

W. S. 1,296

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21
NO. W.S. 1296

ROINN  COSANTA.

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

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,296.....

Witness

Thomas Costello,
3 Shop Street,
Drogheda,
Co. Louth.

Identity.

O/C. Athlone Brigade
I.R.A.

Subject.

Moate Company,
Athlone Battalion I.R.A. 1917-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S.2575.....

Form B.S.M. 2

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURD STAIRS MILEATA 1913-21
NO. W.S. 1296

STATEMENT BY THOMAS COSTELLO,

3, Shop St., Drogheda, Co. Louth.

I was born at Ballynahoun near Athlone and educated at the Marist Brothers Schools, Athlone. One of our teachers at school - a man named ~~Keeney~~ ^{GALVIN} - was a fluent Irish speaker and a man with a great love for everything Irish, and he instilled, or tried to instil into us a similar love for Ireland. He was particularly keen on Irish history and the wrongs suffered by the country under English rule. Some time after leaving school I joined the Gaelic League in Athlone. There was a very keen and enthusiastic branch of the Gaelic League in Athlone then and one would be expelled for speaking the English language where Irish could have been used. I remember one member being expelled for singing a song in English during one of the branch's social functions. Mr. Ramsbottom from Portlaoise, more commonly known as "An Fear Mór", was a founder member and an ardent worker.

Early in 1917 I joined the Volunteers. I was working in Moate at this time and we organised a company there. Soon after we had started, Michael Collins, who had been released from internment previously, came to Moate and stayed for three weeks with us. He gave us a series of lectures, including one on the Manchester Martyrs. Initially we had about twenty-five members. Simon Grennan was our first Company Captain. We secured the services of a couple of ex-British Army men who lived in the town as drill instructors. These men were not members of the company and were paid for the service they gave. On joining we took no oath or made any declaration of any

sort. We paid a small subscription weekly towards a fund to purchase arms and defray other expenses. Parades were held weekly and sometimes oftener, and although they were not really secret the police at this time did not seem to take any notice of us. We had no arms of any account.

By now companies were being organised in other areas around Moate and we gave all the assistance we could in this direction. In 1918, about or before the conscription crisis, a brigade was organised in the Athlone area. Seán Hurley of Athlone was appointed Brigade O/C and Seamus O'Mara Vice O/C. A mobilisation of the brigade took place at Mullingar and each individual company marched there. This was a strenuous test as the distance in most cases was big, and it was a surprise to all to see the large number of men who were mustered at Mullingar on that day.

Hurley and O'Mara put great energy into getting the area organised and battalions now began to be formed. When the conscription crisis came upon us there was not the huge influx of recruits into the Volunteers as took place in other areas. We were rather careful of the type of men we took into our organisation. Drilling and training were intensified now. Local committees, which included in some cases members of the Volunteers, were set up in all areas to deal with the menace of conscription, and the Volunteers put in a huge amount of work in having the anti-conscription pledge signed and in making a census of food supplies in the area and also what arms, principally shotguns, were available for collecting. We did not construct any dug-outs. Whilst individuals who were not in the Volunteers were highly excited about

conscription, the Volunteers seemed to take the threat far more coolly and gave the impression that they had confidence in their leaders and just awaited their instructions. This was all to the good, and showed that discipline had taken root and would pay dividends.

Drilling and training during this period was carried out openly, and the more notice the R.I.C. took of us the more we liked it as we knew they would be reporting to Dublin Castle accordingly. Jas. Tormey, who had served in the British Army during the earlier stages of the World War, now joined the Volunteers and was very useful as his methods of instruction and knowledge of drill and tactics were more up to date than what we had to use previously. Our armament now consisted of a few small revolvers and a few shotguns.

A battalion had by now been organised in the Moate area. This was the 1st (Moate) Battalion of the Athlone Brigade. David Daly was appointed Battalion O/C; James Martin, The Berries, Athlone, Vice O/C; Joe Kennedy, also of Athlone, Adjutant; and Frank Fitzgerald of Ballykeevin Quartermaster. The companies comprising the battalion were: "A" - Coosan & Bliery - Capt. Henry O'Brien; "B" - Mount Temple - Captain Brian Lenihan; "D" - Athlone - Captain James Fox; "E" - Moate - Captain Hugh Sheerin; "F" - Faheeran - Captain Tom Claffey.

The brigade was comprised of the following battalions: 1st Battalion - Athlone area; 2nd Battalion - Drum~~R~~^Eany area; 3rd Battalion - Summerhill area; 4th Battalion - Mullingar area. The latter battalion was subsequently transferred to the Mullingar Brigade when that organisation came into being.

During the general election at the end of 1918 the Volunteers played a very active part. They were busily engaged in canvassing voters, protecting speakers at meetings and collecting funds for the election. On the day of the polling they arranged transport to get the supporters of Sinn Féin to the polling booths and did duty on the booths also. During the election a lot of trouble was experienced in Athlone and Tullamore with the hangers-on or camp followers of the British Army and with the "separation" women - women who were in receipt of monies from the British government on account of their husbands serving in the British Army. What was known as the Irishtown area of Athlone was particularly bad in this respect. Jam-jars and bottles were the usual missiles used by these people. On one occasion when we were proceeding into Athlone for a meeting, the Franciscan priests had to take us into the town by a circuitous route in order to avoid a clash with those people, who, we were told, had quite a large store of such weapons waiting for us. We were armed with hurley sticks, but women were a particularly bad subject to have to deal with. The R.I.C. were generally sympathetic to this mob, while they were openly hostile to the supporters of Sinn Féin.

