

W S. 1,322

**ORIGINAL**

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913 21

No WS 1,322

ROINN



COSANTA

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,322

Witness

Art O'Donnell,  
28 Steele's Terrace,  
Ennis,  
Co. Clare.

Identity.

Commandant, West Clare Brigade,  
Paymaster for Clare Co. Council  
under First Dail Eireann,

Subject

National activities, West Clare,  
1908-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness

Nil

File No S.2295

Form B S M 2

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 32821  
BUREAU STAIRS MILEATA 1913-21  
NO W.S. 1,322

STATEMENT BY ART O'DONNELL,  
28, Steele's Terrace, Ennis,  
formerly O/C West Clare Brigade.

I suppose it is usual and sometimes a necessity to show a background leading up to the principal events, and to this end I may be able to show that any part played by me or other members of my family in the National Struggle for Independence was not accidental. My late mother, R.I.P., was very well versed in Irish history, local and national, and her knowledge, coloured by an intense longing for Irish freedom, set us all on the warpath long before the actual struggle started.

I became conscious that I had a country long before I had reached ten years of age, and that our country was held in subjection by England by force of arms; that several attempts had been made to overthrow British rule, particular emphasis having been laid on the Risings of 1798, 1803, 1848 and 1867, and I remember that she made these periods of history most interesting to us by epic tales of local feats achieved by the fathers or grandfathers of a number of people known to us.

I became aware that my father was a member of the Irish Republican Brotherhood, having been sworn in by the local Centre whose name was John Crowley. I could gather from him that he was then in his teens and that most of the neighbours were also members of the Irish Republican Brotherhood, but that active revolt did not reach their particular area. This, of course, was more or less a preparation to him of what was to come in his later years.

An uncle of mine, Dr. Con McDermott, was a student or intern in one of the Dublin hospitals (I believe it was the Mater) in the latter seventies or early eighties, when his attention was drawn to one of the patients, a Clareman named Peter Honan. My uncle learned that he was "Head Centre" for Clare in the Irish Republican Brotherhood, that he was a well-educated man and that he had written a considerable amount of poetry; some of these poems were collected by Dr. McDermott and, with the help of Clare people in Dublin, were published in booklet form, the proceeds were given to Mr. Honan as a helping hand. I have not been able to trace what subsequently happened to Mr. Honan but I have heard some of his ballads many times.

I believe that arrangements had been made for a particular operation in the Carrigaholt area - I don't know what the action was going to be - in the year 1867 and the severity of a snow storm prevented outside communication. It was, however, learned in Kilrush that the uprising had been abandoned. A woman, sister of Mr. Griffin, a Kilrush butcher, undertook to take the countermanding order to the Carrigaholt men. She proceeded on horseback, dressed as a man. She was stopped by two police a short distance from Kilrush, but she produced a revolver or pistol and forced her way past the police and reached her destination safely and in time.

All pro Irish magazines and papers were eagerly devoured by us, and we were well advanced in national thought when Griffith propounded the Sinn Féin policy about the year 1905 and Sinn Féin became the popular weekly paper in our household.

A brother of mine, Simon, went to Skerry's College,

Dublin, about this time and while there made the acquaintance of Cathal Brugha, Seán McDermott, Arthur Griffith and a good many others later prominent in the Anglo-Irish war. Con Colbert was our first cousin and he was then in Dublin, and it was through him that my brother got in touch with the men whom I have mentioned above. Seán McDermott kept in touch with my brother Simon until the latter went to Canada in 1912. He had several letters from Seán McDermott, some of which he still has. Others were given by him to people in America who auctioned them for considerable sums of money to swell the Irish National Aid funds. During my brother's period in Dublin he joined the I.R.B. and he later organised some others in the Kilrush area, including Jack O'Dwyer (R.I.P. The Square. Seán McDermott and Cathal Brugha paid organising visits to Kilrush on some occasions about 1910 and formed officially a Circle there.

I attended school at Cooraclare from 1905 to 1911 and on an occasion in 1908 Con Colbert, then on a visit to our home at Tullycrine, swore me into the Irish Republican Brotherhood. The text of the oath is: "In the presence of God I do solemnly swear that I will bear true allegiance to the Supreme Council of the Irish Republican Brotherhood and the Government of the Irish Republic, that I will implicitly obey all the commands of my superior officers and that I will preserve inviolable all the secrets of the organisation, so help me God".

Seán McDermott paid a visit to Clare in 1908 and addressed a "Sinn Féin" meeting at Farrihy, Kilkee, on Sunday, 6th September, 1908. My brother presided and several local people also spoke. The meeting was enthusiastic and a full report appeared in the subsequent issue of the "Clare Champion".

As I was attending school and studying fairly hard I was unable to attend any meetings of the I.R.B. local Circle. When, however, I went to St. Patrick's Training College, Drumcondra, Dublin, I became attached to a Circle which met in Parnell Square on Sunday mornings, this being the only time that I was free to attend. The president of the Circle was Michael Moloney (Goggin), who hailed from Baloughtra, Tulla, Co. Clare. I only attended a few meetings of this Circle when I was transferred to another Circle, which also met in the same building. The president of this Circle was Seumas O'Deakin, who was, I believe, a chemist in the North Circular Road, Phibsborough. In the year 1913 I proposed the name of Maurice Keane, Brandon Creek, Dingle, for membership. He was a fellow student at the college, had strong national views and was a lovely speaker of Irish. Another member seconded my proposal and the usual inquiries started, which were not completed when the course at the college finished in July, 1913, and, as I then took up residence in Co. Clare, I did not attend at that Circle again.

