 1917, another Volunteer Company was formed in Ardmore, Co. Waterford, about six miles west of Old Parish, and I was appointed O/C. of the Company with the Old Parish Company being a sort of outpost to Ardmore. I had about 20 men in Ardmore who had, between them, about half a dozen shotguns at that time.

During the parliamentary by-election of February 1918, in Waterford City between Dr. Vincent White representing Sinn Fein, and Captain Willie Redmond representing the Irish Party, I went in to Waterford City with about a dozen other Volunteers from the Dungarvan area to help to keep order and give protection to the Sinn Fein candidate and his election workers, who were

being savagely attacked by the ex-British soldier element in Waterford and by the Ballybricken (Waterford) pig-buyers, all of whom strongly supported Redmond in the election campaign. I might add that the R.I.C., who were supposed to maintain order in the city, openly encouraged the Redmondite mobs in their attacks on sympathisers of Sinn Fein.

Whilst engaged on election duty in Waterford City and when we were billeted in the Volunteer Hall in Thomas Street, we were fired on with rifles by British ex-servicemen at points outside the Hall. A couple of our lads who had revolvers replied to the fire and dispersed the attackers; but our main weapon of defence was a stick or hurley, which we were compelled to use on many occasions during this election.

During the later months of 1917 I was engaged organising Volunteer companies in Ring, Clashmore, Colligan, Villierstown, Kinsalebeg and Piltown, Co. Waterford, in the area known as the 3rd Battalion area, and was appointed commandant of that battalion in December 1917.

The arms position at that time was poor. Although we had a strength of about 300, we had only a few dozen shotguns and about three or four revolvers, the latter we got from brigade headquarters, the O/C. of which was Pax Whelan of Dungarvan, Co. Waterford.

Early in the year 1918, I received orders from the Brigade O/C. to try and contact German submarines which were operating off the south coast of Ireland against British merchant shipping in the course of the First World War. The idea was to secure some guns from the Germans. We put to sea at night in boats off Stradbally, a village on the Waterford coast, situated about five miles east of Dungarvan. There was a password (which I cannot remember) to be given to the German submarine commanders when we made contact. I had men from the Ring Company also at sea on the lookout for these submarines.

We spent many night on this task, but we never did succeed in contacting any of the German 'U' boats.

The years 1918 and 1919 were mainly devoted to general organisation of the companies in my battalion with particular reference to the acquisition of arms and ammunition. To increase our meagre store of arms, the raiding of farmhouses and houses of the landed gentry was begun. These raids took place at night time and were carried out by small parties of about half a dozen men. At times, we had advance information from servants in the house of the whereabouts of any guns or ammunition; but in no case, to my knowledge, was there any active opposition to our men. Invariably, the guns, which were usually of the shotgun type, were handed over without demur. We did acquire a few revolvers and a rifle or two in these raids, but the results generally certainly increased our 'fire power' and made the boys more anxious to come to grips with the enemy.

We had now about 100 shotguns in the battalion, with a few revolvers. We loaded our own cartridges using old cartridge cases for the purpose, and made our own buckshot and powder.

I got the Intelligence Service going in the battalion about this period and commenced systematic holds-up of rural postmen and post offices to examine the mails for any information which might be useful to us.

By the end of 1919, my battalion strength was approximately 300, about a third having guns of some description.

In September 1919, I was advised by the Brigade O/C. of an attack on a military party to take place in the town of Fermoy, Co. Cork. The attack was in charge of Liam Lynch. In the event of the attack proving successful it was anticipated that about 30 rifles would be captured from the British, and these rifles, with any captured ammunition and equipment, would be brought to the Youghal area where I was instructed to post scouts over a wide district, to contact cars bringing the

the captured material. I carried out these instructions, but none of the rifles from the successful Fermoy ambush came our way.

The day following the Fermoy attack, I received a note from Pax Whelan, our Brigade O/C., to go to Youghal and pick up Liam Lynch who had been wounded the previous day in Fermoy. I went by car to Youghal, contacted the Volunteers there, but they had no information as to the whereabouts of Liam. They sent for some girl who told me that Liam had gone to Ardmore with the clerk of the Youghal Urban District Council. I later learned that Lynch had contacted the I.R.B. organisation in Youghal rather than use the I.R.A. I went then to Ardmore and, en route, ran into a patrol of R.I.C. I pretended to be examining the car for some defect and they passed on.