Early in 1919 the 1st Dáil assembled in Dublin and constituted themselves as the Government of the Irish Republic. The Dáil took over responsibility for the Irish Volunteers as the Army of the Republic, and all members of the force, both officers and men, were now required to take an oath of allegiance to the Dáil as the government of the Republic. Almost all our officers and men subscribed to this oath and there were only a few

who declined to do so and ceased thereby to be members.

Around this time I became a member of the I.R.B. I was taken into this organisation by McCormack of Drumreany, who was the O/C of the Drumreany^E Battalion, Irish Volunteers or I.R.A. at this time. McCormack had been in the I.R.B. previous to the Rising in 1916. I now started a circle in Moate and recruited eight or nine members, to whom I administered the I.R.B. oath. I was appointed head or centre of this circle and we held meetings generally once a month. Each member paid a small subscription towards the purchase of arms. I also organised circles at Shannon Bridge, Ferbane, Flahen, Mullingar and Gleniden and at some other places.

The strength of the battalions had increased slightly by this time. As far as I can remember, the strength of the brigade was now roughly one thousand - all ranks. Towards the end of 1919 a general raid for arms was ordered to be carried out in the area. As a result of this raiding we procured an amount of shotguns - somewhere between five and six hundred - in the brigade area, together with an amount of shotgun cartridges. We did not get any service weapons. We did pick up a few revolvers of different types and calibres. Ammunition for these weapons was scanty as well as being of such a varied selection. The companies in the towns had now five or six revolvers each, and some of the officers in the country companies had revolvers also.

Early in 1920 the R.I.C. began to evacuate their smaller outlying stations and concentrate their men in larger garrisons, principally in the towns. This

decision to evacuate their small stations was forced on them by attacks and, in some places, capture of their barracks by the I.R.A. or Volunteers. They realised apparently that they could not possibly hold on to their small stations. In our area, Creggan and Brawny barracks were evacuated, and we burned both of these on Easter Saturday night, 1920, in conformation with the rest of the country. This was a countrywide operation, and it was gratifying to read in the daily papers of the period about the destruction of these enemy posts. It indicated that the Irish people were up and thinking again on the right lines. The R.I.C. were always looked upon as the No. 1 enemy of the people. They were of the people - being all Irishmen - and it was understood by all that they were the chief weapon by which the British government maintained such a hold on the country. This evacuation, though only a limited withdrawal, was the beginning of the end, and was a great blessing to us as it allowed us greater freedom of movement. The R.I.C. were the eyes and ears of the British government through their hirelings in Dublin Castle.

The evacuation by the R.I.C. had another advantage also. The I.R.A. had now to take over the duty of policing the country, and, although it threw a great strain on our organisation, we were anxious to do this. It was essential to demonstrate to the people at large and of all shades of political thought that we could maintain discipline and order and run our own institutions. The withdrawal of the R.I.C. was availed of by some unruly elements to make capital out of the situation, but this was quickly stopped by the Volunteers and I don't think that the country was ever so law-abiding as it was

then and up to the advent of the Black and Tans and Auxies, when it became practically impossible for the Volunteers to maintain police work and deal with robbers and murderers both official and unofficial.

We had set up a prison or place of detention at Drumreany - "An unknown destination" as they were called by us. This was an old unoccupied house. From my memory, only one man was detained there. This case arose out of land trouble. A family, the boys and father of which were members of the I.R.A., had forcibly acquired an area of land and had cultivated it and sown crops in it. We arrested the father and held him prisoner at our unknown destination for ten days. His sons pleaded for his release, and eventually an agreement was reached with the father that he would cut and save the crops and the matter of compensation for his work would be settled at a later date. On agreeing to this the man was released.

The Sinn Féin Courts were now organised and functioning successfully in the area, and the people were using them extensively and were abiding loyally by their decisions. The British Courts had practically ceased to function. The Volunteers were instrumental in getting the people to take their cases to the Sinn Féin Courts, and in many cases were able to settle up differences between neighbours without reference to the court. I acted as a kind of liaison officer between the Volunteers and the people and, as such, was able to settle many disputes myself. The British Forces raided extensively to try and locate where the courts were being held, but with very little success. On one occasion they did succeed in surprising one of the courts while it was in session.

They arrested Mr. Joseph Dixon, Solicitor, Athlone, and detained him for one night and then released him without preferring any charge against him. Mr. Dixon, who was very sympathetic to the Sinn Féin movement, had put in an amount of work in organising the Sinn Féin Courts and had rendered very valuable service to the movement.

A further raid for arms was carried out in the latter part of 1920. In this raid we collected some more shotguns and a few more revolvers of different types. The revolvers were mostly picked up in the houses of retired British Army officers. We had in the brigade now four Martini type service rifles. I do not know how these were acquired. I think they came from Drumreany and were the armament acquired by the men there previous to the Rebellion in 1916. There were also a few .303 Lee Enfield service rifles which had been bought from soldiers of the British garrison in Athlone. There was a fair good supply of ammunition for the Lee Enfield rifles but only a few rounds for the Martinis. The ammunition for the Lee Enfields was also purchased from soldiers of the Athlone garrison.

Seán Hurley, the Brigade O/C, was arrested by the British and he was replaced by Seamus O'Mara, the Vice O/C, who now became Brigade O/C. I was now appointed Vice O/C of the brigade. The Brigade Adjutant was George Manning and the Quartermaster was, I think, Patrick Macken, who now lives in Longford. There was no change in the battalion officers.