After the meeting at which I proposed my candidate was over two men came to me. One was Pádraig Manning, who then resided in Patrick St., and Seán MacMurrough Kavanagh (afterwards called, I believe, Seán an Chota). They asked me about Maurice Keane and, as I was free for the rest of the day, we went out for a walk Clontarf way, along by the Bull Wall, returned and, after dinner, we went to an aeriocht at Towerfield House grounds, Dolphin's Barn, Dublin. Tom Clarke was addressing the crowd when we arrived. After this meeting was over we returned to town and I went back to the college. I didn't see Seán MacMurrough Kavanagh much after that. I met P. Manning a few times and, with

Maurice Keane, I attended at All Hallows' College at the ordination of P. Manning's brother. The next few weeks were eventful and discussion was intense as to whether Kerry or Louth would win the Croke Memorial Final. They had played a draw on the 4th May previously. Kerry, however, triumphed, the college broke up and we all wended our way homewards in the second week of July, 1913.

The night before we broke up college in 1913 Maurice Keane came over to me and told me he had a parcel for me, which he duly passed over. He had a similar one for himself, all anti-enlisting leaflets which we were to distribute in our own counties on the following Sunday. The leaflet was something like this:

WAR

IRELAND - GERMANY - ENGLAND.

War is imminent between England and Germany. England's cowardly and degenerate population won't make soldiers. Not so the Germans! They are trained and ready.

What will England do?

She will recruit Irishmen to fight the Germans for her. She will then, when finished with them, fling them back to the workhouses of Ireland reeking with foul, filthy diseases... ..

The leaflet continued with a warning against enlistment in the British Army.

I organised some few of our lads on my return home and we distributed the leaflets all over West Clare on the following Saturday night. Those attending Mass on that Sunday morning had something else to talk about other than the weather.

I had some hundreds of leaflets left which I carefully stowed away, and in the following year, just after the 1914-18

World War broke out, I had the pleasure of distributing a number of these leaflets at a Killadysert sports' meeting, at dances, football matches and wherever a crowd was gathered for any purpose whatever.

The R.I.C. at this time started to take notice of some of us but the police with whom we were in immediate contact were in the main easy-going and did not interfere with us at all.

I commenced teaching in Low Island near Killadysert in 1914 and while I used to stay in the Island at Michael Kelly's (Pat), I managed to put in my week-ends at Killadysert. I was only in the Island a short time and had planned to take a day off and go to Kilrush for some school books which I needed at school, when on a Monday morning Mr. Jack Meehan, Killadysert, showed us a wire which he had from Dublin about Howth gun-running and the firing by soldiers on Volunteers. I went to Kilrush where there was a bit of excitement, and when the train arrived with papers about 3 o'clock the newsagent, Tim Kelly, was besieged for papers. I managed to get three, which I took with me to Tullycrine and Killadysert where the full news of the Sunday's operations were read publicly. There was at that time a strong body of "National" Volunteers at Killadysert organised by Bianconi, and a local enthusiast and sincere Republican named Seán McNamara had a parade organised which he addressed and condemned in the strongest manner possible the action of British soldiers in Ireland in shooting Irish citizens in cold blood.

Time wore on during that year of 1914. The World War was under way one week after the Bachelor's Walk shootings, almost before the rifle shots of the King's Own

Scottish Borderers had died down. German forces smashed into Belgium and France, while Russia and Austria were in the throes of a deadly struggle on the other side. The British soldier, as predicted, ran before the efficient German machine, and all over this country there were feverish appeals for recruits ; "Your King and Country need you" and many young Irishmen were "taken in" and enlisted. Our political leaders, the Irish Parliamentary Party, appealed to all young Irishmen to join up and save Home Rule. Following a speech by Mr. John E. Redmond, leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party, at Woodenbridge in August, 1914, the National Volunteers, formed in 1913, to offset the activities of the Ulster Volunteers, were split up into two groups - one following John Redmond and the other taking their stand on the sovereignty of the Irish nation. All the well-known Irish leaders - Pearse, McDonagh, Clarke, McDermott, Colbert and the I.R.B. were behind the latter group, which continued to plough its way along strictly national lines despite the smallness of its numbers. A notable feature of the party who called themselves the National Volunteers was that, after the first month in which all were exhorted to join up the Volunteers and parade in defence of their country against German aggression, their activities practically ceased. The few companies, however, that organised in defence of the "New Ireland" worked steadily and slowly armed themselves for the test which they knew was to come.

After the first few weeks the tempo of recruiting slowed up considerably for the British Army, which drew the following comment from the 'Irish Times':

"Long live the Irish Volunteers  
 May none their reputation mar  
 Invincible in times of peace  
 Invisible in times of war".



The Irish Volunteers, however, had other views, and on one occasion Pearse in a lecture referring to the Volunteers of 1782 said.

"What did the Volunteers?  
They mustered and paraded  
Until their laurels faded  
Thus did the Volunteers.

How died the Volunteers?  
They slunk into their graves  
And died the death of slaves  
Thus died the Volunteers".

and he continued to surmise if the same lines would be written about the Volunteers of 1914. History has now given its verdict in this regard.

