

W.S. 1,261  
ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1261

ROINN  COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

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Witness

Sean O'Keefe,  
Ard na Greine,  
Ennis,  
Co. Clare.

Identity.

Captain Crusheen. Company  
Irish Volunteers, County Clare;  
Q.M. Mid-Clare Brigade, later.

Subject.

- (a) National activities, Crusheen,  
Co. Clare, 1907-1921;
- (b) Mid-Clare Brigade, 1917-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

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# ORIGINAL

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STATEMENT BY SEÁN O'KEEFFE,

Árd na Gréine, Ennis,

formerly Brigade Quartermaster, Mid Clare Brigade.

I was born on 5th August, 1889, in Crusheen, Co. Clare. In a family of nine I was the fourth child. My people were farmers. I left school at the age of fourteen or fifteen to help my mother in the working of the farm, my father having died when I was very young. A year or two later I got a job in the local post office as a postman and stayed in that position for a few years, when, owing to the emigration of my older brothers, I had to throw up the job to return home to work and manage the farm.

In 1911 I went into the employment of the McNamara Bros., building contractors, Crusheen, and from them learned the building trade. Their contracts were obtained throughout Clare and Galway, with the result that in the years between 1911 and 1916 I worked a good deal away from home and made acquaintance with a number of men who afterwards became prominent in the movement for Irish independence. In slack periods I came home to my own district or at week-ends when I happened to be working near at hand.

In my early youth I came into daily contact with men who had been either members of the Fenian Brotherhood in the sixties or members of the I.R.B. in the intervening years or "Moonlighters" during the Land League days. Though I'm not in a position to vouch for it as a positive fact, a branch of the Invincibles was said to exist in the

Crusheen district. It is true, however, that ten or twelve men from the locality were arrested as suspects under the Coercion Acts introduced after the killing of Burke and Cavendish in the Phoenix Park, Dublin. Another national organisation which functioned in the parish of Crusheen in my young days was the '98 Centenary Committee. Under its auspices parades, concerts and lectures were held, at some of which I can remember being present.

The opening decade of the present century saw my native parish <sup>with</sup> ~~into~~ a branch of the Gaelic League, formed before 1900, a senior hurling team, a branch of Sinn Féin, started in 1907 or 1908, which, I believe, remained in existence until the resurgent Sinn Féin movement swept the country after the 1916 Rising, and an I.R.B. circle. I was a member of all these organisation. With regard to the Sinn Féin Club, I cannot recall now what business was transacted when meetings were held. It was through some of the officials of the club that the official organ of the movement - "Sinn Féin" - was distributed, particularly members of the McNamara family by whom I was employed at the time.

The I.R.B. circle in Crusheen was in existence prior to 1909, the year in which I became a member. It was started by a Carrigaholt man, Seamus Mór Ó Griofa, who was then working in Crusheen as a post office linesman. It is my firm opinion that this circle was the first to be formed in Clare after the reorganisation of the I.R.B., and though I have often heard of people claiming to be members of I.R.B. circles in other parts of the country prior to 1905, I think they really belonged to what could be described as "unofficial circles" that were kept

alive by the remnants of the older I.R.B. organisation in many places in Clare since the Fenians. Unfortunately these "unofficial circles" had through time degenerated into groups solely interested in agrarian trouble.

In my own particular case I was proposed and seconded for membership of the I.R.B. by Tadhg McNamara and Seamus Mór Ó Gríofa. I was actually sworn into the organisation by Maurice F. Crowe, an official of the Great Southern and Western Railway. He came to Ennis on the same day to referee a football match between Kerry and Mayo, and the swearing in ceremony took place in Hayes's photography establishment, O'Connell St., Ennis. There was no other person present. After that I did not attend any I.R.B. meeting until 1914 or 1915, and never paid subscriptions or received any instructions or orders in the interval.

It was the I.R.B. element in the Crusheen district which was responsible for the formation of a unit of the Irish Volunteers towards the end of 1913. The first Company Captain, Con Fogarty, was an I.R.B. man himself. About sixty men joined the company at the outset. Drilling took place two or three times a week on Corbett's lands in Carrowhill, and our drill instructor was an ex British soldier named John O'Connell of Ennis. In addition to being a Boer War veteran, he was a first class instructor. Up till 1915 we had no guns to train the company but used instead timber rifles which were made locally. The company was not affected to any extent by the Redmondite "split" which occurred in the autumn of 1914, as practically the entire unit rejected Redmond's leadership in favour of that of John McNeill. Except alone that we had no training

in target practice or in the handling of the rifle, modern or otherwise, the Crusheen Company at the commencement of 1915 was as well versed in company drill as any company in a regular army.

I think it was in the early months of 1915 that Seán McNamara returned home to Crusheen. For some years he had been engaged in the building trade outside County Clare, especially in Cork and Galway. He was an I.R.B. man and a most ardent Gaelic Leaguer and through these circles was on friendly terms with a number of the leading figures in the I.R.B. and Irish Volunteers whom he had met during his travels. Shortly after coming home he went to Dublin and brought back with him two Lee Metford rifles which he bought in the city. A month or so later, through some other channels which I cannot now recall, the Crusheen Company got four Martini-Henri and two .22 rifles. One of the Lee Metford rifles was fitted with a Morris tube and, together with the .22 rifles, was put into use for target practice. A plentiful supply of .22 ammunition was obtained from hardware shops in Ennis and Limerick, but I do not know from what source the Morris tube stuff was got. At all events, through the acquisition of these rifles the company was able to indulge in target practice every Sunday beginning about June or July, 1915. As the ammunition was fairly plentiful and cheaply procured, there was no stinting in the number of shots which each Volunteer could have at each exercise. In the course of the next eight or nine months, and certainly by Easter, 1916, the standard of marksmanship in the company was really good.