A brigade had now been organised in the Mullingar area and our 4th Battalion was now transferred to this brigade, leaving us with three battalions in ours,

Athlone, Drumreany and Summerhill. The railway company had an extensive quarry for supplying material for the upkeep of the permanent ways at Licarrow in South Roscommon. They used explosives extensively in this quarry. The explosives were kept in a magazine in the quarry area but were not guarded. It was decided to raid this and secure what explosives were there. The raid was carried out by selected men from the 1st Battalion area, and a big quantity of gelignite and detonators was secured. This was taken across the Shannon by boat to the eastern side where I had a party ready to receive it. We had to use a horse and cart to get it away from the Shannon. I cannot remember now where we dumped it. A second raid was made later on this quarry and I think another but smaller amount of explosives was secured. I did not have anything to do with the second raid and do not know the details.

The R.I.C. had a barracks in Streamstown which was garrisoned by seven men and a Sergeant. In February, 1920, elaborate plans were made by the Brigade O/C to attack and capture this post. There were no windows on one side of the barracks, so his plans entailed the placing of ladders against this side of the building and climbing on to the roof. Holes were to be broken in the roof and bombs and petrol thrown through these and the place set on fire. Meanwhile a rather large party of Volunteers were to occupy fire positions and keep the garrison confined to the building.

I told the Brigade O/C. that, in my opinion, all this elaboration for attack was all nonsense; that the place could be taken easily by ruse. My plan was a simple one. On Sunday morning, half of the garrison of the barracks would go to Mass at Bohan Chapel while the remainder stayed in the barracks. We would mix with the people who would also be going to Mass and intercept the R.I.C. and disarm them and then take their uniforms and cycles off them. Having donned the police uniforms we would cycle to the barracks and surprise and capture the remainder of the force there. Meanwhile, a party of Volunteers would be lying in hiding ready to rush in after us.

The Brigade O/C. reluctantly agreed to try this, but at the same time went ahead with his own plans as an alternative method. On Sunday morning, as planned, we merged with the people going to Mass and when four of the R.I.C. came along we held them up. Only one of them was armed with a revolver. We took them to a farmhouse close by and took their uniforms off them. James Toomey and I got into two of the uniforms and, having waited for a while, again mixed with the people coming now from Mass.

When we arrived at the point where we were to contact the Brigade O/C. to inform him that we were ready, I found him drilling his men on the road in public. The Brigade O/C. insisted on getting time to get his men into position and, even when this was done, some of them could be seen looking over walls and so forth. On looking towards the barracks I could see the steel shutters being put on the windows and one of the police left the barracks and went to the signal cabin on the railway close by, apparently to phone Mullingar for reinforcements.

I realised very quickly that we had lost the element most in our favour - surprise - but still decided to put the matter

to the test. Tormey and I cycled up to the barracks. The door, which was normally only closed, we found was locked. On knocking on the door a voice from inside - probably the sergeant - asked who was there. I replied: "Police". I was then asked from where and I replied "Ballymore". Next, I was asked "Your business" to which I replied "Dispatches". I was then asked for my name ^{WHICH I GAVE} as Curran. I knew there was a Constable Curran in Ballymore. I was next asked for my Christian name and here I was stuck as I did not know Curran's other name.

Immediately there was a rush of feet inside and we could hear rifles being loaded and men running upstairs. Toomey caught me by the policeman's cape and dragged me on to the railway line under cover just in time to escape the bursting of a hand grenade which had been pushed out through the loophole in the steel shutter of the window. The officer in charge of our Drumraney section of Volunteers thought we were police escaping from the barracks and opened fire on us from a hill overlooking the barracks. Tormey got a bullet through his policeman's cape.

A general barrage of fire was now opened on the barracks by our men while some of them rushed forward with ladders and placed them against the blind walls of the building in preparation for getting on to the roof. Before this could be done, however, reinforcements of police arrived from Mullingar and our whole party was forced to withdraw. No one, however, got hit and all got away safely.

The Mullingar police took the local police away with them, thus evacuating the barracks and the local Volunteer company burned it that night. Michael Collins asked for a report in full on the attack and I submitted a detailed report to him. Arising out of this report the Brigade O/C. was suspended and I was appointed Brigade O/C. instead and George Adamson was appointed Vice O/C.

We next held up the train at Passaugh and raided it for

mails which we took. While censoring the letters we came across one from Sergeant Craddock of the R.I.C. who was stationed in Athlone, but was on temporary duty in Mounttemple. The letter was addressed to the HEAD CONSTABLE, ATHLONE. Craddock was a veteran of the Boer War having served in the British army. In his letter, Craddock gave a survey of the whole position in the area, as it presented itself to him, and suggested a scheme or set of plans to deal with it. Soon after this he returned to his station in Athlone and there he became very aggressive. A favourite pastime of his was to put a revolver to young men's heads who were in the movement and threaten to shoot them and so forth.

We decided that Craddock would have to be removed. Patrols by the police were now increased to eight in strength. On four different dates we waited in ambush position in different parts of the town, but Craddock and his patrol always succeeded in evading us. One day soon afterwards I was at the shop where I worked when one of our Volunteers came in and informed me that Craddock and another policeman had gone into the Foresters' Hall. I immediately collected two other Volunteers who were armed with revolvers also and we ambushed the two as they left the Hall. Craddock was killed and the other policemen escaped. We could have shot the second man also, but we did not want to do so as there was nothing against him. We were very sorry later that we had let him go as he turned out to be a right villain and excelled himself in ill-treating people by beating them up and so forth.

