

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913 21

NO. W.S. 1294

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21
STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,294

Witness

Sean Whelan,
St. Senan's,
Enniscorthy,
Co. Wexford.

Identity.

Quartermaster, North Wexford Brigade,
O/C. No. 1 Flying Column North Wexford
Brigade.

Subject.

Irish Volunteer activities,
Enniscorthy, Co. Wexford, 1914-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

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SECOND STATEMENT BY SEÁN WHELAN,
St. Senan's, Enniscorthy, Co. Wexford.

My mother's father, James Tomkins, Tombrick, Ballycarney, was a member of the Fenian Brotherhood, and was waiting, with his Schneider rifle, in 1867 for the call that never came. His sons, Jack and Pat joined the Volunteers at their inception. Jack was sentenced to death - commuted to penal servitude for life - for shooting the cap from the head of Sergeant Cunningham, R.I.C., when a party of R.I.C. surprised Volunteers who were about to blow up Edermine bridge - three miles south of Enniscorthy - during Easter Week 1916. Pat took part in the Rising and was interned.

Thanks to my mother's great fund of Irish songs and ballads, I was familiar with Ireland's struggle for independence long before I could read or write. And when the call came on that memorable day in the springtime of the year 1914, there were no impediments on the way to my lips of the affirmative answer that left my heart in reply to Pat Keegan's request that I join the Irish Volunteers.

Pat was the son of an I.R.B. man - George Keegan - and his Uncle Tom was an I.R.B. man too and was preaching sedition, for forty years before the Rising, to the youth of Enniscorthy who had the good fortune to stop, look and listen, on their way home from school, at Keegan's cooper's shop at No. 10 Irish

Street, where all the milk churns, firkins, tubs, etc., were made by Pat and his uncle, from best American oak, for the farmers and dairymen of Enniscorthy and district.

We drilled and paraded, paraded and drilled, during the spring and summer of 1914. Then, on a July day, a Serbian student fired a revolver at an Austrian archduke in an unknown Balkan town. Germany heard this shot, and August saw her declare war on France and stride like a colossus across Belgium.

September heard John Redmond, leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party and a member of the Volunteer Executive, urging every member of the Irish Volunteers to don khaki and fight for little Belgium.

This caused a split in the Volunteers, and October saw the I.R.B. strike back by seizing Volunteer General Headquarters and kicking out Redmond and his clique.

One section of the Volunteers followed Redmond and became the Irish National Volunteers.

The anti war section became the Irish Volunteers. There were about forty of us in this section. Seamus Rafter was our Captain, and Pat Keegan, 1st Lieutenant. The old '98 Club in Mary Street was taken over as our headquarters, where we began to work for insurrection. Working parties, munition parties and foraging parties were formed, with Keegan in charge.

Davis's foundry was the first victim of the foragers. We purloined a crucible there. Lead we

took from anywhere we found it. Jem Cleary made moulds and began to run buckshot. Large quantities of buckshot cartridges were made, and we carried them to many parts of Co. Wexford.

On one occasion, Pat Keegan, John Cleary, M. Davies and I cycled, with two hundred and fifty buckshot cartridges on each carrier, over twenty miles to Captain Kehoe, Skeeter Park, Co. Wexford, away up in the mountainous district of the Three Rocks.

Keegan's house (No. 10 Irish Street) was known to all the initiated as "the munition dump". It was here that the buckshot was run and cartridges filled, pikeheads sharpened and handles fixed.

The pikeheads were made by Jim Cleary at his forge in Reilly's yard at the top of the old Church Road - now St. Senan's - and we carried them in sacks on our backs as we waded across the Slaney at a place known as the Point of the Island.

Work went on every night (except Sunday) at Keegan's. We constructed a cave in Keegan's yard where we stored all the pikes, cartridges, crude bombs and shotguns. The shingle that we dug from the cave was filled into sacks and formed a barricade across the yard. Behind this first line of defence, one or two Volunteers did "sentry go" every night, with orders to fire on any R.I.C. man who dared to lift the latch of the door that led out to Keegan's yard. Captain Rafter made most of the powder that went into the buckshot cartridges. It was known as "the devil". We captured four kegs of gunpowder in a raid on

Donoghue's stores, Templeshannon. Liam Mellows came down from Dublin and took away two of them.