About a fortnight previous to Easter, 1916, I

attended a meeting in Limerick City with Con Fogarty, O/C Crusheen Company, at which representatives were present from all over Limerick and Clare. Limerick City was then Irish Volunteer headquarters for both counties. Unless I am very much mistaken, everybody present at that meeting was also a member of the I.R.B., and though we were all Irish Volunteers, I believe, but I'm not sure, that it was a specially convened I.R.B. gathering. The most prominent on the occasion were Jim Leddin, Liam O'Sullivan and Michael P. Colivet, all from Limerick City. It was here that I heard for the first time that a rebellion was being planned. In a speech made by Colivet he urged that the military training of the Irish Volunteers should be intensified, and he also dwelt on a number of aspects of such training which required particular attention. No specific date was mentioned for the rebellion nor was there any discussion of plans.

On Holy Saturday, 1916, orders came to the Crusheen Company to mobilise that night with all available arms and that each Volunteer was to be instructed to have with him a couple of days' rations. Seán McNamara, who at that stage held the rank of Battalion Commandant, sent me early on that day with a dispatch he had received from G.H.Q. in Dublin to the Bishop of Killaloe, Most Rev. Dr. Fogarty. I met His Lordship at the Cathedral gate in Ennis and handed him the envelope. When he had read the communication he passed the remark "Good man", tapped me on the shoulder and walked away. Later on I heard that a similar dispatch was sent to every Catholic bishop in Ireland, and that it asked for the appointment of chaplains to administer to the spiritual needs of the Irish Volunteers as soon as they went into action in armed rebellion against the English government.

Though I can't say so with certainty, it was rumoured in Irish Volunteer circles at the time that the Bishop of Killaloe selected Fr. Michael Crowe, then C.C. in Dooragh, as chaplain to the Clare Irish Volunteers.

On Holy Saturday night, 1916, about fifteen members of the Crusheen Company mobilised at Carrowhill. Of those present I can remember Seán McNamara, Battalion Commandant, James McNamara, Francis McNamara, Con Fogarty, Michael Fogarty, James Fogarty, Patrick Davis, Patrick Casey, Patrick Flanagan, William Hannigan and Michael McGuane. The majority of those men were in the I.R.B. also, and during the previous week had met every night in Seán McNamara's house for the purpose of filling shotgun cartridges. Every man present at Carrowhill was armed either with one of the rifles which I have already described or with a shotgun. About 2 o'clock on Easter Sunday morning Michael Brennan of Meelick arrived after cycling from Ennis. He informed us that he had been sent from Brigade Headquarters in Limerick to notify us that the rising had been called off and that we were to disperse at once. We did so and, like the others, I went home.

During the week of the Rising in 1916, either on Wednesday or Thursday, a dispatch from Liam Mellows in Galway arrived at Seán McNamara's house in Crusheen for Michael P. Colivet, O/C Limerick Irish Volunteers. I took this dispatch from Crusheen to Limerick and delivered it to Colivet, whom I met in the harness-maker's shop owned by Liam Sullivan, William St. After leaving Sullivan's to return home, I noticed a detective on my tracks but managed to elude him and made my way back to Crusheen without interference. That was the only incident in which

I was involved during Easter Week, 1916. In the following week a further dispatch from Brigade Headquarters in Limerick for Liam Mellowes, then 'on the run' in Galway, came to Crusheen for delivery. I cycled with the message to Athenry, where I handed it to Larry Lardner who was one of the few who were aware of the whereabouts of Mellowes.

After the suppression of the Rising in 1916 the only person connected with the Irish Volunteer movement in the Crusheen area who was arrested was the Battalion Commandant, Seán McNamara, and he was detained only a few days. The R.I.C. were kept in the dark regarding our mobilisation for the Rising and looked upon us as a harmless ~~group~~<sup>crowd</sup>. No guns were surrendered in response to General Sir John Maxwell's proclamation. The Irish Volunteer movement in the district remained intact although we did not parade and drill.

I think it was early in May, 1916, when Michael Moloney (Goggins), Balloughtra, Tulla, called on Seán McNamara in Crusheen. Moloney was an I.R.B. man and had been in touch with us prior to the Rising. He told McNamara that Liam Mellowes and two others were in hiding in a cattle shelter on Moloney's lands in the Balloughtra Mountains and that Mellowes was anxious to contact McNamara, whom he had previously known. McNamara deputed myself and Con Fogarty, Captain of the Crusheen Company, to accompany Moloney who would take us to meet Mellowes that night. We found Mellowes and his companions in the cattle shelter. They were lying on a bed of straw with overcoats as covering. Mellowes, who was awake, jumped out of bed to greet us and he put down a fire, around which we conversed until three or four o'clock next morning.