There was intense activity by the police after this. A list of the wellknown leaders of Sinn Fein was posted up in the barracks. All those men were to be shot. Many of the men on this list had no connection whatever with the I.R.A. but had made themselves prominent during the earlier days of Sinn Fein and particularly during the elections.

Head Constable Feeney, who was a moderate type of man, intervened and succeeded in having this list cancelled.

The house where I worked was now closely watched by the police and on the day of Craddock's funeral there were actually two enemy agents in the shop as the remains passed. There was always some spy, such as a local ex-British army soldier or suchlike, in the shop and they tried by every means in the way of conversation to get me to divulge that I knew something about Sergeant Craddock's death.

One day two young men entered the shop and beckoned me to go down to the Bar section, although there was an attendant there at the time. In the Bar they produced a Parabellum pistol which they offered to sell to me for £6. They informed me they were deserters from the British forces. I told them I had no interest whatsoever in firearms of any description. Eventually they offered it to me for £2, but I still refused to have anything to do with it. It was hard to resist the temptation of acquiring such a beautiful weapon, but I was satisfied that they were trying to catch me out.

I stalled them for two hours, hoping that someone whom they did not know and would not see again would come into the shop and purchase the weapon. The men now left the shop saying they would call back later, and I again repeated that I had no interest in revolvers. The men now went to Joseph Kennedy, who had a business premises near us and he bought the gun off them for £7. That evening, Kennedy informed us of his purchase and laughed at us and said we were too "windy" to purchase the weapon. While we were with Kennedy, important and urgent dispatches arrived for Longford, and Kennedy was detailed to travel to Longford with them. The dispatches had to be delivered in Longford that night. Kennedy set off for Longford on a cycle. That night, at 1 o'clock in the morning, Kennedy's house was raided by R.I.C. and Tans with blackened faces, but,

lucky for Kennedy, he was in Longford, else he was for the firing squad had he been at home.

The R.I.C. and Tans now commandeered Cohen's motor boat on the Shannon. This was a house-type boat and a large party of this force boarded it. We received information that they were going via the Shannon to intercept Kennedy on his return from Longford. We hurriedly mobilised as many men as possible and waited in ambush position at Coosan, three miles north of Athlone. When the boat reached a point on the river at Coosan we opened fire on it. The engine of the boat was put out of commission and the boat floated helplessly. One R.I.C. man was killed and three or four others of the party wounded. Reinforcements were quickly at the scene from Athlone and they brought the dead man and the wounded and the rest of the boat party back to Athlone. All our party got away safely and Kennedy was saved again. Our party consisted of about 30 men mostly from the Coosan company. We had four service rifles and the remainder had shotguns and there were also a few revolvers.

On the Saturday following this I was working in the shop as usual when, at about five in the evening, a sergeant of the military with 5 or 6 men with bayonets fixed arrived. They came into the shop and asked for the Boss's son whom they marched off to the barracks. This young man was not a member of any organisation. I concluded that they had made a mistake and that I was the one they had been sent to collect. Immediately I asked the Boss to give me my holidays and I left the place that night. The following morning the place was surrounded and my box, in which I kept my things, was broken open. I was now 'on the run'.

Instructions had been received from H.Q. to organise an active service unit, or flying column, in the area, and the

next month was spent on this work in selecting and getting together the different personnel. Jim Tormey was selected to lead the column which, at first, consisted of 10 men. For armament for this unit we had eight rifles and two shotguns. We located ourselves at first in an old house at Tubber and there we planned our first ambush. Although I was the Brigade O/C. I was just an ordinary member of the column. It was essential that I should be free to come and go in order to attend to brigade duties.

It was now October 1920. At the end of that month we planned to ambush a party of enemy forces at Parkwood, midway between Moate and Horseleap. Parties of enemy forces usually travelled this road. We took up positions on either side of the road - eight men were on one side and two on the other. There was a little bit of wood on either side of the road, but otherwise not much effective cover, the ground being flat. A scout was placed in position about 200 or 300 yards away from our position on the Horseleap side. This man's duties was to keep a watch for enemy lorries and when he saw one approaching to blow a whistle to warn us. Thus, instead of being on continuous alert, we could rest. The road was straight at this point.

We were about two hours waiting when a lorry of Tans ran right through our position without any whistle blast having been received from our scout. It was through and safe before we recovered from our surprise and we had not a chance of engaging it. We all now left our position and were standing in a bunch wondering why our scout had not signalled and vowing vengeance on him, when we now heard a shrill whistle blast which indicated there was another one coming. We had just time to dive for a firing position when this lorry was upon us. Fire was opened on it, being concentrated on the driver as previously ordered. The driver was killed instantly, but the man beside him grabbed

the steering wheel and prevented the lorry from crashing into the fence. This caused the lorry to slow down, thus giving our men a chance to get a second volley into it. This wounded three other occupants. In quick succession five other lorries now arrived behind this; pulling up, the occupants quickly jumped from them, some of them actually landing into the garden or field where we were. They had panicked and quickly scattered over the countryside and seemed only concerned with getting away from the place. Had they kept their heads, we could never have got out of the place alive. Afterwards a sergeant of the R.I.C. told me they found some of them four miles away from the scene of the attack. We later discovered that what we had engaged, instead of being a single lorry or a cycle patrol as we expected, was a whole convoy of Tans who were proceeding from Gormanston, Co. Meath - their H.Q. and Training Depot - to Galway.