A small group in Killadysert had formed in 1914 - Seán McNamara (Jacko Mack), Martin Griffin, Frank McMahon and myself - to push the propaganda side as much as possible. I had sworn all these into the I.R.B. and we thus formed a small local unattached Circle. Their membership was later confirmed when they were visited by Seán Ó Murthuille and Diarmuid Lynch towards the end of 1914. We continued to make headway and recruited for the Irish Volunteers slowly but surely. The R.I.C. paid us some attention but did not interfere unduly with us.

Work went on slowly and during the holiday period in 1915, about August, I had a short visit from Con Colbert at Tullycrine and I went across to Athea, his home place, with him, and when his holidays were up we went to Abbeyfeale where his sister, Mrs. Woulfe, who was married to a chemist, resided. He took the evening train to Limerick and I saw him off from the station at Abbeyfeale. We were accompanied by an escort of the R.I.C. to the station and they kept him under close supervision until the train had moved out. That evening in conversation with him I

was firmly convinced that the day was approaching rapidly when an Irish Army would again measure its strength with the English enemy.

Fearing that activities would take us unaware, and resolving to organise our own boys at Tullycrine where a strong company of forty of the youth held firmly to the idea of Irish freedom and had continued to train through all the changes that had taken place, I resigned my job as teacher in Low Island school and went home to work and extend our organisation. We organised dances, concerts etc., but the amount of public support was small and we made slow progress. One of our dances was picketed by a group of members from a local Redmondite corps of Volunteers. We carried on and succeeded, and had further very successful dances. This 'drive' of ours took place in November, 1915. I had been to Dublin and attended a concert at the Mansion House in commemoration of the Manchester Martyrs. Professor Eoin McNeill spoke at this concert and the oration was given by Bulmer Hobson, who said that "the day is very near now". A Dublin vocalist, Miss Joan Burke, sang the "Bold Fenian Men" and other songs. She had a nice voice and sang very well but got a very mixed reception from the audience. I heard somebody say that she had sung previously at a British recruiting meeting.

I next proceeded to have our boys properly affiliated and I got in touch with Peadar Clancy (a native of Cranny who then resided in Dublin), who had our company properly affiliated with Irish Volunteer Headquarters. We also established communication with other Volunteer companies at Cranny and Carrigaholt in West Clare. Other companies existed at Clooney, Ennistymon, Corofin, Inch, Crusheen, Meelick and O'Gonnelloe. To establish cohesion a meeting

was convened in Limerick early in 1916 (it was probably in January) at which James Ledden, Limerick, presided. Representatives from all the places mentioned above attended, as well as Seán Ó Murthuille, Gaelic organiser for the district. A Clare County Board of the Irish Volunteers was formed. Rev. C. Culligan, C.C., Carrigaholt, was elected Chairman; Jeremiah O'Brien, Vice Chairman, and Micheál Brennan, Meelick, as Secretary. M.P. Colivet, Commandant Limerick Brigade, addressed us on military topics, organisation and operation features. We decided to hold our next meeting in Ennis. All our representatives were very pleased at the success of this meeting. Seán McNamara, Crusheen, M. Quinn, Inch, M. Brennan, Meelick, Rev. C. Culligan, Carrigaholt, and many others were present.

The holding of our next meeting in Ennis enabled many others to attend who could not in the first instance travel to Limerick. Our Secretary, M. Brennan, applied to the Ennis Board of Guardians for permission to hold the next meeting in the Board-room at Ennis Workhouse. The Board readily granted permission but the Local Government Board vetoed their decision and refused to allow the Volunteers the use of the Board-room for their meeting.

On the day fixed for the meeting, on a Saturday in February or March, 1916, a number of men drifted into Ennis and all soon became aware that the place agreed on was "taboo", but notwithstanding the authorities refusal the Co. Board delegates were instructed to proceed to the Workhouse, which they did, and on reaching there went to the Board-room and occupied it. The Chairman, Rev. C. Culligan, arrived, also the Secretary, Micheál Brennan, and the meeting commenced. In a short time the Master of the Workhouse, Mr. Frank Barrett, came into the Board-room and demanded the reason for the presence of the crowd. M.

Quinn, Inch, who was then Chairman of the Ennis District Council, replied that a meeting of the Clare County Board of the Irish Volunteers was in progress and that they had the permission of the people's representatives to be there. Mr. Barrett was then informed that he was a prisoner and would not be allowed to leave until the meeting had concluded. He was detained until the meeting was over. Fr. Culligan earnestly urged all the Volunteers to arm: "If you have not a rifle" he said "get a shotgun, and failing a shotgun get a revolver, pike, pitchfork or any weapon useful in defence. In the general police raids following the Insurrection a few months later the minutes of this meeting fell into the hands of British forces and the Chairman's address was quoted in parts in the report on the rising which was published by the British Commission which held some kind of an inquiry into the causes which led up to it.

After the meeting was over we left the building and found that a large force of police (R.I.C.) lined the path on both sides from the halldoor to the front gate. They made no attempt, however, to arrest anybody or interfere with us in any way and we went home unmolested.

There came at this time to Ennis a dentist's mechanic named Oscar Hofstead. Oscar had been employed at Coogan's, Limerick, and was dismissed for his Volunteer activities. He found employment with Mr. Burke, a dentist in Ennis, and on arriving he proceeded to organise a few enthusiastic Ennis people into a small auxiliary Volunteer force. The Redmondite, pro-British and ex-British soldier element were then very dominant in Ennis and combined to have him hunted out of town. The windows of his employer's house were broken, but Mr. Burke did not budge and Mr. Hofstead

remained in his employment. I met Oscar Hofstead several times and went with him to Limerick where I met many of the Limerick Volunteer officers. He used to say that his father was Dutch, his mother German, that he himself was born in Ireland and, consequently, had a triple hatred for the British Empire. He left Ennis to go to his home in the North of Ireland when his father was interned by the British as an undesirable alien early in 1916 and I did not see or hear from him afterwards.