Mellowes gave us a detailed account of his experiences in Galway during the Rising there and explained how, after disbanding his men, he and his two companions - Frank Hynes of Athenry and Alfie Monaghan, a Northern Ireland man - crossed into Co. Clare and made their way along the Derrybrien Mountains until they met Michael Moloney, who offered them the use of the cattle shelter. After our initial meeting with Mellowes, Con Fogarty and myself visited him two or three times each week, always after nightfall, usually bringing him food, especially poultry. After six or seven weeks a fourth man - Tom Kenny, Croughwell - also wanted by the British authorities for his part in the Rising in Galway, came to stay with Mellowes. These four men remained in hiding in the cattle shelter until the end of the autumn of 1916. By that time G.H.Q. in Dublin had made arrangements to send Mellowes off to America.

The first I heard of the plans to get Mellowes away was from Seán McNamara, our Battalion Commandant. He instructed me to notify Mellowes that everything was ready to get him as far as Cobh, which I duly did. On the following day McNamara sent me to Fr. Crowe, C.C. Dooragh, to ask the latter to procure two sets of nuns' attire for Mellowes and a lady who would be travelling with him to Cobh, and to inform Fr. Crowe that Mellowes and the lady would stay at his house the next night, where they would dress up as nuns and then go by motor car direct from Dooragh to Cobh. Incidentally, the lady in question was a Miss Barry from Gort and the motor car was provided by Michael Brody of Ennis, a man who was opposed to the Irish Volunteers and who had not the slightest idea of the identity of the passengers. No hitch occurred in these arrangements

and Mellows got safely to America.

I think it was early in 1917 that a separate brigade was formed for the Clare Irish Volunteers and, arising out of this, there was a general reorganisation of the county. In Crusheen there was an election of company officers which resulted in my appointment as Captain; Con Fogarty, 1st Lt.; and Michael McGuane, 2nd Lt. The reorganised company contained about forty men. Under the auspices of the Volunteers a pipers' band was started in the district, the money to buy the instruments having been raised by concerts and hurling matches. The band instructor was paid £2 a week and was provided with a free house. I am making reference to this band because it proved to be one of the big attractions in the Sinn Féin drive during 1917 and 1918 to capture the support of the people in Clare. Its services were much sought after during the East Clare by-election in July-August, 1917, when Mr. de Valera won the seat for Sinn Féin. In that by-election campaign we were away almost every day wherever our candidate and his principal speakers held meetings. In the general election of 1918 the band, along with a contingent of Volunteers from the Crusheen Company, went to East Mayo to help de Valera defeat the leader of the Irish Party, John Dillon, in one of the most bitter contests of that election.

When public drilling recommenced in July or August, 1917, the Crusheen Company met and drilled too. We did not do so as openly as in other districts as the officers agreed among themselves it was in the best interests of the Volunteer movement to avoid the limelight and to keep out of jail if possible. There were no arrests in our district

for illegal drilling at this period. The Volunteers drilled there as regularly as anywhere else but did so in out-of-the-way places, meeting about twice a week right through 1917 and 1918.

The conscription menace which developed in those years did not affect the Crusheen area very much as most of the men of military age there were already in the Irish Volunteers before the idea of conscription for Ireland was mooted at all. In another respect, too, our area was immune from a type of activity which was widespread in Co. Clare at that period - land trouble. Fortunately, and probably due to a high sense of discipline in the company, there was not a single instance of cattle driving or land seizures in the parish of Crusheen in those days.

Towards the end of 1918 there was a further reorganisation of the Volunteer movement in Clare. The county was divided into three brigades, east mid and west. In the reshuffle of officers which followed, I was appointed Quartermaster to the 1st Battalion, Mid Clare Brigade. The Battalion O/C was Seán O'Grady, Cappamore, Crusheen, and the battalion was comprised of the companies of Ballinruan, Barefield, Clooney, Crusheen, Doora and Ennis. Frank Barrett, Darragh, was elected O/C of the Mid Clare Brigade. Martin Devitt, afterwards killed in action in February, 1920, at Crowe's Bridge, was the Brigade Vice O/C. Another member of the Barrett family, Joseph, was also on the brigade staff and he subsequently filled the post of Brigade O/C of Operations.

The Barretts were excellent organisers and were not long in getting to work and in bringing the organisation of the Mid Clare Brigade up to a high standard. Punctuality

and regularity in the holding of company mobilisations was insisted upon; reports on parades and drill had to be supplied to Battalion Headquarters, a summary of which had to be furnished at fixed periods by the battalion to the Brigade Headquarters. Returns in respect of munitions and funds were also required. Unofficial acts by individual Volunteers, such as participation in cattle drives and other forms of agrarian trouble, were stamped out throughout the brigade area. The Brigade and Battalion Councils met often, at least once a month so far as I can recollect. At the outset and until such time as the officers were obliged to go 'on the run', the meetings of the Brigade Staff were usually held in the Clare Hotel in Ennis. For the first few meetings most of the business transacted at the Brigade and Battalion Council meetings was of a routine organisational nature, but as the guerilla campaign against the British developed so, too, did the proceedings at these meetings change.