One night towards the end of the summer of 1915, Keegan asked me to remain on at the "munition dump" after the other workers had gone home.

Joy of Joys! He presented me with a long Lee Enfield rifle and twenty-five rounds of .303 and told me to defend it with my life.

I brought my prize home and fondled and caressed it, as a lover would his bride. I placed it in a secure hiding place that I had been preparing for quite a long time, in anticipation of this event - there to await the dawn that surely must be near now.

P.H. Pearse came to Enniscorthy in 1915 and I am not sure whether it was Emmett's birth (March 1778) or his death (September 1803) we were commemorating. Pearse was accompanied by The O'Rahilly. They were met at the railway station by twenty-five uniformed Volunteers who escorted them to the "barley field", at the foot of Vinegar Hill, where Pearse addressed and inspected A. and B. Companies. It was here I first heard "The Soldiers' Song". The singer was Tom Stokes, a member of A. Company.

That night, at a concert in the Athenaeum, twenty-five uniformed Volunteers carrying rifles formed a guard of honour for Pearse.

I think it was about this time that the great Irish patriot, O'Donovan Rossa, died, and forty (A. Company) Volunteers in uniform marched behind the remains to Glasnevin where I heard Pearse deliver the

oration.

We had many route marches, sham battles, etc., to toughen us for the coming fight that we, the rank and file, suspected was just "round the corner".

About four weeks before Easter 1916, we had a route march to the ancient city of Ferns. It was while I was exploring the ruins of Dermot McMurrrough's castle in that city, I was approached by Keegan and Jim Cullen, Captain of B. Company, and asked to join the Irish Republican Brotherhood. Cullen administered the oath to me.

On Spy Wednesday, A. Company received orders to be ready for a route march on Easter Sunday morning. This was to be a route march with a difference. We were to carry full equipment and two days' rations. The full equipment part of the order was cancelled late on Holy Saturday night.

We marched round Vinegar Hill on Easter Sunday morning, and dismissed in Mary Street at midday.

On Easter Monday, Dame Rumour came to town and filled the air with news of Volunteers fighting in the streets of Dublin and Germans landing in Kerry. Our officers met many times on Monday and Tuesday when it was confirmed that the Volunteers had taken the G.P.O. Though they talked it out all day Wednesday, it was midnight before they finally made up their minds to rise.

We paraded in Mary Street at dawn on Thursday morning, and marched to Keegan's where the 'cave' gave up its secrets to all the uninitiated. Shotguns,

pikes and bombs were distributed to all those who had not got rifles. We then marched to the Athenaeum where we hoisted the tricolour, saluted it with three volleys and three ringing cheers, established headquarters, controlled the town and posted outposts at the approaches.

Some writers say that we occupied historic Vinegar Hill and that we made no real effort to rouse the country or to maintain the initiative. Those statements are not true.

The R.I.C. barricaded themselves in their barracks, and most of us who had rifles amused ourselves by taking pot shots at them from two positions overlooking the barracks, the Turret Rocks and the top of Castle Hill. The police returned the fire, and one of our bullets found a billet in the leg of one of the defenders, Constable Grace. We allowed a doctor to go into the barrack to treat his wound, but he did not succeed in saving the constable's leg as it was amputated after the surrender.

Recruits flowed in to the Athenaeum from every part of the district. We armed most of them with pikes and shotguns.

On Friday we extended our line to Ferns and had almost reached Gorey when Dame Rumour came to Enniscorthy again on Saturday and told us that the Volunteers had surrendered in Dublin and that British troops had landed in Wexford and were marching on Enniscorthy.

When both those rumours were confirmed on

Sunday morning, a deputation of prominent townspeople took it on themselves to interview General French, Officer Commanding the British troops in Wexford. Fr. Fitzhenry, Adm., Canon Lister, Pat Shaw, T.C., John Bolger and Pat O'Neill are some of the deputation. They returned to Enniscorthy with terms of surrender - unconditional - and official confirmation of the rumour that Pearse had surrendered in Dublin and was a prisoner in Kilmainham prison. Our officers doubted this, and were granted facilities to interview Pearse in Kilmainham prison.