On the Sunday prior to Palm Sunday, or it may have been Palm Sunday, 1916, I was in Limerick and I think that the first round in the Thomond Feis Hurling Tournament was being played at the Market Field. Under these circumstances representatives of a wide area met at the Fianna Hall, somewhere at the back of John Daly's house in Barrington St. Fr. Feeney and Larry Lardner were there from Athenry. All our Claremen were there: Micheál Brennan and Paddy Brennan (the latter had been in the Civil Service in London and on leaving was appointed an Irish Volunteer organiser for Limerick and Clare area in succession to a man named Paddy Farrell), Con Fogarty, Crusheen, Seán Ó Murthuile, Scanlan, Guarranboy, Bertie Hunt, Corofin, and a good many others. "Ginger" O'Connell of Headquarters Staff gave a talk on military matters. He was followed by Commandant Colivet of Limerick on simple military operations. In a subsequent conference the following officers were nominated by Commandant Colivet, who divided Clare into four battalion districts for military purposes:

1. Meelick to Killaloe and thereabouts with Comdt. M. Brennan in charge.
2. Crusheen, Inch, Ennis and district - Comdt. Seán MacConmara, Crusheen, in charge.

3. Corofin, Ennistymon, North Clare, with H.J. Hunt, Corofin, in charge.
4. West Clare, embracing Carrigaholt, Kilrush, Tullycrine, Cranny, Killadysert, with Eamon Fennell, Carrigaholt, as Commandant. I was asked to act as Vice Commandant in this area and it is quite possible that similar officers were nominated in the other battalion districts. All these battalion districts were included in the Limerick brigade area under Comdt. Colivet.

Commandant Colivet impressed on everybody the great need for conserving our limited stock of ammunition and guns, and he urged the collection of shotguns and empty cartridge cases.

When I got back I proceeded to arrange all our men in properly organised companies. On the Wednesday evening of Holy Week, 1916, I got a message to send all available empty cartridge cases to Limerick at once, and I went to Carrigaholt at dawn on Holy Thursday morning to get their supply collected and despatched. The cartridge cases were really sent that evening and reached Limerick on Good Friday. Eamon Fennell, whom I contacted in Carrigaholt that morning, informed me that a brother of his, a lighthouse keeper at Loop Head, told him of the presence of a strange craft or ship off the Shannon Estuary for some two or three days and it appeared as if it had been waiting on something or another.

I had a Volunteer uniform put on hands at Ryan Bros., Tailors, Shannon St., Limerick. They were a grand family and very patriotic. May, the sister, was a member of Cumann na mBan; Jim was a Volunteer, and Steve, who had acute spinal trouble, was the best of them all. Steve promised me the uniform on Saturday, 22nd April, 1916, and I accordingly set out for Limerick on that day to collect it. I cycled to Ennis and was about to take the train for

Limerick when I met Paddy Brennan, and when I told him I was going to Limerick in answer to his question, he said: "Great Scot, you can't. You must get back at once as there will be a general rising on (Sunday) to-morrow evening". I insisted, however, on collecting my uniform, but promised to be careful and to come back immediately. When I arrived in Limerick I met Micheál Brennan, who asked me: "What good fortune drove you along"? and that I was required at the Fianna Hall immediately. After I had seen about the uniform, which took only a few minutes, I went to the Fianna Hall with M. Brennan, where I found Comdt. Colivet, James Ledden, Seán O'Dea, Johnny Raleigh and several others. The news of Casement's capture had come through. There was rumour and report of vessels bearing arms to Ireland having been sunk and of the accident to a motor car near Killorglin and the drowning of those who were to meet Roger Casement and arrange for the transmission of the arms now known to have been lost. All these incidents affected to a major degree the plans for the rising which had already been made, and on Comdt. Colivet's instructions I remained at the Fianna Hall all day with Seán O'Dea and M. Brennan pending a message from G.H.Q. in Dublin as to what was to be done under the circumstances. During this time it was established that Con Keating and Alf Monahan were drowned when a car driven by Tommy McInerney of Limerick plunged into the tide near Killorglin. McInerney swam to safety and was arrested. Austin Stack and Con Collins were arrested and taken to Tralee Jail, and a copy of the Daily Sketch reported the arrest of Sir Roger Casement.

Moving on towards 8 p.m. on that Saturday evening (the Ennis train was due to leave at 8.10 p.m.) Comdt. Colivet came into the Fianna Hall, stated he had not received

any news from Dublin but decided to call off all immediate operations, but to keep our forces mobilised for action pending further instructions. I was despatched to West Clare, M. Brennan to Crusheen and Seán O'Dea to Galbally, Doon and Charleville. We just made the train, and when we got to Ennis I picked up my bicycle there and after a hurried cup of tea at Mrs. McNamara's, O'Connell St., I set out for the West. Micheál Brennan went on to Crusheen.