About the middle of July, 1919, I represented the 1st Battalion at a meeting of the Mid Clare Brigade Council held in the Clare Hotel in Ennis. Frank Barrett presided. It was agreed to that an attempt should be made to capture the R.I.C. hut at Inch which was occupied by a sergeant and four constables. Each policeman, of course, was armed with a carbine and a revolver. It was the practice at this station to send out a patrol of two men every night and it was decided at the meeting that this patrol should be held up and disarmed as it was returning back to barracks at a point along the road 300 yards or so from that building. With the disarming of the patrol accomplished, two Volunteers should then proceed to the barracks, knock at the door and, when it opened, rush the place, supported by other men who would be lying

convenient outside. Joe Barrett was selected to take charge of the attack, which was fixed for 19th July.

During the course of the appointed day the necessary arms were brought into the outskirts of Inch village, and they were made up of rifles, revolvers, shotguns and home-made bombs. That evening the Battalion O/C, Seán O'Grady, and myself cycled from Crusheen into St. Flannan's College, Ennis, inside the gates of which we met Joe Barrett, Dr. Bill Shannon of Cranny and Dan McNamara of Ennis. From the college grounds we walked across country to Inch, roughly four miles, where we were joined by about fifteen men, who included Patrick Costelloe (Pappy), O/C 2nd Battalion, Michael Barrett, Vice O/C of that unit, and Seán Griffey of Inch. It was about eleven o'clock when the men selected to attack the patrol moved off, while the remainder of us went into a position at the back of the R.I.C. station.

Due to some misunderstanding the patrol and the party sent to disarm it missed one another and the patrol reached the station without being attacked. A quick decision was then taken to attack the barracks with gun fire and the home-made bombs. Seán Griffey and I think one of the Barrett brothers were detailed to throw the bombs, which consisted of canisters charged with gelignite and scrap. A piece of ordinary fuse, fitted to a detonator set in the gelignite and ignited by a match or lighted cigarette end, protruded through the canister. The bombs were to be thrown into the barracks through the windows. Unfortunately the bombs were designed without regard to the fact that the barrack windows were fitted with heavy iron bars which were too close together to

enable the bombs to be pushed between them. Seán Griffy was in the act of trying to force a bomb, with its fuse ignited, between the bars when the bomb exploded and badly shattered his hand. This ended the use of the bombs but the gunfire continued until dawn, when we had to retire as it was then obvious that the building could not be taken. We dispersed by devious routes to our homes and the police made no attempt to follow us. No arrests were made after the attack and the only casualty in the engagement was John Griffy, whose wound was treated by Dr. Bill Shannon.

After the Inch affair there were a number of small engagements in the western part of the brigade area but I was not involved in any of them. During the course of one of these the Vice Brigade O/C, Martin Devitt, was killed in February, 1920, and this resulted in new appointments in the brigade staff. Peadar O'Loughlin, who was, I think, Brigade Quartermaster, replaced Devitt, and I was given the post of Brigade Quartermaster, which I filled up to the Truce in July, 1921.

One of the first jobs I did on being promoted to the brigade staff was to construct an arms dump for the use of the brigade. It was situated in one of our own fields at Carrowhill, Crusheen, roughly 500 yards from that village. The site was on a piece of sloping ground. The dump measured  $7' \times 4\frac{1}{2}' \times 5\frac{1}{2}'$  and was built underground. The walls were of brick and mortar with a roof of long stone flags covered on top with sods placed on a level with the surrounding ground. The entrance was by means of a galvanised iron trap door camouflaged with whitethorn bushes and sods.

Most of the explosives held by the brigade were, until the dump was finished, scattered here and there through the different companies, but as soon as the dump was ready this stuff was collected and stored in it. In the interval up to the termination of the fighting with the British, rifles, shotguns and revolvers were also kept in this dump, which was never discovered by the enemy.

In my capacity as Brigade Quartermaster I have no recollection of ever having handled any funds as this end of the job was looked after by the Brigade O/C himself.

In the month of May, 1920, I accompanied Joe Barrett and Dan McNamara, Ennis, to Tiermaclane, about 6 miles from Ennis, where we joined about a dozen men from the 2nd Battalion under Patrick Costelloe (Pappy) to attack an R.I.C. patrol of five men. The site selected was three hundred yards from Ballyea Cross and our party was positioned on both sides of the road. After waiting there for four or five hours the party dispersed about 5 o'clock in the evening, as it was then apparent that the patrol would not come along.

A month or so after this disappointment two Ennis Volunteers, Liam Stack, an officer of that company, and Michael Malone, reported to Joe Barrett who was then, I believe, Brigade O/C Operations, that a military guard of about seven men, <sup>which</sup> who had started doing guard over a military transport depot in the Butler Market, Ennis, could easily be disarmed while returning from guard duty to their headquarters in the Home Barracks, Jail Road, Ennis. They always returned through Carmody St. and the distance from the Butler Market to the barracks was a quarter of a mile. Barrett immediately summoned the

officers of the 1st Battalion to a meeting held in a field in Drumconora, Barefield. I also attended. He put the information which he had received regarding the patrol before the meeting and it was decided to attempt a disarming operation.

At this meeting the men to take part in the job were selected and it was also agreed that it should come off on the eve of Spencilhill fair, which was then about a fortnight away, and that in the intervening period the part which each man would take would be rehearsed each night under the personal supervision of Barrett, who was to be in charge of the actual attack.