Approaching close to Ardmore, I met up with Lynch who was wounded near the collar bone. He was accompanied by a man named Walsh. I signalled him and went on in the direction of Ardmore where the two men caught up with me and came along with me into the village. Whilst Lynch was in Ardmore, I arranged to have the R.I.C. barracks covered (unobtrusively) by the guns of the local Volunteers. I later took Liam Lynch on to Dungarvam.

Attack on Ardmore Barracks.

At a brigade meeting held in the Town Hall, Dungarvan, in January 1920, it was decided to attack the R.I.C. barracks at Ardmore, Co. Waterford. This barracks had a garrison of 12 men, some of whom had been transferred from vacated barracks in the neighbourhood. The building was a two-storeyed stone and slated one. It was loopholed for firing and was in the main street of the village.

The intention was that a land-mine be exploded against the gable end of the building and the barracks then rushed and captured.

At about 12 o'clock, midnight, on January 17th, 1920, approximately, 30 men, practically all of whom were from my own battalion (3rd), were in position at the front and rear of the barracks. Upwards of 40 others were on outpost duty on the roads leading from the village, having erected obstructions to prevent the approach of enemy troops by road, principally from Youghal five miles to the east, or from Dungarvan twelve miles to the west.

As the party who were detailed to place the mine in position were about to do so, a shot rang out, fired accidentally by one of our men. Immediately the R.I.C. in the barracks were alerted and the garrison opened heavy fire with rifles and bombs. It was impossible for us to place the land mine in the place originally intended and to put it elsewhere near the barracks would result in the neighbouring houses being blown up. We replied to the enemy fire with shotguns and rifles, but, as the element of surprise in the attack was now gone and all hope of capturing the garrison gone with it, it was decided, after about half an hour, to call off the fight.

We suffered no casualties on that occasion and I cannot say whether or not the R.I.C. suffered any.

Although the R.I.C. garrison sent up Verey lights for assistance immediately, firing commenced, our men dispersed without meeting any enemy forces.

On 4th April 1920, following, I believe, a general order issued to all I.R.A. units by G.H.Q., Colligan R.I.C. Barracks, which was vacated a short time previously, was burned.

Attack on R.I.C. patrol at Kinsalebeg.

Early in May 1920, a party of R.I.C. patrolling on bicycles were ambushed and captured at Kinsalebeg, about four miles east of Youghal. The attack was carried out during the day-time by men of the Piltown Company numbering six men under

their Company O/C. James Fitzgerald. These men were armed with shotguns and forced the R.I.C. to surrender after an exchange of shots without any casualties being inflicted on either side. Four bicycles, four revolvers and about a hundred rounds of ammunition were captured.

Burning of Captain King's car at Dungarvan.

For several months previous to January 1920, Captain King, Inspector of Police for the Dungarvan district, had been noted by us as being particularly over-zealous in the matter of raiding the houses of I.R.A. men. In the course of a raid on my own home at Crobally, Old Parish, Dungarvan, he was particularly incensed at not finding my brother Mick or myself at home and threatened my mother (with his revolver) that he would shoot her if she would not divulge our whereabouts. Needless to say, she refused.

With a view to warning him of the consequences of his officiousness, it was decided to burn his motor car outside his house. This 'warning' was intended to be a preliminary to more drastic action if King did not mend his ways.

One night his car was taken, placed outside his home, drenched with petrol and set alight.

Shortly afterwards, King was transferred to Mallow at his own request.

Stradbally R.I.C. Barracks attacked.

In the month of May 1920, the 2nd Battalion arranged to attack the R.I.C. Barracks at Stradbally, Co. Waterford, about six miles east of Dungarvan on the coast road. My instructions were that the 3rd Battalion (of which I was O/C.) should cut the road communications within a radius of six to ten miles in the neighbourhood of Stradbally on the night of the attack. Trees were felled across the roads and telephone wires cut. About forty of my men were engaged on this duty.

The attack itself was not a success, due, I believe, to the failure of home-made bombs to explode on the roof of the barracks. None of my men made contact with any enemy forces on the night in question.

Disarming of police patrol at Crushea.