Seamus Doyle and Seán Etchingham (accompanied by Constable Drake, R.I.C.) were those who saw Pearse in Dublin. He confirmed the order to surrender, but whispered to Seamus Doyle, "Hide your arms. You will need them again".

On their return to Enniscorthy, a council of war was held in the Athanaeum. Keegan was there and tried hard to be allowed to form a Flying Column and take to the hills. It was finally decided to disband the rank and file, the officers to surrender to General French. All arms were called in and laid on the floor of the Athenaeum.

Early on Monday morning, my brother, Jem, and I returned to the Athenaeum, just to have one last look round before the British came to town. We found the place deserted. Confusion reigned supreme. Scattered all over the floor were scores of mattresses, hundreds of blankets and sheets, clothing, food, mugs, plates, etc., scores of pikes, many shotguns, bombs and a few ancient and modern revolvers. We noticed at once that

all but four of the rifles were missing. Seamus Doyle had done his work well and carried out Pearse's instructions to "hide your arms ...".

I did not know where the hidden arms were dumped, though I heard later that they were taken in the direction of Oulart, and that meant that Larry and Mick de Lacey were in the secret, as their home was in Oulart. (Fr. Rossiter, C.C., The Manse, thought I knew where those rifles were dumped and sent for me a few days after all the Volunteers had been arrested, and told me that the British knew that we did not surrender all the rifles and they were going to stay in Enniscorthy until they got them. I truthfully said I did not know where they were hidden. That ended the interview. He escorted me to the door, gave me a toe in the pants and told me to be off.)

I picked up one of the four rifles and, at that moment, the long arm of coincidence stretched out and handed me my own long Lee Enfield!!

Joy of joys again! I grasped it fondly. "Listen", I said to Jem, "I'm taking this rifle, no matter what happens. You take another, and let's get to h--- out of this".

Jem grabbed another rifle and we rushed out on to the street. There were about twenty bikes standing against the wall of the Athenaeum. We selected two of them, threw the rifles across our backs, our legs across the bikes, and we cycled away on that beautiful spring morning to the home of my mother's father at Ballycarney.

We found him standing at the cottage gate, seeking news of the Rising from those who passed by. When we told him of the surrender, he rushed into the cottage, whipped an old quilt from off his bed, wrapped it round the rifles and we hid them in the heavy undergrowth of Pat Doyle's orchard close by - there to await another day which we thought might come in our time.

When we returned to Enniscorthy a few hours later, we found about a thousand British troops loitering round the Market Square. The police had come out from behind their barricades and were making arrests wholesale.

Arrests went on, day and night, night and day, until every known Volunteer was behind prison bars. Jem and I were not arrested, though we were well known Volunteers and had paraded in uniform dozens of times. Almost forty years have elapsed since those events took place, and we are still wondering how we came to be overlooked in this Easter round-up.

I should like to mention that the Irish National Volunteers in the town of Wexford gave every assistance to the British troops from the moment they landed in that town.

On the Monday following Easter Week, I returned to my place of employment, and the boss informed me that my services were no longer required, so I folded my tent, like the Arabs, and silently stole away, to work for an army contractor, named Warner, who had the contract of repairing all the boots for the troops in

the garrison town of Newbridge in the County of Kildare.

I was only a few months in this job when I discovered that an odd revolver and an occasional rifle could be bought from the hard-up soldier who was willing to break the seventh commandment for an "honest" pound. But the fight was over, and all my friends were in prison, so I did not bother, but "shelved" the knowledge of my discovery for future reference.

I did not return home to Enniscorthy until the summer of 1918, and I found all the old parties - munition working and foraging - in action again and working at top speed in a new munition dump up in the attic of Antwerp - a pet name for Volunteer Headquarters.

When I told Keegan of my "shelved" Newbridge discovery, he was jubilant, and the necessary cash was immediately forthcoming from the private pocket of Seamus Rafter. I purchased many rifles and some revolvers and an occasional clip of .303 ammunition in Newbridge and The Curragh.

Seán Gallagher, a native of The Shannon, Enniscorthy, was working in Baltinglass at the time, and occasionally came to Newbridge to collect my purchases.