The following list, which was prepared by me some time ago for other purposes, gives correctly the men who were selected and who actually did take part in the operation:

(1) O/C	-	Joseph Barrett,	Brigade Staff
V.O/C	-	myself	
		Seán O'Grady	O/C 1st Battalion
		Patrick Davis	Crusheen Company, do.
		Patrick Casey	do.
		John Joe Harte	do.
		Patrick Flanagan	do.
		John Roughan	Barefield Company, do.
		Daniel McMahon	do.
		Thomas Considine	do.
		Patrick McNamara	do.
		Con McMahon	Clooney Company
		John Clune	do.
		B.J. Doherty	do.
		Michael Hegarty	Kilnamona Company, 3rd Bn.
		Patrick Keane	do.
		Patrick Brody	do.
		Joseph Barrett	do.
		Peadar O'Brien	Ruan Company do.
		Patrick Casey	do.
		Seán Casey	do.
(2)		Liam Stack	Ennis Company, 1st Bn.
		John Joe Clohessy,	do.
		Daniel McNamara	do.
		Jack Darcy	do.
		Peter O'Loughlin	do.
		Michael Malone	do.
		John (Ter) Frawley	do.
		William McNamara	do.



(3)	Patrick Costelloe, Michael Barrett, Sylvester Barrett Brian Barrett	O/C 2nd Battn. Vice O/C do. Ballyea Coy. do. do.
(4)	John Joe Egan Sam Moroney Joseph Tierney Michael Kennedy Jack Mellett William Barrett	Ennis Coy. 1st Bn. do. do. do. do. do.

It will be noticed that all those listed in No.(1) of the list belonged to units outside the town of Ennis. As they were the men who had to do the actual disarming of the military, it was deemed safer that they should be from the rural parts as there was less likelihood of recognition afterwards by the military or any of the few townspeople who might inform the British authorities as to the identity of the attackers. Those in part (2) of the list were all drawn from the Ennis Company as their part was to be that of a covering off unit who were familiar with the "ins and outs" of the town. The men in part (3) were earmarked to meet the motor car containing the captured rifles at Kilmoraine and there take over custody of the guns. Lastly, those whose names appear in part (4) were all motor drivers.

At that particular stage of the struggle it was remarkable how the British military adhered to a fixed type of routine. They rarely varied their formation in movement and rigidly adhered to set hours for such things as guard changing. On this occasion the relieved guard marched back to barracks in pairs, about ten paces apart, the N.C.O. in charge bringing up the rear three or four paces behind the last two soldiers. The route was always the same - from the Butler Market into Carmody St., Upper O'Connell St. and then on to the Jail Road, and the rifles were carried at the slope with bayonets fixed.

The plan of attack provided for the splitting up of the men named in part (1) of the list into groups of three, each group to take up a position along Carmody St. and Upper O'Connell St. at a distance equivalent to that between each pair of soldiers. The two streets make almost a right angle. At the junction is Darcy's publichouse and it was here that the O/C, Joe Barrett, decided to take up his position as it gave him a clear view of both streets. A blast of a whistle blown by him was to be the signal for our men to rush the soldiers, each group taking on the two nearest soldiers. Every man in the attacking party carried a loaded revolver, which he was to draw as soon as the whistle sounded and present as he was advancing on the soldiers, shouting at the same time "Hands up". Parked at Darcy's corner also was to be a motor car driven by John Joe Egan. He had received orders to start up the car as soon as the second pair of soldiers passed him, and the attacking party had also been instructed to run to the car with the rifles immediately a gun was taken from the soldiers so that Darcy could clear off the scene with the booty without a moment's delay.

At the rehearsals for this attack about thirty men attended. Seven of those were chosen to act the part of the military guard, while twenty-one others were assigned the role of the attackers. No man missed a rehearsal. The site chosen for this practice closely resembled the route traversed by the military guard, and by the end of the fortnight every man was thoroughly familiar with what he had to do to make the attack a success.

There was a special reason for selecting the eve

of Spencilhill fair for the date of the attack. In those days this was one of the biggest fairs in Clare, at which there was always a lot of horses offered for sale. People came from all over Ireland to this fair and big crowds usually gathered around the town of Ennis on the preceding evening. Although Spencilhill is about three miles from Ennis, a goodly number of animals were generally displayed and sold along the Ennis streets on the evening before the fair. We took advantage of this custom as strangers or country fellows loitering along the streets on such an occasion would excite little or no suspicion from either the watchful R.I.C. and the less cautious military. So as to help in throwing both of these forces off their guard, we got a Volunteer called Michael Nugent from the Barefield Company to bring a horse into Carmody St. and some of the men who were to constitute the attacking party were detailed to get around this animal and be engaged in pretending to buy it just before the attack was timed to come off.

A short while before 4 p.m. on the evening of 23rd June, 1920, the day selected for the attack, all our men had assembled in their places in Carmody St. and Upper O'Connell St. The military guard came along marching in their usual formation shortly after 4 o'clock. As planned, everything worked out in our favour and within a matter of seconds after the O/C, Joe Barrett, sounded the whistle the operation was over; the rifles and equipment which were taken from the soldiers were being conveyed in the motor car driven by John Joe Egan to the pre-arranged destination. Only one of the soldiers offered any resistance - the Corporal in charge - and I finished that by a punch to the jaw which quickly subdued

him. They were all collected and marched into sheds in Jack Darcy's yard and locked there. Michael Hegarty, Con McMahon and Michael Foley accompanied Egan in the motor car as an escort. We took the captured booty to Kilmorane barracks, about 2 miles from Ennis on the road to Kilrush, and there handed it over to Patrick Costelloe and his men. Myself and the other members of the escort made off home across the country.