In July 1920, at Crushea, about two miles east of Ardmore, a funeral was taking place. Two R.I.C. men carrying revolvers 'tailed' along with the funeral. When the proceedings were over a few men from the Ardmore Company jumped on the R.I.C. men and took their bicycles, revolvers, and ammunition.

About this period, all police patrols were being held up almost every night they went out in the 3rd Battalion area, with the result that eventually no armed patrols went out at all, except when escorted by a strong party of military.

On 15th August 1920, we held up mails at Piltown (about 2 miles north east of Youghal) and a party of about twenty of us lay in ambush for military expected to come out from Youghal when news of the hold-up of the mails reached there. On this particular occasion I personally sent a message to the O/C. of the military in Youghal inviting him to come out with his men and fight. He sent me back another message asking me to come into Youghal and fight it out there. The British did not accept the challenge, neither did I accept their offer, for obvious reasons.

Attack on Ardmore R.I.C. Barracks (August 1920).

In August 1920, a further attempt was made to capture the R.I.C. barracks in Ardmore. About 30 to 40 men of my battalion were engaged. The majority were armed with shotguns. We had a few rifles and revolvers. The men were all placed in positions at night for the attack which was planned to take place the following morning.

It was customary for the local postman - a man named Patrick Horton and a member of the Ardmore Company - to deliver the post to the police barracks about 8 a.m. and he was instructed to hold the door open (when the police were taking in the post) and enable us to rush into the barracks.

At the last moment the R.I.C. became aware of our intentions through the screaming of an R.I.C. man's wife who lived in the village. This woman spotted some of our lads and ran out into the street shouting a warning to the garrison. The postman went to the barracks with his post, but, instead of opening the door in response to his knock, the police opened fire with rifles, machine guns and bombs. Verey lights were sent up and a party of Marines, who had occupied the coast-guard station at Ardmore some time previously, opened a barrage of machine-gun fire on all the roads leading from Ardmore. The coastguard station was about 400 yards from the R.I.C. barracks and was on high ground overlooking the village.

Meanwhile, our men were engaging the R.I.C. and also the Marines. Rifle fire was directed at the latter to prevent a sortie. We succeeded in containing the Marines in the coastguard station and I withdrew my men from the village as all hope of attaining our original objective had now gone.

Reinforcements of British troops came out from Youghal about 10 a.m. but these were not attacked by our men as we dispersed.

Later in the day, the men of the Ardmore Company were mobilised on receipt of information that enemy troops (Black and Tans) were coming out from Dungarvan en route to Ardmore after having been attacked at Kiely's Cross by a 3rd Battalion outpost there at 10 a.m. These Black and Tans were proceeding across country on foot towards Ardmore and were attacked at 4 p.m. one mile from Ardmore, at Monea. A running fight

lasting half an hour took place, the enemy having two wounded. We suffered no casualties.

It was in the late August or Early September 1920, when the West Waterford Brigade Flying Column was formed with George Lennon of Dungarvan as O/C., and Mick, my brother, Vice O/C. There were about a dozen men at the start, this number increased to approximately 20 men later on. The majority were armed with shotguns and revolvers. We had only a few rifles.

Piltown Ambush. (Ordnance Sheet reference 22, 1" to mile 8H)

Late in October 1920, George Lennon and the nucleus of the Flying Column was in the Old Parish district when a conference was held as to the best means of enticing the British out from Youghal and ambushing them at Piltown. It was finally decided that a feint attack be made by our lads on Ardmore R.I.C. Barracks and on the Marine post at Ardmore, but that the attack should be a sustained one on this occasion. This, it was hoped, would draw the military out from Youghal. All Souls' night - 1st November - was the date fixed for the operation.

On the day previous, I had orders issued to all the men in my battalion, giving them instructions where to proceed for action. Special men from each company were ordered to be in readiness to reinforce the column, which had moved into the area, following the ambush at the Pike just outside Dungarvan.

Companies of outside battalions of the West Waterford Brigade were also mobilised to block roads, cut wires and hold up any reinforcements from Dungarvan as it was considered that the strongest British force to relieve Ardmore would come from there. The Brickey, Kiely's Cross, Ring, Old Parish and Dungarvan companies were detailed to

hold back any military likely to come from that point by any route. Sections of the Ballycurrane, Clashmore, Old Parish and Piltown Companies were on scout duty on the different roads leading to Piltown and an armed party drawn from these companies took up a position at the Ferry Point, opposite Youghal, to cope with the possibility of a landing of British troops at that point, or a crossing of military by boat from Youghal.