When I got to Tullycrine I changed into my new uniform, called up my brothers who had been in bed for some hours, (I may add that I had to cycle against a gale from Ennis and progress was necessarily slow) sent my brother Jack to Ennis to await news there; Willie, my eldest brother, was to mobilise the local boys, and Frank, a younger brother, was sent to Cranny to mobilise the Cranny boys and to hold them together at least for the day to be ready in case the call came for action. I then went on to Carrigaholt & contacted Eamon Fennell about 8 a.m. on Easter Sunday, 1916. Seán O'Dwyer (Johnay) of Carrigaholt and Paddy Brennan were with Eamon Fennell at the time I delivered my message. After I had been to Mass and had my second breakfast that morning, I marched with the Carrigaholt Company, with whom were P. Brennan, Fennell and Johnsy O'Dwyer, as far as Moneen where the men were given various and varied military exercises. On the final line up that evening before the return to Carrigaholt I administered the Volunteer pledge to the Volunteers in batches of six. I forget what the actual words of the pledge were but in the main it was: "To secure and maintain the rights and liberties common to all the people of Ireland without distinction of creed or class".



That Sunday evening turned very wet and I stayed in Carrigaholt that night at Miss Behan's hotel. P. Brennan also stayed there, and, having received no other word to the contrary, I returned home on Monday evening and was shown by a friend, Jack McDonnell at Kilrush, the notice inserted in the papers by Eoin McNeill calling off all parades for Easter Sunday. The R.I.C. kept at my heels all that evening in Kilrush and I somehow had a presentiment that something must be happening elsewhere in spite of the absence of any news.

We heard on Tuesday of the happenings in Dublin and stayed put expecting orders from Limerick to get into action. No order came and I got into touch with Seán O'Dea, who advised against any action on our own account.

When the Ennistymon boys heard of events in Dublin they collected all the shotguns in the district. One man resisted and discharged his gun through the door. One of the Volunteers, Peter Barrington of Clooney, got most of the charge in his forearm and rather than run the risk of medical attention he had all the pellets extracted with the aid of a penknife only. Thus the week wore on and fantastic rumours were rife. On the Thursday evening I met or went to see two ladies at Cranny - Mrs. Doyle and her daughter - both teachers who had just managed to get back from Dublin where they had gone on a short visit on the previous Saturday. Hostilities had broken out during their stay and it was with great difficulty and with the help of numerous jarvey-men that they were able to reach a point where they could get a train for home.

The week passed uneventfully here, except for an almost continuous surveillance by the R.I.C. On Saturday,

29th April, I went to Kilrush. I went into the town by Moore St. and was accorded a fairly hostile reception by some people who knew I was connected with the Volunteer movement. Some predicted that I would be shot and that it was good enough for me. I called on Jack O'Dwyer at the Square, after which I walked down Francis St. A companion, Patrick J. McNamara, a school teacher, had some business in connection with school books at Miss Culligan's, Francis St., and as we were entering the shop a police patrol held us up, questioned Mr. McNamara closely and took me to the barracks where I was searched and a small .32 revolver taken from me. I was detained and kept overnight in the Kilrush barrack cell, and on Sunday night I was taken to Ennis and kept in the cell of the police barrack there. On Monday morning with another prisoner (Mike Joe Shannon) I was taken to Limerick to William St. barracks (police) and transferred to Limerick Gaol in the evening. I spent the next week in Limerick Gaol. Many prisoners were brought in there in the meantime, among whom were Padraig Fahy, Irish teacher from near Gort, Co. Galway, Eamon Waldron, Padraig Brennan, Michael Brennan, Seán O'Dea, then teaching in Charleville, Padraig Comer, Killaloe, Sammy Wyndram, Quigley of Limerick, Denis Healy, Co. C. Bodyke, H.J. Hunt, Willie Hunt, Corofin, Martin Crowe, Ruan, and others whom I cannot at the moment remember. At this time the gaols all over the country were being filled and wholesale arrests were made. No newspapers were allowed through to us and we were unaware of what was actually happening outside. On May 9th we were marched to the railway station with all our belongings and we were put into a train which was already half-filled with prisoners who were brought from Tralee. Among this lot were Tommy McInerney, who drove the car that met with disaster near Killorglin when Con Keating and

Alf Monahan were drowned, Con Collins and Austin Stack. When I got seated in one of the carriages I got a glimpse at a paper for the first time for a fortnight, and in it I saw the report of the execution of Con Colbert, Michael O'Hanrahan, Seán Heuston and Eamonn Kent. On the way to Dublin we became acquainted with a lot more of the preceding events. When we arrived at Kingsbridge we were marched to Richmond Barracks where we were all assembled in the barracks gymnasium. Seán O'Dea, Austin Stack, Con Collins and myself sat down in a corner of the gymnasium and feasted on some bread and jam which a soldier brought us from the canteen. The Royal Irish Rifles were in the barracks at this time and some were mildly sympathetic. After some time all the prisoners were dispatched to various barrack rooms. I was sent to F.5. with a good number of other prisoners, we were supplied with a blanket each which we used that night as bed, bedclothes and all combined. Our boots served as a pillow. This room contained representatives from Clare, Mayo, Louth, Kerry, Cork, Dublin and other places. The Clare contingent included myself, Seán O'Dea, P. Brennan, M. Brennan, Joseph Malinn came from Tralee; Paddy Ryan, John J. Coleman, Joe Flannery, Joseph McGill or Gill, Barney Hughes, P.J. Doris from Mayo, Peadar Ó hAnnracháin from Cork, and Barney O'Rourke from Dundalk. Count Plunkett was in solitary confinement in a small room just outside our door. The soldier on duty brought him into our room on one occasion for an hour or so to an impromptu concert, which he very much enjoyed. Our room contained a fireplace, on each side of which a soldier had printed the letters R.I. as under

R.I.