There are two other matters concerning this operation to which I desire to refer. Firstly, despite the fact that it took place in the open daylight and that notwithstanding the precautions to guard against identification of the participants, a number of our men were recognised by eye witnesses to the attack. Yet not one single Volunteer concerned was afterwards arrested. Secondly, the people whose names appear on part (4) of the list were all motor drivers who had cars standing convenient for use in case of emergency. One of these cars, driven by Joseph Tierney accompanied by William Barrett, went off along the Kilrush road once the attack was over. This was done to hoodwink the British authorities and succeeded in its purpose, too, as the car was followed by a military armoured car which was sent out in pursuit of the vehicle containing the captured arms and equipment (seven rifles and a quantity of ammunition, seven bayonets and the web equipment of the seven soldiers).

About a month after the Ennis operation - I'd place the date as 29th July, 1920 - two ambushes were planned to be carried out by men from 1st Battalion, Mid Clare Brigade. A single lorry of soldiers had started to

travel between Tulla and Ennis and between Gort and Ennis. Each ambush party comprised around twenty men armed with rifles and shotguns. On the Tulla road the Volunteers took up positions at Tooreen, 3 miles from Ennis, and I was in charge there. On the Gort road the Volunteers were under Con McMahon, who waited at Ballylyon, six miles from Ennis. After lying in ambush all day the lorry failed to show up and both parties dispersed about 8 p.m.

On 10th September, 1920, a strong party of roughly forty men under the O/C Mid Clare Brigade, Frank Barrett, mobilised at Moyreisk between Tulla and Ennis to attack a convoy of military which was expected to travel from Ennis. This party was drawn from the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Battalions. Again nothing happened, as the convoy did not travel though we waited from early morning until nightfall. During the day two unarmed soldiers on horseback passed us but they were not molested. I might mention also that about 11 o'clock in the day Michael Brennan and Tom McGrath, O/C and Vice O/C of the East Clare Brigade respectively, happened to come along by accident, and on learning of our presence they expressed the wish to be allowed to join in the attack. Neither of them appeared to be armed and Brennan asked to be given a rifle. I handed him my own - a Lee Metford.

On the next occasion on which I participated in armed military action it was the biggest and most spectacular operation which occurred in Clare - the capture of Ruan barracks, in which I was involved from the outset. Early in October, 1920, I went to Ennis to meet Joe Barrett by appointment. Seán Casey, a national teacher in

Ruan, then Adjutant of 2nd Battalion, was also present. Casey had come to report that he was in touch with one of the R.I.C. stationed in Ruan - Constable Bill Carroll - who appeared to be very much in sympathy with the I.R.A. and willing to co-operate with us in the capture of the R.I.C. station to which he was attached. After a long discussion it was agreed that Casey should again sound Carroll and ascertain definitely from him if he would be agreeable to assist us in case we did decide to try to capture the station. A week or so later a further meeting took place in the Clare Hotel, Ennis, and this time Constable Carroll, in plain clothes, was present, as were Frank and Joe Barrett, Seán Casey and myself.

Carroll impressed us as being a sincere type of young man who was sorry for having found himself in the R.I.C. at that stage. He declared himself in sympathy with the I.R.A. and said that he intended to resign from the police force. He was then asked to describe the internal lay-out of the Ruan R.I.C. station, how the garrison was allocated at night-time and give details of the military equipment of the station. He also mentioned that he would be on night duty on the third week in October along with an elderly R.I.C. <sup>man</sup> named Wilmot, and that Wilmot would be leaving the station every morning about half-past seven to get milk from a neighbouring house owned by people named Callanan.

There was a general discussion at the meeting on the information supplied by Constable Carroll and it was decided there to attempt the capture of the barracks. It was also agreed that Constable Wilmot was to be held up on his way for the milk and that as soon as this was successfully

accomplished the back door of the barracks would be opened by Constable Carroll to admit the main I.R.A. <sup>bark</sup>, who, on getting inside, would rush upstairs and overpower the sleeping members of the garrison. As the attack was timed to take place just about dawn, there was a danger that the police in bed might be alerted by the barking of Callanan's dogs. This man was a herd in the employment of a big grazier named Tom Crowe of Dromore and he always kept four or five collies. Callanan was on friendly terms with the R.I.C. and he could not be asked to keep his dogs under control on the night fixed for the attack, so it was decided at the meeting that these dogs should be poisoned a day or two before the attack. However, though orders were issued to carry out the poisoning it was not done.

Constable Carroll was most anxious that none of the police would be shot during the course of the raid. He was assured on this point and special instructions were given to the men chosen to enter the barracks that shooting should be resorted to only when it was absolutely unavoidable.

No definite date was settled on at the meeting for the attack. Carroll was told that he would be notified of this date later on. About 15th October, 1920, the Brigade O/C, having completed his arrangements, decided to attack three nights later and sent word of his intention to Carroll through Seán Casey, the latter being also reminded about poisoning the dogs.