The main attacking body took up their positions at Piltown Cross at the appointed hour, 8.30 p.m. Piltown Cross is about two miles north east of Youghal and three miles from Ardmore, the main Youghal-Dungarvan road being intersected at the point by the road leading from Clashmore to Monatrea. As an ambush position it did not possess any outstanding feature, except that advantage could be taken of it for concentrated fire and close-up fighting.

I went by bicycle to Ardmore about 7 p.m. accompanied by Pat Keating of Comeragh, and Pakeen Whelan (not 'Pax' Whelan) of Dungarvan. On arriving at Ardmore, I placed the local company in firing positions and waited the beginning of the attack which was signalled by Pat Keating and Pakeen Whelan throwing bombs in through the fanlight of the barracks. Immediately the bombs exploded, firing was begun by our lads and sustained at intervals. Seeing that everything in Ardmore was proceeding as planned, I returned with Keating and Whelan by bike to Piltown Cross, where we arrived about 11 p.m. As we made our way to Piltown we could see the Verey lights going up from the police barracks and the Marine Station at Ardmore. Heavy firing was also going on.

Whilst the precaution of cutting the communication wires to Dungarvan had been taken, the wires leading from Ardmore to Youghal were left untouched, the success of the whole plan depending on a convoy of British military issuing from the

latter town to the relief of Ardmore. In order to do so the British would have to pass through the ambush point at Piltown Cross.

On returning to the ambush position, I had a look at the disposition of our forces and then went to a point behind a low hedge and about 20 yards behind a barricade and trench on the roadway. I was armed with a revolver. About twenty of our men with rifles and shotguns lined the fence at either side of the road in the vicinity of the barricade. About ten or twelve others with shotguns were on higher ground overlooking the barricade and about 100 yards behind it. Meanwhile, the scouts on duty had been reporting the movements of the British garrison in Youghal. "Lights out" had been sounded in the barracks at the usual time. At 11 p.m. or thereabouts, the scouts reported resumed activity within the barracks. Lights, they said, began to show there, to be followed by the sound of the buzzing of motor engines. A little later - about 11.45 p.m. - further reports from the scouts indicated that the British were leaving Youghal. Ten minutes later the scouts passed on the message "Here they come!"

One lorry of British military appeared out of the darkness heading for the ambush point and ran right up to the barricade. The order to fire was given and in the first fusillade the driver of the military lorry was killed. Further bursts of fire were poured into the lorry with very little signs of reply from the British, who were panic-stricken at the sudden turn of events.

After a short time, a lull came in the firing, and the order was given for our lads to get out on the road and charge the lorry. The cries of the wounded British soldiers could be heard and then came a shout "We surrender". This was followed by renewed firing on the part of the British and some of our lads, who were very close to the lorry, dived underneath it and fired up through it. Very soon the military

on the roadway.

As the first shots in the attack were fired, the officer in charge of the troops jumped from the lorry into the position occupied by myself and some shotgun men. He was immediately captured and disarmed. The fact that their O/C. had disappeared from the action so suddenly had, no doubt, a demoralising effect on the Tommies, who showed "no stomach" for a fight.

In the confusion, before the surrender, a number of the British had got away under cover of darkness. On rounding up what remained, 30 men were made prisoners. Two of the enemy forces were killed and six wounded. Our men suffered no casualties.

Following the surrender, about 30 rifles, equipment and hundreds of rounds of ammunition were captured, together with a quantity of grenades.

Transport, in the shape of a dray, was procured to enable the British to take their wounded back to Youghal, and every possible assistance in the way of first aid was rendered by us.

Some members of the R. I. C., who were acting as guides to the party, were questioned and, on promising to resign from the force, were allowed to go free with the military. One of the R. I. C. men who had given his word to resign, but did not do so, was killed a month later in an engagement near Youghal bridge.

Attack on R. I. C. Patrol at Youghal Bridge.

On 2nd December 1920, information reached me concerning a patrol of six R. I. C. who used cross over Youghal Bridge on the second day of every month to bring a pay cheque to an R. I. C. pensioner who was in charge of the drawbridge. This man lived in a lodge on the Waterford side of the Blackwater.