R.I.

The barracks had been occupied just previously by the "Royal Irish". Paddy Ryan of Ballaghaderreen on looking at the

letters got a brain-wave and, seeing some black-lead in the grate, he quickly added the letters C and P to read

R.I.C.

R.I.P.

There was a general laugh, and one of the soldiers who came into the room later enjoyed the joke on hearing the explanation of it. I may add that the soldiers didn't like the R.I.C. any more than we did. We had a cheery though maybe uncomfortable time in the room for about ten days or so when we were summoned to the barrack square on 19th May. After standing in the square for some hours we were marched to the North Wall and put on board ship for England (Holyhead), then per train to London and, after some hours' delay at Victoria Station, we were taken to Lewes Detention Barracks which had, I believe, been disused for a considerable number of years prior to our coming. We were marched through the town from the railway station. The townspeople lined the streets and shouted angrily as we passed. I daresay were it not for the soldier escort of considerable strength we would have been mobbed. We were shown to our cells and after our evening meal we made down our bunks and went to bed. I never remember a shorter night than that one of 20th May, 1916. I thought I was scarcely in bed when the guard was again calling us, due, I daresay, to the strenuous time we had since leaving Dublin but also due to the shortening of the night by one hour, as it was on this night that Summer Time was first introduced. Our time here was not so bad although the place was primitive. We made the most of it, we had a good session each day of free association with one another. The original number sent here was fifty-nine, who came from practically every county in Ireland -  
 2 Belfast, Monaghan, Tyrone, Galway, Mayo, Tipperary, Cork,

Kerry, Wexford, Clare, Dublin, etc. Men were being released or sent to Frongoch Internment Camp, where most of the Lewes draft found themselves early in June. I was sent to Hut 14 North Camp at Frongoch and a good few of the Lewes men were domiciled in the same hut. The Prisoner Commandant of this camp was M.W. O'Reilly, who is now Managing Director of the New Ireland Assurance Company. Parties were being brought daily before some commission in London presided over by Chief Justice Sankey. The object of all this was to try and get a statement from the rank and file that they were duped into taking part in the insurrection. Commandant O'Reilly, however, warned the men about this in each one of the huts, and I'm sure when they did appear before the tribunal they gave nothing away. In this manner we were given another trip to London, put up in Wormwood Scrubbs Prison, and when I was brought before the tribunal, which consisted of five men, I was questioned as to whether I was a member of the Volunteers. I said I was. I was then asked my rank, which I gave accurately. I was asked if I took part in the rebellion. I said no but that I was mobilised for duty. Then Justice Sankey asked if I had the opportunity would I have participated, and I answered that I undoubtedly would. We were brought back to Frongoch, where we remained until late in July. My fatigue duty in the camp was to assist in cleaning out the dining hut. Phil Shanahan was in charge of this party and Paddy Moran (who was later hanged in Mountjoy) was with us also. We thoroughly enjoyed this as both Phil Shanahan and Paddy Moran were two grand characters. I was released from Frongoch towards the end of July, 1916.

Immediately on reaching home I got in touch with all our men locally and started again to train. While in Limerick one day early in August I met Seán Ó Murthuille, a

Gaelic League organiser for Clare, and he asked me to meet him at William's Hotel, Kilrush, in a few days' time - a race meeting was being held in Kilrush that same day. He said he was also sending word to Eamon Fennell and some others to be there also. I went to Kilrush that day, where I met Fennell, Seán Ó Murthuille and some others. The meeting was more or less informal but we made arrangements for keeping our men together and to carry on the good work of organising. The people in general were a lot more friendly towards us, and where previous to the insurrection we ran up against open hostility we now encountered friendliness. Later on I received a letter from Seán Ó Murthuille to meet him at Fox's Hotel in Thomas St., Limerick, which I did. He asked me to visit each of the districts which had been active prior to Easter and get particulars of men, arms and ammunition in each place. This information was to be supplied at a meeting which would be held in Ennis early in November, 1916. I travelled to Crusheen, Corofin, Ennistymon, Darragh, Killadysert, Cranny, Tullycrine and Carrigaholt and arranged to have a meeting held in Ennis on Saturday, November 11th. Seán McNamara of Crusheen arranged to have this meeting at the Clare Hotel, O'Connell St., Ennis, which was owned by the Barrett family. A good number of men turned up to this meeting and I secured all the particulars required. I attended a meeting on the following Saturday, 18th November, 1916, of representatives from practically all Munster. Beyond the Limerick representatives, Seán Ó Murthuille, Seán Ó Tuama, Corcaigh, and Liam Manahan, Limerick, I cannot now remember the other men who were there. Seán Ó Murthuille, at the conclusion of the meeting, asked me to attend at the Courthouse, Ennis, on his behalf that evening and to explain to Clare Technical Committee that he had been

served with an order by the British Military Authorities specifying that he was to reside in some district in England and, consequently, could not fulfil his engagement at their meeting. I appeared at the meeting, delivered my message and listened to a few speeches of protest from some of the members, who included Fr. A. Clancy and Fr. Breen.