Due to the enemy panicking, we got away safely without any casualties and with only the loss of a few rounds of ammunition expended. It was a bad position for an ambush. The cover was bad and there was a bog at our back. Had we sufficient force and equipment, we could have disposed of them individually like ducks.

The column now moved over to the Summerhill area and went into camp there for a few weeks. While here we occupied ambush positions at least three times for cycle patrols from Athlone to Clonark, but we had no luck - a patrol never turned up. We now moved to the Drumraney area and selected suitable sites for ambushes there, but again we were out of luck as the enemy never obliged us by turning up when we were in position, so we moved back again to the Summerhill area. When Christmas came we disbanded the column temporarily. I went to the west of Ireland. A few of the men remained in camp.

Shortly after Christmas, Tormey's brother was shot in Ballykinlar internment camp by one of the British entries there. This made Jemmy very impatient and he laid an ambush at a place called Coonafulla on the Athlone-Ballinasloe road. Adamson was Vice O/C. of the brigade at this time. A cycle patrol came along and they opened fire on this. There was a lane or boreen running at right angles to the position occupied by our men and, unfortunately, this was not guarded. One of the police succeeded in getting into this boreen and placing himself on the flank of the ambush party. This policeman shot Tormey through the head, killing him instantly. The rest of the column got away safely - the police making no effort to keep contact with them. There were no enemy casualties ~~either~~.

The local Volunteers succeeded in getting Tormey's body after the police withdrew and took it to a house on the Shannon. It was buried the next night at Clonmacnoise Cemetery. The police had withdrawn at the same time as our men and hence they did not find Tormey's body and were unaware that he was killed. The ambush position was a bad one and due consideration had not been given to its selection and the protective measures required for security while in the position. It was a case again of never leave your flanks unguarded.

After this affair, I returned to the column and took charge of it myself. We moved to Faheerean near Moate where we established our H.Q. We remained there for about three weeks. At this time, an order was received from Headquarters to carry out as many ambushes and attacks on the enemy as possible. I think this was consequent on the shooting of the Mayor of Limerick - Clancy - that this instruction was issued. I now divided the column into three sections. Dick Birthles, the O/C. of Drumraney Battalion, was put in charge of No. 1 Section. Barney Gaffey was put in charge of No. 2 Section. He had with him O'Meara, who was formerly the Brigade O/C., and I took

charge of the No. 3 Section remaining at Faheeran. Plans were made for three points of ambush. The first was to ambush military patrol between Athlone and Longford. Dick Birthles and his section took up an ambush position at Auburn and attacked a party of Black and Tans which came instead of military. Four or five of the Tans were wounded. Our men had a small supply of G.H.Q. type bomb and these proved absolutely unreliable. The Party of Tans were attacked going up a steep hill on the road and our men succeeded in getting a number of the bombs into the lorry, but they failed to go off and the Tans picked them up and threw them back at our men. One of our men - Volunteer Finn - was killed. I believe myself that he was shot by our own men. He had got up from his position and was caught in the line of fire by some of our own men. The Tans succeeded in getting through without the lorry being halted which our men were depending on the bombs to do for them.

No. 2 Section attacked a patrol of police or Tans at Cloonark. This was a cycling patrol. One policeman named Doyle was wounded. No. 1 Section had most of the rifles we had and No. 2 Section were mostly armed with shotguns. Over 100 shotgun pellets were, I understand, taken from Doyle's head and face. The powder in the cartridges was old and apparently too weak to make the pellets penetrate. We had no casualties here.

With No. 3 Section I decided to attack police patrols in the town of Moate. There was a big garrison of R.I.C. and Tans in Moate and the enemy had developed a new technique in this matter. While patrols were out in the town, parties of military were wont to come to the edge of the town and await there, so that if the patrols were fired on they could quickly rush to their assistance. I made my plans, selecting points

of attack according to the movement of the patrol and noted the laneways and houses which would serve us in making our getaway. I was thoroughly conversant with the topography of the place.

I sent orders to the Moate Company to send out two reliable men to me at Faheeran and when they reported I made them thoroughly aware of our plans and gave them their instructions. Those men were working in the town and their duty was to keep us informed by runner regarding the patrols - when they came out and the direction they went and their strength. I had selected an assembly point for my section some short distance out of the town.

The following night, I moved the section to the assembly point, but found on arriving there that about half of the inhabitants of Moate had evacuated the town; even some of the businessmen in the place had left and gone into the country. The police were confined in their barracks and three or four lorry loads of military had taken up positions in the town. The two Moate Volunteers had told their friends of the intended attacks and the news quickly spread around the town. In fact, they might as well have notified the police officially. There was nothing we could do in the circumstances only get out of the place again, and we withdrew back to Faheeran. For this affair we had four rifles and a number of revolvers and a few of the G.H.Q. bombs. Revolvers were more suitable for town work.

The column was now re-formed as one unit at Coosan outside Athlone. Adamson, the Vice O/C. of the brigade, and another man now left us temporarily and went to deal with a ^{SPIE AT} ~~special~~ Carrick Brien whom they executed. Officers of the military garrison in Athlone, including General Lambert, were in the habit of going to a house near Coosan named Midge's, to play Tennis. Captain Elliott of the Tubberclare Company of Volunteers was instructed to round up this party and if they carried arms

to disarm them. Elliott laid an ambush for the party on the road out to Midge's. When the car containing the officers came along, he called on them to halt. They refused to halt and his men opened fire on them. The car got through, but General Lambert was killed. I don't think the officers were armed. Elliott should have used a temporary road block and compelled them to stop. A permanent road block would have been impossible to operate owing to the amount of traffic on this road. Something in the nature of a farm cart to push across the road at the last moment would have been best.