About eight of our lads lay in hiding on a hill overlooking the bridge and when the patrol was half way across the bridge, rifle fire was opened. One R. I. C. man was killed and two

wounded. The man killed was the one referred to in my account of the ambush at Piltown a month earlier.

Reinforcements of troops immediately began to pour out of Youghal military barracks, which was situated directly opposite the bridge on the Youghal side, a quarter of a mile away. Our men were compelled to retire in view of the overwhelming superiority of the enemy forces.

After this incident, the British opened the drawbridge and took the key away. The bridge remained open until the Truce of July the following year.

Abortive ambush at Old Parish.

It was shortly after the successful Piltown ambush of 1st November 1920, when I got word that my home at Crobally, Old Parish, was to be raided. These raids were of very frequent occurrence and considerable hardship to my people was caused as a result. Both myself and my brother Mick were 'wanted' men at the time.

On this occasion I decided that I should do something about these raids, so I got four good men and went to meet the raiders. I strung telephone wires across the road about four miles from my home to bring the raiding lorry to a stop and we waited with shotguns to give the raiders a hot reception. The lorry of troops came along as expected, but the wire we had placed was fixed too low and was not tight enough, with the result that the lorry cut through it. The ground was too 'open' to fight it out there and then, and, although I had almost decided to have a crack at them on the return journey, I was afraid they might be carrying a prisoner (which, as a matter of fact, turned out to be correct) so I reluctantly had to call the whole thing off.

It was during this year, 1920, that I first became a member of the I. R. B., having been sworn in by Pax Whelan, O/C. West Waterford Brigade.

Early in February 1921, I happened to have my battalion headquarters at Clashmore about two miles west of Piltown. It was, I well remember, on a Sunday morning. I was awakened and told the immediate countryside was swarming with British troops from Fermoy, apparently engaged in a big round-up. I got together four of my lads who had rifles and took up a position overlooking the village of Clashmore. Prior to the British troops reaching Clashmore, Jim Fitzgerald, captain of the Piltown Company, had spotted them and had been sniping at them with a rifle. He moved his position from time to time to give the impression that a number of men were in action. This slowed down the enemy advance towards Clashmore and put us on our guard; otherwise we might have been in great danger of encirclement and capture.

From our position overlooking Clashmore, we could see the military searching the congregation leaving Mass. There must have been upwards of 400 troops engaged. Although it would have been quite a simple matter for the five of us to 'lay low' quite a few of the Tommies, I decided to hold our fire as, undoubtedly, the British would run amok and create a massacre amongst the civilians leaving the Church, if any of their men were made casualties. I eventually withdrew with my small party.

Ring, Roberts' Cross, Engagement.

Sometime early in February 1921, I received word from George Lennon, O/C. of the column, to contact him immediately. I met him about a mile west of Dungarvan when he told me that it was intended to ambush the British at Killongford Cross about two miles from Dungarvan on the main Dungarvan-Ring road. Lennon had sent word to Dungarvan barracks that Cathal Brugha had been seen going to Ring Irish College and it was expected that the British would be out hot-foot to capture him. The message, of course, was just a trick to entice the British out of Dungarvan.

I immediately notified the Ring and Old Parish companies to mobilise with all speed and take up a position about a mile beyond Killongford on the road to Ring College and near Roberts' Cross. The time was about 9 p.m. when the column was moving into position along the road to Killongford, when, quite unexpectedly, a lorry of troops came along from Dungarvan proceeding to Ring.

The road in this district has many turns and twists with the result that the British were almost on top of the column before the latter were aware of the fact. Lennon had just time to get his men over the hedge and under cover when the military passed by. Meanwhile, about eight men of the Ring Company were approaching Roberts' Cross from Ring when they too literally 'walked into' the British. The latter opened fire and the Ring men, taken completely by surprise, could only dash for safety over the adjoining hedges. One man from Ring was wounded but all escaped capture in the darkness. The military then proceeded to Ring hoping to effect the capture of Cathal Brugha.

Disgusted with the turn of events, George Lennon moved the column to a more favourable position for an attack on the returning British convoy. We waited for an hour or more and then saw the lights of the military cars returning to Dungarvan by another road which was well out of range of our guns. There was nothing we could do but watch the British return in safety to Dungarvan.