The men selected for the operation were drawn from all over the Mid Clare Brigade area and orders were given that they should assemble at 10 o'clock on the night of 17th October at Costelloe's in Barefield, a house which

was then vacant. With the exception of the men from the 4th Battalion (Miltown Malbay - Ennistymon area), all the others reported at the appointed time and numbered about sixty. Three sections of ten men each were selected to enter the barracks, Joe Barrett, Con McMahon and myself being detailed to act as section commanders. Incidentally, each section commander picked his own men. The section under Joe Barrett was, as soon as we gained admittance, to take the job of dealing with the ground floor, in which were located the dayroom, kitchen, a store and a small bedroom in which only one policeman, Constable ~~Clare~~, slept. Upstairs were two large bedrooms, which the rest of the garrison - a sergeant and thirteen men - occupied. Con McMahon's section was allocated the task of subduing the occupants of the room on the left-hand side of the landing, while my section was given the room on the right-hand side. My section included:

Con O'Halloran, Clooney.  
 Jack Hassett, Quin.  
 B.J. Doherty, Carahan.  
 James McNamara (Jimo), Ballynacally.  
 Dan McNamara, Ennis.

Two men were told off to hold up Constable Wilmot and the rest of those present were assigned positions at various points around the barracks to guard against enemy reinforcements who might perchance come to Ruan. All the men who met at Costelloe's were armed, those selected to go inside the barracks and to hold up Constable Wilmot having revolvers and the others having rifles.

The village of Ruan lies between Corofin and Ennis, about four miles from the former and about five miles from Ennis. Both places were occupied by enemy forces, R.I.C.



in Corofin and R.I.C. and military in Ennis. The I.R.A. companies in Ruan, Crusheen and Barefield were ordered to erect barricades along the roads leading to Ruan to hold up and delay enemy reinforcements which might come to the aid of the R.I.C. in Ruan in case any hitch occurred in our plans.

Our party moved off from Barefield about four o'clock on the morning of 18th October and reached Ruan two hours or so later, the distance being about six miles. It was still dark on our arrival. A half mile from the police barracks all the men who were to enter the barracks were ordered to remove their boots and then continue on silently until they reached the wall outside the barracks. I would say we were waiting behind this wall for the best part of an hour when Constable Wilmot emerged through the back door on his milk collecting errand. As he approached Callanan's he was held up and made a prisoner. This incident took place thirty yards away from the barracks and was clearly visible to the watching Constable Carroll, who at once came to the door to signal us to come along. We were inside the barracks in a few minutes. The police were completely surprised. In the room where I entered with my section the occupants were all asleep and were roused by shouts of "hands up". One Constable named Ruddy did not comply and threw himself out of bed. He was fired at and wounded, but this bullet also wounded another Constable named Farrelly. The Sergeant in charge made an effort to grab an automatic pistol from the wall but desisted when he found a revolver stuck into his face. He then began to cry but, like the rest of his comrades, then submitted. We took possession of all the rifles and revolvers which we found lying in racks on the bedroom walls

In the other room a Constable Loughheed was mortally wounded, dying within half an hour. I heard that in his case he refused to put up his hands when ordered to do so and was making an effort to get a gun when he was shot. The section on the ground floor, having to deal with only one man, experienced no opposition.

The captured policemen were ordered to dress and were then marched into the street outside, where the wounded had their wounds dressed by one of the men from the 4th Battalion who had just come on the scene. This man was a chemist named Molyneaux who was working in Ennistymon.

The correspondence and other papers in the barracks were searched and then, with paraffin oil procured from Murty Kelly's shop in Ruan, the building was set on fire and burned to the ground.

My estimate of the booty captured in this operation is: 14 short Lee Enfield rifles, 1 short parabellum automatic pistol, 14 revolvers, 2 shotguns, 14 bikes, thousands of rounds of .303 and .45 ammunition, two or three dozen Mills bombs and a number of Verey lights.

We took off with us as prisoners Constables Carroll and Wilmot, the former to join the I.R.A. in the Kilfenora - Ballyvaughan area and the latter as a blind to deceive the British as to Carroll's part in the attack and what had become of him. In fact he became one of the most active members of our brigade and was later wounded in an ambush at Monreal in the following December. Though a native of Roscommon, he elected to remain in Clare for a good period after the Truce in 1921. The

British did not find out that he had joined the I.R.A., until after the Truce, and when they became aware of this the Black and Tans made an attempt to shoot him at a race meeting in Kildysart in August or September, 1921. The attempt was frustrated by a number of I.R.A. men who were also at the races and no injury befell Carroll.

We released the remainder of the captured policemen after having warned them of the consequences of reprisals which had then become common throughout the country. No reprisals did follow the attack.

The captured material was removed via Ballinruan to the brigade dump in Crusheen, and the men who participated in the attack all got back to their home areas without mishap.