Military activity now became intense and they combed the countryside, including the Islands on the Shannon. The military did not carry out any reprisals, but after a few days, the Tans came into the area and burned the houses of seven families in the area. They did not give a chance to the people even to get dressed, but just put them out of their beds and did not give them time to collect any of their belongings. Our Brigade H.Q. was established in this area at the time, but escaped detection.

A few days after the Tans had done their burnings, an order was received from G.H.Q. that we were to burn an equal number of houses belonging to supporters of the British regime as a counter reprisal. There were a number of small places owned by Protestants in the area, but I did not consider it would be fair to burn those people's houses for something which was not their fault. Lord Castlemaine lived in Moydrum Castle and was a member of the British House of Lords. Lady Castlemaine was in continuous residence in the Castle. I decided to burn this in preference to the small houses of the other loyalist residents, as it would be more effective.

I mobilised about 20 men in all including the column. We had to go prepared to fight, as officers of the Athlone garrison were regular visitors to the Castle. Knocking at the

main door, we were refused admission, so we broke in one of the panels of the door with hammers which we got from a local forge. The butler and Lady Castlemaine now came to the door and the Lady asked for whoever was in charge. I told her I was in charge and told her the object of our visit. She asked me if I would allow her some time to pack some valuables and so forth, such as silverware. I pointed out to her that the Black and Tans did not give the people they burned out time even to dress, but I said we did not follow their example. I gave her the time she required and also ten men to help her with the task and they took out about ten boxes of materials. Meanwhile, we had rounded up all the staff and placed them under guard at the rear of the premises. Two armchairs were taken out of the Castle and put down for the Lady and her daughter to sit on.

The place was now liberally sprinkled with petrol and then a check was made of our men to ensure that all was accounted for. I informed Lady Castlemaine that we were not criminals and were acting on the orders of G.H.Q. of the I.R.A. and that the burning of her home was a reprisal for the burning done by England's Black and Tans. She was very dignified under the circumstances and never winced. She thanked me for my co-operation in saving her treasures and assured me that she quite understood. The place was now set alight and, having assured ourselves that it would be totally destroyed, we saluted Lady Castlemaine and withdrew. Three of our men named Costello and relatives of mine were actually working in the place. Yet, when the military interviewed Lady Castlemaine after the fire, she refused to disclose the identity of any of them and said she was not in a position to recognise any of our party. She informed the military that the men who burned the Castle were gentlemen and behaved as such. This was told to me afterwards by her doctor. Lord Castlemaine was awarded £100,000 as

compensation by the British Courts, which, taking into consideration the value of money then, gives an idea of the extent of the building.

Six of our men in the Mounttemple area were arrested by enemy forces, some of them being actually taken from their beds. It was apparent that some one in the area was supplying information to the enemy and a check was made up in the area to find out who was doing this. A man named Johnston, a Protestant, who lived in the area was under suspicion for some time previously. The officer in charge of the 2nd Battalion was in charge of this investigation. I do not know the details of what he discovered, but he was satisfied beyond doubt that Johnston was guilty. They went to Johnston's house on three or four occasions, but could never find him at home. Eventually, it was discovered that he was staying in a neighbour's house and they went there to get him. When they entered the door of the house Johnston made a dive to get away, but was grabbed and held by our men. He fought like a lion to get free, so much so, that his coat was torn off in the struggle. It was the intention of course to take him some distance from the house and shoot him, but so violently did he fight that they were compelled to shoot him there and then in full view of the family in the house. The people in the house did not seem in the least surprised and it was apparent that he had told them, or they were well aware of his activities. I should have stated that ⁱⁿ a raid on the mails, a letter was found from Johnston to the British Intelligence Authorities which seemed to indicate that he was the principal intelligence agent for the county. The O/C., 2nd Battalion will be able to give details concerning this.

After Johnston's death, the British forces carried out an extensive comb-out of the area, more intensive than even in the case of General Lambert. They searched an area of about 40 square miles around.

At this stage there was a British Intelligence officer named Tully stationed in Athlone Barracks. This man seemed to bear a charmed life. We tried every means to try and get him, but never could. He usually went around on a motor cycle and wore a chain waistcoat or vest. He carried two guns (revolvers) and was reputed to be able to shoot excellently with either hand. He struck terror into everyone he contacted. We laid ambushes for him, in all about 15 times, but he always succeeded in evading us by returning by another route. On one occasion when he had gone out on his motor cycle, we had parties covering all roads to Athlone from the east side of the Shannon, but again he evaded us. On this occasion he had returned via Longford and crossed the Shannon and came back to Athlone on the Roscommon side. When we again heard that he was out on his motor cycle, we decided that he would not escape this time, and we had parties on every road to Athlone both east and west of the Shannon, but again he evaded us. His cycle broke down and he returned by train from Mullingar. We had not thought of that loophole. I understand that this man went to Palestine to seek adventure there after the signing of the Treaty with this country. I once met him face to face at Coosan as I stepped on to the road. He was on his motor cycle as usual. He just stared at me and passed on. I was not carrying a gun at the time. On another occasion George Adamson and some of our boys were looking for him in Athlone. He came along and Adamson had his gun levelled on him when a patrol came in sight and once again he escaped.