On 1st March 1921, I joined up with the column which was then located at Comeragh in the mountains and handed over command of the 3rd Battalion to Vice Commandant William Doyle of Kinsalebeg. At this time, some of the men of the column were sick and had dumped their guns in the Old Parish district where my home was. I remember collecting three rifles and making my way on foot across country for about twelve miles

towards the headquarters of the column in the Comeragh mountains. When I got there George Lennon asked me to return to Clashmore 10 miles to the west and pick up three of the men from that company and bring them along to the column. I did so, and when we finally arrived back in Comeragh, I and one of the Clashmore men were so exhausted that we were unable to move off with the others who were making towards Durrow near the coast where an engagement with the British subsequently took place. I had been walking continuously for almost two days and nights.

Hold-up of troop train at Kilmacthomas.

A few days after the events I have mentioned, the column was in the neighbourhood of Kilmacthomas when the O/C., George Lennon, got word of a troop train coming east from Dungarvan. It was decided to hold up the train and disarm the troops. We took up firing positions in the vicinity of the railway and put the signals against the train as it approached the station. The train pulled up. We rushed on to the platform and ordered the Tommies out of the train. They did so, without firing a shot, which was rather surprising. However, the explanation was simple enough; they were all unarmed.

We took what bits of equipment they wore and ordered them out on to the roadway. We formed them into 'fours' and marched them through the village of Kilmacthomas led by myself playing a fiddle. The local people stared in amazement at the extraordinary sight. We billeted the Tommies in the houses of Unionists and left them, to return to our headquarters in Comeragh.

Attack on Marines at Curragh, Ardmore.

In the month of March 1921, a party of Marines from the coastguard station at Ardmore were proceeding to search the village for 'wanted' men. Actually, some of our lads were 'resting up' in Ardmore at the time. The Ardmore Company quickly mobilised and about 12 of them took up positions on

high ground overlooking the village. They opened fire with rifles on the advancing Marines and forced the latter to retreat. Again the Marines tried to advance, but they were checked by the fire from our lads.

This went on for almost two hours. Finally, the Marines retreated in disorder back to the coastguard station. I cannot say what casualties they suffered. None of our boys were hit in the engagement and those resting in the village got away safely.

Burgery (Dungarvan) Ambush.

On the night of 18th March 1921, the column moved to within a mile or two of Dungarvan to act as covering party for a demolition squad of local Volunteers engaged in destroying Tarrs Bridge situated about a mile north of Dungarvan on the main Dungarvan-Waterford road. While the demolition of the bridge was proceeding, word reached us from scouts that a lorry containing military had left Dungarvan proceeding eastwards. It was decided to abandon the work of destroying the bridge and, instead, ambush this military car on its return to Dungarvan. The column, numbering about 20, was split into two sections. One section under the command of George Plunkett, G.H.Q., Dublin (who was on inspection duty in Co. Waterford at the time) together with Pax Whelan, the West Waterford Brigade O/C. and myself were in position on the Ballycoe road, a side road due west of Tarrs Bridge. The remainder of the column, under George Lennon, were inside the hedge on the Burgery Road, - the main road leading into Dungarvan town, less than a mile to the west.

At about 11 p.m., two military cars (instead of the one expected) came along the main road approaching Tarrs Bridge from Cloncoskerine in the east and were fired on by our men at the Burgery position. Shortly afterwards, we received

word to reinforce our comrades at the Burgery and, as we advanced across a field, came under heavy fire from the garrison at Cloncoskerine House who had come out when the engagement started. We replied vigorously to the British and drove them back in disorder and moved forward to a position at a sunken road adjacent to the Burgery.

For a while I lost contact with our lads in the darkness, but soon met with George Lennon and Mick Shalloe, who were in action on the Burgery road and who were preparing to burn the military lorry from which the soldiers had fled in disorder.

There was confused fighting going on in the vicinity for some time after this. The Tommies were running here and there through the fields in a panic, some trying to escape back to Cloncoskerine House, and others making their way to Dungarvan town.