After Ruan I was not involved in any military operation until January, 1921. Early in that month it was noticed that a lorry of R.I.C. and Black and Tans had begun to travel between Ennis and Kilrush. Under the Brigade O/C, Frank Barrett, a force of about sixty men, all armed with rifles, were mobilised at Sleveen, three or four miles from Ennis, to attack this lorry at Caherea some miles from the latter town on the main road to Kilrush. The I.R.A. force was billeted on the houses around Sleveen on the previous night and early next morning moved off to take up the selected position. The lorry was expected to pass by in the forenoon from Ennis to Kilrush. The position was in the vicinity of Caherea national school, on the Kilrush side of which a by-road branches off the main road in a south westernly direction and for a distance of a quarter mile is not more than three hundred yards from the main road. This by-road runs over rising ground and gives command over traffic

moving along the main road for a good distance. The main portion of the ambushing party, about forty strong, were posted along this by-road, directly beneath which a barricade was placed on the main road. Frank Barrett and myself were in charge of this party. Two other sections of ten men in each section under Seán Casey, 2nd Battalion, and Joe Barrett, Brigade O/C Operations, were posted on the Ennis side of the schoolhouse. Casey's section were about two hundred yards from the main road half a mile on the left of the main party, and their position in the fields there was well above the level of the main road. At the rear of this section and of Frank Barrett's party were the mountains of *Kyfeatuona*. Joe Barrett's section were on the other side of the road directly opposite the positions held by Casey's men and three <sup>hundred</sup> yards from the main road.

At about half-past four in the evening, as it was then approaching dusk and the enemy had not shown up, Frank Barrett sent out orders to vacate the position. Joe Barrett's section was in the act of doing so when the scouts reported that lorries of enemy troops were on the way from Ennis. These lorries pulled up about a half mile on the Ennis side of Joe Barrett's section. The enemy troops quickly alighted and began a movement to outflank Joe Barrett's section which promptly opened fire. An exchange of shots lasting about ten minutes took place. The enemy troops stayed put while Barrett moved his men out of the danger zone and retired to the Lismaurice district.

Owing to the darkness which had set in, Frank Barrett decided not to intervene with his party as soon as

he was satisfied that his brother's section was out of danger. He ordered his men and Casey's section to move off northwards to Kyleatunagh and Cullinagh where billets were procured for the night. The men were dispersed next day to their home areas.

After the Caherea attempt it became very difficult to get an opportunity to engage the British forces in the Mid Clare area. From thence onwards the enemy moved in large convoys varying from ten to twenty vehicles, generally accompanied by armoured cars. With the limited resources at the disposal of the brigade, a total of about eighty rifles in an area constituting more than one third of the county, the job of successfully attacking these large convoys was beyond us. Besides, the area did not provide suitable country for engaging more than two or three lorries with a reasonable chance of victory.

As Quartermaster of the Mid Clare Brigade, returns were submitted to me once a month by each battalion showing the arms' strength of these battalions. Though the records have long since left my possession, I have a fairly clear recollection that when the Truce arrived in July, 1921, the brigade held a total of about eighty serviceable rifles and about fifty or sixty revolvers and automatic pistols. It may be of some historical interest to give details of how the rifles were acquired and the following table will throw light on this point:

<u>Date</u>	<u>No. of rifles</u>	<u>Make</u>	<u>How secured</u>
Previous to 1917	20	Martini	Mainly from G.H.Q. Dublin.
"	2	Lee Metford	do.
1917-18	5	Lee Enfield	Seized from Br. soldiers home on leave from Great War.

<u>Date</u>	<u>No. of rifles</u>	<u>Make</u>	<u>How secured</u>
1918-20	5	Lee Enfield	Bought by Bill McNamara from soldiers stationed in Ennis.
do.	2	" "	Bought by Peter O'Loughlin from soldiers in Ennis.
do.	3	" "	Bought by the Lehanes from soldiers in Lahinch.
1918-19	5	Winchester	Obtained by raid for arms on private houses.
24.2.'18	2	Police carbine	Seized from police at Derrymore, Ennistymon.
5.7.'19	1	do.	Attack on R.I.C. at Kilshanny.
5.8.'19	2	do.	Attack on R.I.C. at "81" Cross, Islandbaun
23.6.'20	7	Lee Enfield	Disarming of military guard in Ennis.
17.7.'20	1	do.	Soldier disarmed in Ennistymon by Michael Nestor.
20.7.'20	4	do.	Military party disarmed in Ennistymon.
22.9.'20	6	do.	Rinneen ambush.
18.10.'20	14	do.	Ruan barracks.

Only two or three of these rifles were lost to the enemy - one in the Monreal ambush and another one or two during the course of a brief engagement at Crowe's Bridge about January, 1920.

As regards the revolvers, dozens of these were acquired by individual Volunteers from persons who had been using them in connection with land trouble, which was common in Clare for generations prior to the commencement of the Irish Volunteers; some revolvers were purchased from soldiers, about a dozen were obtained by

raids on private houses, approximately twenty in the way of booty captured from enemy forces. There were few types of the .45 revolver which were not included in the brigade stock of these weapons; the Webley and "Bull-dog", however, predominated.

Of shotguns we had a few hundred, but the most of these had through use and abuse become defective. By the time hostilities with the British ceased there were from three to four dozen serviceable shotguns at the disposal of the brigade.

Signed: Sean O'Keeffe  
(Sean O'Keeffe)

Date: 29. 8/1955

29 Sept. 1955.

Witness: D. Griffin (D. Griffin)

(Investigator)

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