We received information that officers from the garrison in Athlone were in the habit of going up the Shannon in a boat to fish on certain days and we decided to ambush them. We mobilised a party of our men on the banks of the Shannon to do this job. The officers were reported as always being armed.

Prior to this, George Adamson and Gerald Davis - now Dr. Davis in the army - who was attached to us, had left us and gone to another area to investigate a report that a spy was operating there. When on their way back to us they were informed that two Black and Tans were in a farmyard with two girls from Athlone. This was quite close to where we were waiting to ambush the officers on the river. Davis and Adamson went to the farmyard and held up the first Tan they met and disarmed him, taking his revolver which he was carrying from him. Adamson, who was armed with a Parabellum automatic, stood guard over this Tan while Davis went to look for the second. Adamson also had the Tan's revolver. Davis found the second Tan waiting for him. He had the girl he was with in front of him and was using her to cover him from being fired at. Davis was reluctant to fire as he would hit the girl, but the Tan fired a shot at him hitting him in the muscle of the right arm. There was now an exchange of shots between them and then the Tan made a dash to get away. Davis heard a shot behind him and, on looking around, saw that the first Tan was on top of Adamson who was on the ground. The Tan had put a bullet through Adamson's chest and was in the act of putting another into him when Davis fired at the Tan with the last round in his gun, hitting him in the side of the body. The other Tan made good his escape.

We were less than half a mile away at the time and, hearing the shooting, we rushed to the farmyard. We had Adamson removed across the Shannon to a place called Ballycumber where he was nursed back to health in a house owned by relatives of mine. The officers did not go up the river that day which was Sunday, although they had been up the previous Sunday.

A lorry load of military were in the habit of proceeding each day with provisions from Athlone to Ferbane. This was a

a type of armoured lorry and usually contained eight men or so. We decided to ambush this vehicle at Tubbrit on the Athlone-Ferbane road when it was returning to Athlone. The ground was more suitable for ambush on anything moving in the direction of Athlone. On the night previous to the day selected for the ambush - as I knew that the officers of the staff of the 2nd Offaly Brigade had their H.Q. near Tubbrit, and not wishing to have them surprised and possibly caught in any subsequent round up - I went down there and warned them of my intentions. I met some of the officers of the staff and told them of what I was going to do. I did not ask for any assistance as I did not consider that I wanted any.

My ambush party consisted of about 14 or 15 men, some of whom belonged to the local company, and some of the column. The ambush position was in our brigade area, but close to the boundary of the 2nd Offaly Brigade area. Commandant O'Connor of the 2nd Battalion took charge of our ambush party. We had a few riflemen on the party, but the armament was mostly shotguns. We took up a position on both sides of the road and waited for the lorry to return. We had information that it had gone to Ferbane as usual. We waited in our position for some considerable time and well over the time the lorry normally returned at, but it put in no appearance. Eventually a soldier on a cycle came from the direction of Ferbane. We called on him to halt and when he did not do so, fired at him, slightly wounding him and knocking him off his cycle. This soldier informed us that the lorry was held up on the road by fallen trees some distance back on the Ferbane side and that he was proceeding to Athlone for assistance. He was only wounded by some shotgun pellets fired by one of our men who was at the end of our position and was not armed or carried any documents. We released him and sent him back to join his

own party and not to Athlone. There was nothing we could do now but pull out of there and return to our billets.

It would appear that the officers of the staff of the 2nd Offaly Brigade were quite happy and enjoying themselves in their hideout near Tubritt and did not want any trouble started in that locality; so, to prevent us ambushing the lorry, they blocked the road so that it could not return and we could not ambush it. This took place shortly before the Truce and at this time it was very hard to get dispatches through to G.H.Q. without delay.

I made a full report to G.H.Q. about this abortive ambush, but I do not know if my dispatch ever reached G.H.Q. or if any action was taken by them against the staff of the 2nd Offaly Brigade. I was amazed at the action of the officers of this brigade, especially as we had co-operated with them very successfully on the night that they attacked Clara Barracks which was a big affair and went on for some hours. I would prefer not to mention the names of the officers of the Offaly Brigade with whom I had been in contact prior to the attempted ambush.

After the burning of Granard, Co. Longford, by British forces, a large number of Auxiliary Police and Black and Tans were gathered in Athlone and were celebrating their glorious victory. James Tormey and Harry O'Brien, who was captain of the Athlone company of Volunteers, were in the town. As they went from house to house in the town they were shadowed by the Tans and Auxies. They realised that they were being followed and they made for Maguire's in the Pig Market. Maguire's was a publichouse and, being a corner house, had a double entrance at the corner. It would seem as if someone had pointed them out to the Tans. As the two reached the entrance

to Maguire's the Tans had closed up on them. Tormey did a quick wheel into Maguire's shop and as he did so he was grabbed by one of the Tans who was following them. O'Brien, who was quick on the draw, drew a revolver from his pocket and shot the Tan. The Tan fell on the path and Tormey dived into the shop and quickly escaped through the back entrance into the yard. Here he found his escape cut off as there was no way out of the yard and he was compelled to hide himself on the roof of an outhouse. O'Brien, having shot the Tan, made a quick dive around the corner into the other street and, although fired on by the Tan's comrades, succeeded in making good his escape.

The Tans searched Maguire's premises minutely, but did not find Tormey, and he eventually made good his escape and got out to Coosan. Within a couple of hours the Tans returned to Maguire's armed now with petrol cans in addition to their other weapons and burned Maguire's premises to the ground. I do not know if the Tan that O'Brien shot died or not.