The work of training went on. All the available arms and ammunition, which were not by any means considerable, were conserved and stored safely. We had not yet established any connection with Dublin, but we kept in touch with Limerick as we were still a part of the Limerick Brigade. Christmas, 1916, came and with it came the release of all those still interned in Frongoch Camp and in Reading Gaol. Among those released were Paddy and Micheál Brennan, and just after Christmas, early in January, a meeting was called and held at Mrs. McNamara's, O'Connell St., Ennis, by Paddy Brennan. Those who attended were Eamon Fennell, Carrigaholt, Seamus Connelly, Clouna, Ennistymon, Bertie Hunt, Corofin, Seán McNamara, Crusheen, Micheál Brennan, Meelick, Michael Moloney, Tulla, Eamon Waldron and some others. After discussion it was decided to form an independent brigade for the Clare area. Paddy Brennan was to get in touch with Dublin with a view to having this proposal sanctioned and the following officers were appointed:

Brigade Commandant	- Patrick Brennan
Vice Comdt.	- Frank Barrett
Adjutant	- Joseph Barrett
Q/M	- Eamon Waldron.

The County was divided into a number of battalion areas, with a Commandant in charge of each. The names of the Commandants were: Micheál Brennan, Seán McNamara, Bertie

Hunt, Michael Quinn, Seamus Connelly, Eamon Fennell, Michael Moloney and Art O'Donnell.

The establishment of the brigade was approved by Dublin in due course and brigade meetings were held at regular intervals. In February, 1917, Commandant Micheál Brennan and others were deported to Wetherby in England, but the organisation still went on. Easter came; the British Authorities took elaborate precautions everywhere to prevent a recurrence of the Rising of 1916. Flags were hung out in many places and the change in the country's patriotic atmosphere became remarkably noticeable. Many were now eager to join the Volunteer ranks and training proceeded briskly but mostly "underground" as yet.

The death occurred in May, 1917, of Major Willie Redmond, British Parliamentary Representative for East Clare. A convention was called on behalf of the Volunteer and Sinn Féin elements, who were working hand in hand. This convention took place at the Old Ground Hotel, Ennis, and was presided over by the Very Rev. James Clancy, P.P., Kilballyowen, and Seán Milroy attended on behalf of the Dublin executive. William Considine (Dodger), Ennis, proposed Arthur Griffith and Hugh Hehir seconded the proposal. When the Chairman called for further proposals Austin Brennan, Meelick, objected to the candidature of Arthur Griffith, who, he said, "shirked the rising", and he stated that in Clare we always wanted fighting men, not shirkers. In a scene resembling pandemonium Fr. Alfred Moloney stood up, called for order and said: "Clare can have its fighting man and that man is de Valera. He was the man who made the Notts and Derbys bite the dust in the streets of Dublin, he was the last man to surrender in 1916, you are all acquainted with these facts and I now formally propose him as our candidate for Clare". The



proposal was seconded immediately and the Chairman asked were there any more proposals. Denis Healy of Bodyke said he didn't see why they couldn't have a Clareman as candidate, and when asked by the Chairman if he had a candidate to propose he said that he wished to propose Michael Duggan of Scariff. He failed, however, to get a seconder and the Chairman, Very Rev. Fr. Clancy, declared that their candidate was Eamon de Valera. The election aroused great interest and almost before the contest had begun the convicted prisoners of the insurrection were released from English gaols and arrived back in Dublin amid scenes of the wildest enthusiasm. Many of them came straight down to Clare and threw themselves heart and soul into the contest. The Irish Parliamentary Party had chosen the strongest candidate it was possible for them to find - Paddy Lynch, a Senior Counsel who was extremely well liked and had innumerable family connections in the constituency. The contest was waged furiously. The relatives of the soldiers of the British Army in the towns - "separation women" - banded themselves together and attacked violently whenever possible those who supported the Republican candidate, for de Valera declared in his first speech in the constituency that he stood for an Irish Republic. The most extreme speeches were delivered all over the constituency and the Volunteers paraded and drilled publicly. Petrol was difficult to get at this time but motor cars were readily available when required. A considerable amount of spirit had been washed ashore on the Clare coast, and through the Volunteers in the Loop Head peninsula I was able to get two forty gallon drums at Kilbaha. Accompanied by Seán Ó Murthuille (Gaelic League organiser) I collected these drums but was unable to find room in the car after the drums had been stored in the back. I walked

with Eamon Fennell from Kilbaha to Carrigaholt, and getting a bicycle from Fennell at Carrigaholt I just caught the morning train to Ennis. On the following night, accompanied by Austin Stack, I got a further 60 gallons from William Studdert at Kilballyowen and Rev. Jas. Clancy, P.P.

The date of the election was July 11th, 1917, and at the close of the poll all the ballot boxes were escorted to Ennis Courthouse by Volunteer parties in order to ensure that none of the boxes were tampered with en route. The High Sheriff refused to allow a Volunteer guard on the boxes overnight to the opening of the Court the next morning, so a Volunteer guard was kept outside the Courthouse all night, being changed at regular intervals. I was in charge of the Volunteers at Republican Headquarters (The Old Ground Hotel) and changed the guard at the Courthouse every three hours. One of the officers in charge of the Courthouse guard, Capt. Jack Cotter of Dublin, sent in word that light was observed in one of the windows of the Council chamber where all the ballot boxes were sealed in for the night, a very serious development if a fact. On close investigation, however, it was discovered that the light was but a reflection of another light from the window of a house on the opposite side of the Fair green. The count was commenced in the morning and was finished in the afternoon, with the staggering result of a victory for de Valera with a majority of over  $2\frac{1}{2}$  to 1, the following being the actual state of the poll:

de Valera	5,010
Lynch	<u>2,035</u>
Majority	2,975.