On one occasion, a native of Naas (a few miles from Newbridge), named Tom Traynor, employed in the Co-Op. Stores, Enniscorthy, at the time was home on holidays and called on me at Newbridge, and we cycled

all the way to Enniscorthy (about forty miles), with a couple of rifles tied on our bikes.

The tragic death of Captain Rafter was a staggering blow to the Republican movement in Enniscorthy as the year 1918 came to a close. The arrest of five of six Volunteer officers who wore uniform at the Captain's funeral was a further blow, and the dawn of the New Year saw Pat Keegan leave for America to assist in gun-running for Mick Collins.

St. Patrick's Day, 1917, saw me take the long road back to Enniscorthy to re-join my old A. Company. I was promoted Captain of A. Company some time later.

About this time, a member of A. Company, Seán Magauran, a native of Derry, Northern Ireland, (employed at the Co-Op. Stores, Enniscorthy) made it known to us that he could purchase rifles in Belfast if we could provide the cash and transport. No sooner said than done. I don't know where the cash came from, but the car came out of Tom McCarthy's garage after we had picked the lock. Tom was a member of the I.R.B., but we left a note, saying his car was commandeered by the I.R.A. and would be returned three days hence. We also placed guards on his house, with orders to intercept him if he attempted to go in the direction of the police barracks.

It was midnight when we - Magauran driving, Frank Gibbons and I - started off on the long journey to Belfast. Our first stop was at Ferns where we forced the lock on a petrol store and took away some petrol and oil. We arrived without mishap at No. 5, Devils Drive, Belfast, where we collected six rifles

and, after a journey of many minor adventures, we arrived back in Enniscorthy two days later.

We captured many shotguns and miniature rifles in raids on loyalist houses during the winter of 1919-1920.

Then there arrived in Enniscorthy the most fearless soldier I have ever known. His name was Joe McMahon, Kilmaley, Co. Clare. He was a coach-builder and was employed at Breen's of the Rock factory. From the moment of his arrival, business in A. Company was booming! He was action, ACTION, A C T I O N!!

He often chided us on resting on our '98 and '10 laurels, while the men of Dublin, Clare, Cork, Tipperary and Kerry were pouring out their life-blood in the fight to drive out the English. I pleaded many excuses that included shortage of ammunition and bombs.

Then he produced his plan of the "tailer percussion bomb". These bombs were made from steel piping and were six inches long by five inches in circumference, plugged at both ends with wooden plugs, and a three-inch nail acting as the percussion pin. The bomb was fitted with a tail, eighteen inches long by one inch wide, to ensure that it fell on the pin, causing the detonator to explode and set off the gelignite. The bomb was thrown by catching it by the tail and swinging it above the head three or four times, before letting it go.

We formed a bombing party, with Joe in charge, and practised with dummy bombs at the haunted house,

a little frequented two-storied stone structure, situated on the west bank of the Slaney, about one and a half miles up-stream from Enniscorthy. From fifty yards range, we could land a bomb on the roof, and Joe scored an occasional "bull" down the chimney.

It was Joe McMahon who opened the attack on Clonroche R.I.C. barracks on a night in April, 1920. We were amazed to hear only about one in ten of our "tailor" bombs exploding.

The gellignite used in these bombs had been captured in a hold-up on the Wexford County Council's Engineer's car, about one year previous, and had been hidden in a tomb in Ballybrennan graveyard. When we resurrected it from the tomb one year later, we found it frozen; and we thought we had thawed it back to life when we cooked it on hot iron plates over an open fire at Albert Smyth's home in Tamalosset where all the bombs were made. (One of the 'cooks', Joe O'Brien, Tailor, Duffry Gate, Enniscorthy, is still - thirty-five years after - suffering from headaches caused by the fumes of the nitro-glycerine.)

I should have known that this gellignite was undependable as, sometime before the Clonroche attack, I saw a live bomb accidentally roll off the work-bench at Albert Smith's and strike the floor at my feet - and only the detonator exploded! We said, "Thank God", for that escape, but I am afraid it wasn't a prayer we said at Clonroche. The failure of the bombs was responsible for the unsuccessful attempt to capture

this post.