The attempt to stage the ambush in the Tubritt area was the last major operation carried out by the brigade column as shortly afterwards the Truce came into force. The advent of the Truce found us in a very good position as regards morale. We were all in good spirits and looking forward to further engagements with the enemy although our armament position was in a bad way. The number of rifles available was very limited and the ammunition supply was equally bad and there did not seem to be any hope of replenishment from our own resources. We would have to depend on what we would capture from the enemy and this outlook was none too good either. The day of catching them by surprise was over and they operated and travelled now in much larger forces. They also had learned many lessons and

were paying more and more attention every day to security measures.

With the coming into force of the Truce we set about overhauling our force. Training camps were set up in the area and reorganisation set a foot. We had constantly in mind the matter of making munitions and the receiving of supplies of arms and ammunition, None of us thought that the negotiations with England would bear fruit, bearing in mind England's previous history in such matters.

The only munitions of war that were made in the area prior to the Truce were a number of concrete mines for use against enemy transport in ambush positions. We never used any of those mines as we never could procure an electric exploder. There were also a number of cart box type grenades made in the area. These were unwieldy, being heavy and operated by a length of powder fuze attached to a commercial detonator, were either too slow in action or else failed to act at all. There was also a large amount of shotgun cartridges emptied of the ordinary shot and refilled with home-made slugs. Cartridges were very hard to keep, being very susceptible to damp and when in this state they could not be loaded in the guns, or would not extract when required to do so.

Our intelligence department within the brigade was never highly developed. The brigade and battalions had intelligence officers and intelligence sections in their organisation, but, apart from keeping watch on persons suspected of supplying information to the enemy and reporting on enemy movements and operations and suchlike, they were otherwise ineffective. We had no one in the inner circles of the enemy strongholds who could keep us informed of their intentions. About February 1921, I did succeed in making contact with a man in

the Post Office in Athlone who was a clerk in that establishment. This man was an ex-British army soldier. He undertook to intercept and decipher the code messages which passed through to the enemy posts and claimed he had experience in such work while in the British army. He did send us out a few such messages but they were always so outdated that they were of no value. I still believe that he had no sympathy with our cause and that the only reason he undertook to do such work for us was that he was keeping company with the sister of one of our men who was on the run. This was the only Post Office in the area in which we could even get that much co-operation.

Inside the R.I.C. there were a couple of men in Athlone who were friendly disposed towards us. They were not actually in contact with us and I do not know their names. They would not be in a position to know very much. Because of their knowledge of the area they were specially selected to act as guides for the Tans and military. In this work they led the British forces - what appeared to us at least - deliberately astray. When they went to raid houses for some of our men who were well known to the guides, they generally arrived at the wrong house, thus giving time for the information to be sent to our men who generally made good their escape. They knew the area well and could not possibly have made such mistakes except they set themselves out to do so.

Communications within the brigade were generally maintained by dispatch riders and in this the girls were often very useful. In the early days we used time sheets for our dispatches, but this practice had to be given up as it became too dangerous. If a dispatch carrier was caught with a time sheet on him it would mean a few years in jail. Important and urgent dispatches for G.H.Q. were usually carried by Paddy Daly of the Briary, Athlone. Paddy was a checker on the trains and he carried dispatches for areas as far back as Westport, Co. Mayo. For matter not of an urgent nature, we had covering address in

Dublin. Such stuff was sent by ordinary post; sometimes the mails were raided by our men in other areas and, of course, our stuff would be intercepted with the rest, but it always eventually reached its destination.

There were three or four men executed in the area for spying for the British forces - Mr. Johnston, Mr. Blagriff and another man at Carrick Brien whose name I cannot remember now. These cases were solely dealt with by the local battalion commandants and I am not in a position to give any details as to their guilt or otherwise.

There was, I believe, an organisation of the I.R.B. existing in Athlone as early as 1914 or earlier. I did not become a member until 1918. I was soon appointed Centre for the Co. Westmeath and I organised circles in Moate, Gleniden, Mullingar, Cloghan, Ferbane and other centres. The initial work of members was the selection and introduction of recruits and men to fill the key positions, so to speak; all members of the I.R.B. were also members of the Volunteer force, and thus they acted as a backbone, so to speak, for the Volunteer force.

I represented the county at meetings of the Leinster Council held in Dublin. Business was generally of a routine nature, reports and progress from the different areas and a discussion on the situation in the country and plans and suggestions for intensifying the fight against the enemy. At a meeting held in Dublin in early 1919, it was agreed that the powers of the I.R.B. as the government of the country would be transferred to the Dáil on condition that the Dáil carried out the programme of the Brotherhood to the full letter of the law; and, in case of the Dáil not doing so, the Dáil would automatically cease to be the

government of the country the functions of which would again revert to the I.R.B.

I cannot throw any light on the subject of whether the President of the I.R.B. was the accepted President of the Republic or not and have no knowledge of the matter having ever been discussed. I knew only a few of the men one would meet at such meetings and a golden rule of the organisation was that members never discussed any subject relating to the Brotherhood outside the meeting when such was closed. The weakness of what was originally a very strong organisation came to light when it issued its memo. or instruction to its members on their attitude to the Treaty.

Signed: Thos Costello
(Thos. Costello)

Date: Dec 1st 1955
Decr. 1st, 1955.

Witness: Matthew Barry Comd't
(Matthew Barry) Comd't.