It would be close to midnight when I collected most of the men of my party and, as the firing had now ceased, we retired westwards towards the village of Kilgobnet, as previously arranged. When we were there a short while, Plunkett, Lennon, my brother Mick, Shalloe and other members of the column, who were fighting on the Burgery road, came along with Sergeant Hickey of the local R.I.C. as prisoner. A courtmartial was held, at which it was decided to shoot Hickey, who had been over-zealous in spotting and hunting down I.R.A. men. The Catholic Curate at Kilgobnet was sent for and he heard the sergeant's confession. He received the last rites of the Church and was then shot by a firing party of our men.

Early on the morning of 19th March 1921 (immediately following the Burgery ambush) George Plunkett decided to take a party of men back to the scene of the ambush to collect weapons likely to have been thrown away by the British during the fight a few hours previously. There was considerable opposition amongst the men to this proposal by Plunkett, as it

was well known that very considerable British forces would be drafted immediately from Dungarvan and elsewhere into the area and the risks entailed would not be worth while.

Plunkett decided that the job should be done; so he selected the following men to accompany him on what was certain to be a hazardous mission:- Pat Keating of Comeragh, commandant of the Kilrossanty Battalion; John Fitzgerald, captain of the Kilrossanty Company; Michael Shalloe; Kelly-Donovan; "Fox" Graney, George Lennon and myself. A further small party of six or eight men under Pax Whelan were ordered, by Plunkett, to take up a covering position on the Ballycoe road, about 500 yards or so west of the Burgery ambush point. My party reached the Burgery position about 8 a.m. and advanced in open formation across a field towards the Burgery road. We saw no enemy forces. When, however, we had reached a point about 50 yards from the Burgery, we came under concentrated rifle and machine gunfire from troops concealed on the road.

In the first volley John Fitzgerald was shot dead, and very shortly afterwards, Commandant Pat Keating of Comeragh was mortally wounded. The remainder of us were lying prone in the field and returned the British fire as best we could. Our position was an unenviable one as we were being shot at from all sides. One Black and Tan, more daring than the others, showed himself at the gate of the field where we were and was shot dead through the head.

To me, it was obvious that if we remained as we were we would all be killed, so I passed the word to some men on my left to cease fire and make for a gap in the field which was, incidentally, being swept by bullets from the British. George Lennon, the Column O/C., then came along and agreed with me that we should chance the gap. We did so, and all of us got through without mishap, except Kelly-Donovan who received a bullet wound across his mouth.

We now had somewhat more cover, but we still held our fire so as not to betray our position; besides, the Tommies showed no inclination to come out into the open. They continued firing from cover. George Plunkett then made contact with us and agreed that our position was hopeless and that there was nothing for it but to retreat. With great difficulty we succeeded in escaping towards Kilbrien, where we met the rest of the column. The military made no attempt to follow us.

During the course of the fighting that morning George Plunkett carried the badly wounded Pat Keating to a farmhouse in the vicinity where a priest and doctor ministered to him. Pat died later the same evening, the doctor who attended him stating afterwards that he (Pat) had been hit in the stomach by an explosive bullet.

After the Burgery ambush I moved with the column westwards to Clashmore where I was ordered by the Brigade O/C., Pax Whelan, to return to my battalion and organise it to the highest possible degree of efficiency. I worked at this during the month of April 1921, and established a system of dispatch work and intelligence through the whole of my battalion area. Dispatches from company to battalion and from battalion to brigade went through daily, notwithstanding the fact that battalion and brigade headquarters were very frequently moved because of enemy action.

For some time I noticed that the military frequently arrived at my battalion H.Q. just a day or so after I had moved on. I suspected a leakage of information on our side and eventually located the man and found out how he was contacting the British. He must have got some indication that I was beginning to suspect him, because, when I made up my mind to deal drastically with this informer, he got himself arrested by the enemy to save himself from what he knew would happen to him as a result of his treachery.

It would be, I think, in the month of April 1921, when I received orders from the Brigade O/C. Pax Whelan to prepare for a landing of arms by sea at Helvick Head. Helvick is at the point of the Ring Peninsula. My instructions were that all activity by the Ring and Old Parish companies should cease so as not to draw the military out in that direction.

I arranged for dugouts to be constructed in my battalion area, these to be suitable for the storage of large quantities of arms and ammunition and safe from discovery by the British.