The plan of attack was that the bombers should attack the back and, when we had made a hole in the roof, bottles of oil and petrol, equipped with tails like the bombs, were to be thrown on to the roof in the same manner as the bombs, followed by blazing torches. As we had no alternative plan, we reluctantly withdrew after about two hours. Every shot in our bomb locker was fired that night, and we never made another "tailor" percussion bomb. As far as I remember, T.D. Sinnott was in charge of the attack.

Joe's next big job was when we accompanied two G.H.Q. officers, Frank Thornton and Liam Tobin, on the execution of District Inspector Lee Wilson, R.I.C., at Gorey in June, 1920. I have written a special account of this operation, but I omitted to mention two very important people who made it possible for us to make it the great success it was.

Brigade Adjutant Liam O'Leary, Main Street, Enniscorthy - it was he who went to Gorey a few days before the execution, scouted the position and collected information concerning the District Inspector's daily timetable and habits.

In a raid on Enniscorthy railway station in May, 1920, we captured about two hundred two-gallon tins of petrol and took them away in M.J. Whelan's (not related to the writer of this) lorries and stored it at Miss Mary O'Neill's home at Ballingale, near Ferns. It was here we replenished our supplies of petrol at the end of each day's search for Wilson. Miss O'Neill knew of our

mission, and I would like to say thanks for the many teas and lunches that were given to "Wilson's men".

I am not sure whether it was before or after the Wilson affair that Joe, accompanied by Tom Roche and Frank Gibbons, called at my home at No. 1 Irish Street, where I kept a boot repairing shop, and reported that two armed members of the R.I.C. from the village of Clonroche had gone into Ringwood's barber's shop at Templeshannon - presumably for a hair-cut - and asked me to give them the "green light" for a hold-up. I put Joe in charge and gave him my colt .45 revolver, and said, "Go ahead". I told him to collect Michael Kirwan, Matt Lynam and Jem Fitzharris on the way over, just in case there was a fight. There was a fight, but not at the barber's.

When Joe got to Ringwood's, he noticed that there were five or six other people in the shop. Fearing that some of these might lose their lives if the police refused to surrender, he decided to ambush them as they returned to Clonroche. He selected a good ambush position near the Golf Links at Red Pat's Cross, on the Enniscorthy-New Ross road. They had only taken up their positions when the two R.I.C. men came cycling along. Just as they were about to enter the ambush, one of the Volunteers accidentally discharged his revolver. The police immediately threw themselves off their bikes and a tough fight ensued. The police tried an outflanking movement. Joe ordered a retreat when his men ran out of ammunition. The Volunteers had only revolvers and no refills of ammunition. We were all very disappointed at the failure of our first ambush.

It was in the pleasant month of August, 1920, that

Joe McMahon and I decided to raid the Tower of Hook, a mainland lighthouse at the most southerly point of Wexford, and take away all the tonite and detonators there. Tonite is an explosive used to warn ships in time of fog. It is a white chalklike substance and is made up in six-inch lengths by five inches in circumference. The car we used on this job was lent by the Rev. Fr. Walsh, Coolfancy, and the driver was Bill Sheridan, Irish Street, Enniscorthy. The sun had not gone down when we arrived at the Tower. Joe, as usual, was first into action and led the way into the Tower. The keeper offered little resistance. Bill Sheridan kept them covered while Joe and I carried out the tonite and detonators. We left enough tonite for a twelve-hour fog, dismantled the telephone and told the keeper not to move for two hours. We started off for Enniscorthy where we arrived without mishap, and discharged our cargo at Antwerp.

This raid had a tragic sequence some months later. Some of the tonite was later sent to Saltmills, a little village, about ten miles from the Hook. It was stored in an unoccupied house on farmer Cowman's out-farm. One night, about a dozen Volunteers had assembled in their house for the purpose of making bombs in preparation for an attack on Tintern R.I.C. barracks. Something happened which caused all the tonite to explode with a terrifying report that illuminated the night sky and was seen and heard many miles away. With the dawn, it was seen that the house - a stout stone structure - had disappeared and the remains of six Volunteers were scattered over the countryside. There were a few badly wounded survivors. These were arrested and thrown into prison. I met some of them in Cork detention barracks in 1921. Though they were all young men in

their twenties, that one moment of terror had added thirty years to their age.

The autumn of 1920 was about a month old when I was promoted Quartermaster, North Wexford Brigade.

About this time, I intercepted a letter addressed to: Officer Commanding the Troops, Courthouse, Enniscorthy. The O/C, Troops, was the infamous Captain Yeo - an unprincipled scoundrel who allowed his troops to torture prisoners. They were the terror of Enniscorthy and they sometimes ran amok in town, using entrenching tools as batons to bludgeon those who were unfortunate enough to come in their way. One or two Volunteers were kept in the courthouse, and we believed they were being kept there as hostages, and it was because of those that Captain Yeo was able to boast that he had gone through the "Irish" war and kept his hide intact.

When I arrived (a prisoner) in the courthouse on the evening of the 6th November, 1920, I was thrown into a cell with Val Martin Kelly, Ballycarney. There were no beds, only a few old mattresses sent in by our friends outside. The floor was concrete and the bedclothes and food were supplied by the local Cumann na mBan. (Thank you, Miss Teresa Keegan, and your sister, Ellen!)

I noticed there was much blood on the floor and walls, and asked Martin to explain. He told me that, when he arrived there a few days previously, one of the soldiers, known as "Lofty" (he was six feet, six inches tall) came into his cell and beat him up, by knocking him down and forcing the barrell of a loaded

.45 revolver into his mouth, cutting his gums, palate and tonsils. He told me too that every prisoner was given a "bath", a "hair-cut" and a "hiding".

I did not sleep that night and, when morning came, Private Seaman (a low-bred scoundrel, if ever there was one!) came into my cell, carrying a hair-cutting machine. When he went out ten minutes later, the longest hair on my head was less than five-sixteenths of an inch. Before he left, he ordered me to get ready for a bath.

The bath was a terrible ordeal. I was taken, naked, out of my cell and, as I walked along the flagged corridor and down the stone steps that led out to an open yard, I swore that, if ever I got free from the clutches of those demons, I would No, I'll not write what I swore! Time is a great healer ... !

There were about a dozen soldiers standing round, laughing and jibing. Five or six buckets had been filled with cold water from a tap in the wall. I was ordered to stand in a small, shallow basin, filled with soap-suds, in the middle of the yard. One of the soldiers stepped forward and, picking up one of the buckets, dashed its contents into my face. Other soldiers tried to knock me down by emptying the remaining buckets over my body. They then forced me to run round the yard, beating me with towels as I ran. Some of them held brush handles, thigh high, and forced me to jump over them. I don't know how long this torture went on but, when I was allowed to go back to my cell, I felt some of the joy experienced by a soul being released from Purgatory.

The following night - they did most of their dirty work at night-time - they brought in Martin Carty, Slaney Street, and beat him for hours outside my cell door. When I saw him next morning, I hardly knew him, with what lumps and bruises were on his head and face.

Two nights later, they brought in Albert and Loftus Smyth, Tomalosset. They were placed in my cell. Private Seaman and a few others came in, armed with wooden cudgels, and gave those two brothers a very bad beating. They forced them to take off their boots, and they beat them on the toes and on the head with the cudgels.

Patsy O'Neill, Irish Street, was brought in and given a bath, with his clothes on. They gave him a "hair-cut", punched his eyes, threw him out on the street, and told him to go home - lucky devil!

Fr. Codd, Adm., The Manse, Enniscorthy, (now Canon and P.P., Ferns) called to see me and was escorted to my cell by two soldiers who remained during his visit. I must have looked in pretty bad shape, as he asked if I would like to go to confession. I replied I would love to. He asked the soldiers to leave the cell. They refused but, after a few minutes' reasoning with them, they compromised by consenting to bring Captain Yeo. The Captain came and was very "nice" about it - "Yes, of course! Why not!". We could have all the confessions we wanted but only on one condition, that he be present during the confession!! It is unnecessary to say what Fr. Codd thought of this condition. He gave me his rosary beads - I have it

still and treasure it with pride - and his blessing, and left at once.