I isolated the battalion area by cutting the roads for miles around so that no lorry could enter the district. As a result, the British had to resort to using foot patrols or cycle patrols and I had arrangements made for smoke signals to be given as a warning of approaching military. Every precaution was taken to prevent a surprise swoop by the British in the event of the arms landing coming off at Helvick.

Whilst in the Helvick area with some men of my battalion who, I might add, were on watch duty day and night on the headland, a British cruiser pulled in to Helvick and disembarked a large body of troops. I watched the troops landing and saw them start their round-up, at the same time pulling back with the boys to avoid encirclement.

The British spent a week making an intensive search of my battalion area and subsequently re-embarked on the cruiser at Ardmore without capturing one solitary I.R.A. man or weapon. While the cruiser was anchored in Ardmore Bay, lads from the Ardmore Company sniped at her periodically during her stay.

I should add here that the expected arms landing never materialised, for what reason, I am unable to say.

Attack on Marines at Piltown.

In May 1921, as a result of a raid on the mails by our men, the Marines from Ardmore surrounded the area around Piltown. The local company under their captain, James Fitzgerald, Kinsalebeg, were hurriedly mobilised and a running fight with the Marines followed. The engagement lasted the best part of an hour, in the course of which a Volunteer from the Youghal district, named James Quane, was killed.

The Marines were forced to retreat to Youghal and the Piltown men took up positions on high ground overlooking Youghal Bridge, in expectation of their return to Ardmore. The British forces must have received some warning of the reception awaiting them on their return journey, because they returned to their station in Ardmore by sea.

Later in the same month, the Piltown men were again in action against military carrying out an extensive round-up. On this occasion our lads had to break off the engagement owing to lack of ammunition. They did, however, succeed in disabling one of the military lorries which had to be abandoned by the British and was burned by our men.

During the months of May and June 1921, all the police barracks evacuated in my battalion area were burned. Extensive road-blocking and disruption of telephone and telegraph communications were carried out so that it was with difficulty that enemy forces could move through the area. When they did do so they were constantly being sniped at and their movements hampered by every possible means. Lack of ammunition only prevented us from any large scale contacts with the enemy.

When the Truce was signed on 11th July 1921, I organised training classes at battalion headquarters and, in the autumn of that year, was sent to East Waterford to reorganise

the 5th and 6th Battalions there. It was, I think, some time in the previous month that the East and West Waterford Brigades were amalgamated into one brigade with Pax Whelan of Dungarvan as O/C. A new battalion, the 7th, was also set up in the Nire Valley (Ballymacarbery) in October 1921.

Landing of arms at Cheekpoint.

In October 1921, I was again instructed to prepare for a landing of arms at Helvick. These arms, so far as I remember now, were bought in Germany and the boat on which they were brought was skippered by Charlie McGuinness. In point of fact, the vessel did not put in at Helvick as expected, due, principally, to the presence of a British cruiser in the locality. She did, however, unload her cargo at Cheekpoint on the East Waterford coast. A considerable quantity of arms and ammunition was conveyed safely to hiding places in the Comeragh mountains.

In June 1922, I attended an Army Convention in Dublin as one of the representatives of the Waterford Brigade and, on the taking over of barracks from the British, I was in charge of the infantry barracks in Waterford city.

When the civil war broke out I fought on the anti-Treaty side in Waterford city during the siege by the Free State troops.

Following the siege of Waterford, I returned to my own battalion area when the Free State troops landed in strength at Youghal and Dungarvan. I burned the coastguard station at Youghal and 'took to' the hills again.

We attacked the Free Staters frequently at Youghal Bridge and at the Mall House, Youghal. On one occasion a British cruiser came into Youghal and when we sniped her she replied with heavy shell-fire on our positions.

Further actions against the Free State troops in which I took part occurred at Grange, Summerhill and Crushea. At the latter place we captured a party of troops and disarmed them.

I returned home to Old Parish about February 1923, and continued doing intelligence work until the Cease Fire Order in April 1923.

With seven of my comrades I left the country in November 1923 to avoid bringing further suffering to my relatives by remaining at home. I remained in Canada until 1932 when I returned once more to my native place.

Signed: James Mansfield
(James Mansfield)

Date: 26th Aug 1955
26th Aug. 1955

Witness: T. O'Gorman
(T. O'Gorman)