I was in this veritable hell of mental and physical torture for about three weeks before being transferred to the military detention barracks, Cork. It was one of the high spots in my life to stand and watch the courthouse go up in flames before we (the Republicans) evacuated the town in the Civil War of 1922. The courthouse was rebuilt about twenty years ago. The local court is held there every second Wednesday, and Donagh McDonagh, a son of one of the 1916 leaders, sits there in judgement on the local law-breakers.

To revert back, however, to the episode of the intercepted letter. It contained the following note:-

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"Dear Sir, When you are arresting Michael Kirwan who works at Johnie Kenny's, Chapel Street, be sure and place a guard at Joe Hendrick's lane that leads out to Irish Street, as Kirwan can escape by this lane."

Kirwan was a well known Volunteer. I am not sure if the letter was signed, but the person who gave it to me - Michael Murphy, Ross Road, Enniscorthy, employed at the time at Rafter's, Main Street, Enniscorthy - told me that it was written by a farm labourer named James Doyle, Ballycarney. I asked Murphy where he got it, but, unfortunately, I have forgotten his reply.

I decided at once to set a trap for Doyle, and I asked Tom Roche, saddler, Templeshannon, and my brother, Jem, to spring it. Sometime previously, we had

captured British army officers' uniforms in a raid for arms on a loyalist house. We dressed Tom and Jem in the uniforms, and we started off for Doyle's home. It was rather late when we arrived there, and Doyle was in bed. His wife answered our knock, and we told her that we were officers of the courthouse garrison and we had come in response to a letter written by her husband to our commanding officer. Doyle was out of bed and dressed in a few minutes, and we asked him to come out on the road, as we did not wish to discuss the matter in the presence of his wife.

It was a lovely moonlight night, and the "officers" had to be very careful as Doyle knew both of them, but they acted their parts well, so well, in fact, that two local Volunteers - not in the know of our mission - who happened to be coming along the road, on hearing the English voices, scrambled over the ditch and took to the fields. Doyle told all he knew about the area and the Volunteers, as he walked along the road in the moonlight towards Ballyhamilton.

When he had nothing further to tell, we rang down the curtain on Act I. When the "officers" revealed themselves in Act II, Doyle nearly collapsed, and we had great difficulty getting him along the road to Ballindaggin where we imprisoned him in an out-house on the farm of - I have forgotten the name.

I sent a report to the Brigade O/C, Phil Lennon, and he came to Ballindaggin next day and presided at a court martial that night. The curtain came down on the second act when Fr. McCormack told Doyle he had come to hear his confession.

The scene for the third and final act is laid at Knockroe, near Borris, on the Wexford-Carlow border. Doyle's bullet-riddled body is discovered in a field beside the main road. On his breast hangs a card, with the warning:-

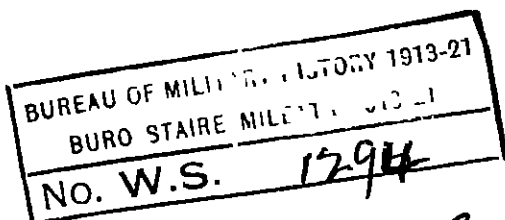
SPIES AND INFORMERS
BEWARE!

When I arrived home on the following morning, I found Doyle's wife seated in the kitchen, talking to my mother. She had come to ask me to help her find her husband who, she said, had been taken from his home two days previously by officers of the courthouse garrison. She had been to the courthouse and they denied all knowledge of her husband.

October had grown old when G.H.Q. sent M. Price to Enniscorthy. He presided at a Brigade Council held at Albert Smith's, Tomalosset. It was decided to form a flying column, and I was appointed leader.

Next day, I set about carrying out the Brigade order, by closing up my boot-repairing shop at No. 1 Irish Street and going on the run.

Six or seven days later when I had almost completed Wexford's first (since '98) Flying Column, I cycled into an R.I.C. cycle patrol on a bend of the road between Enniscorthy and Ballycarney on November 6th, 1920. And so ended all the bright dreams I cherished and my fight for Irish freedom.



SIGNED: *Sean Whelan*
DATE: *Nov. 21st 1955.*

WITNESS *Sean Brennan Lieut. Col.*
(Sean Brennan) Lieut.-Col. Nov. 21st, 1955.