The whole country went wild and this runaway victory sounded the knell of Parliamentarianism. The Irish Volunteers kept up their parading and drilling and at a brigade meeting it was decided to issue an order to all Company Captains to take out their men and drill them publicly. Many did so, and in the course of a few weeks arrests for public drilling were made and those arrested were taken to Cork and tried by District Courtmartial. The first to be arrested were Paddy, Mick and Austin Brennan and Peadar O'Loughlin, Liscannon. They received sentences of two years hard labour by a military court in Cork and were removed from the Military Detention Barracks to Cork Gaol and later to Mountjoy. I was arrested on 14th August and when taken to Ennis Barracks I found some others also, including H.J. Hunt of Corofin and Mícheál O'Brien (Golly) of Ruan. In order to avoid the crowds who now usually collected at the railway stations to give prisoners a send-off, we were taken by devious routes in jaunting cars to Clarecastle, but the crowd, sensing what had happened, travelled out from Ennis in the train and were ready in Clarecastle to give us a good send-off from there. On arrival at Cork we were brought to the Military Detention Barracks and placed in solitary confinement. When brought out to Mass on the following morning - viz 15th August - I saw Austin Stack and Fionán Lynch there among the prisoners. After breakfast we were brought out to exercise in the barrack yard. The soldier in charge was friendly and we were able to light up and have a smoke. I was told that where we were being exercised was that place in the prison yard where Thomas Kent, executed in 1916, was buried. There was no mark

except a faint crude cross on the wall nearby. Visitors were allowed and sometime that day I was taken to the entrance with Austin Stack to meet some people who called to see us. Fr. Augustine, the Church St. Capuchin Father who attended many of the 1916 men, was Austin Stack's visitor. Eithne MacSwiney, Terry MacSwiney's sister, was the visitor who called to see me. Our principal item of news that day was the death of Most Rev. Dr. Ed. Thomas O'Dwyer, Bishop of Limerick, the man who had stood up so fearlessly to the British Officer Commanding the British Forces in Ireland - Sir John Maxwell - the year before.

Conditions in the Detention Barracks were rather severe, and in order to ameliorate the lot of the prisoners a demand was presented by Austin Stack on our behalf for more open air exercise and free association at exercise. This association we proceeded to take when at exercise, with the result that we were shifted that night to Cork Jail where prison conditions were relaxed pending the trial. The courtmartial took place at the Military Barracks. The Crown Prosecutor was J. Travers Woulfe. All the prisoners denied the validity of this British constituted court to try them and ignored the proceedings. Refusal to recognise the court was taken as a plea of "not guilty" and witnesses were called in support of the charges preferred. No witness was cross-examined and no part was taken in the trial by the prisoners. The sentences when promulgated ranged from one to two years' hard labour. The sentence in my case was two years' hard labour, commuted to one. We were then removed to Mountjoy Gaol, Dublin, where we were put in solitary confinement and put to work sewing mail bags in our cells. Paddy Brennan, Austin &

Micheál and Peadar O'Loughlin of Liscannor were already in Mountjoy, and after a few days when communication between us was established each prisoner asked to see the Governor of the prison and demanded open air work and association with our own comrades. In a few days we were all put chopping wood in the "wood yard", each prisoner having a small cubicle to himself. While this meant association, it was not in fact free association and each man was confined to his own cubicle, which was open in front, and permitted in a limited way some little conversation with his immediate neighbour. After a day or two the men went to each other's cubicles freely. Fionán Lynch was sent to his cell by the warder in charge, whose name was Scally; then Austin Stack followed; this resulted in a general mix-up. All the prisoners, now numbering about forty, went to each other's cubicles and threw off all restraint imposed on them by prison regulations. We were taken back to cells one by one until all had been again confined. There was no more exercise that day, but on the following day we were taken out to exercise in a different yard under the ordinary prison conditions - three or four yards apart - and walking around two or three concentric cement paths, these paths being four yards apart also. We ignored this and walked around in groups, talking freely with each other despite the warders threats of dark cells and bread and water. When exercise time came on the following day no move was being made to take us out. On looking through my cell window I saw one of our men, H.J. Hunt, walking around the exercise yard on his own, and it immediately occurred to me that we were going to be given exercise singly. I shouted to Bertie Hunt to refuse exercise unless we were all together, and I then

shouted across the corridor to Austin Stack who was in the same floor and told him what was happening. Bertie Hunt was taken back to his cell immediately. An order was then issued for the simultaneous ringing of the bells which were attached to the cells. To stifle the din thus created the bells were muffled, this led to the smashing of the glass in the cell windows to let in some fresh air. The authorities retaliated by visiting each cell in force, removing our boots and beds and bedding. This was the 20th September, 1917, and was, I believe, on a Thursday. I succeeded in wrenching off the bell, which was a solid horn-shaped piece of iron about 2 lbs in weight, and with it there came attached about 1 1/4 inches or so of round iron which went through the cell wall and was connected with other bell fittings on the outside. This could be used like a hammer and I was soon able to bore through my cell wall to my next door neighbour, who was Micheál Trayers of Gort. Seán Treacy, who was on the other side of me, had in the meantime bored into mine, so that now we were able to see each other and talk freely. The openings were now, however, large enough to permit us to visit each other. A general call then went round for a hunger-strike, and thus was started what has since been called the "Tom Ashe Hunger-strike" on Thursday, 20th September, 1917. We were left in the cells without bed, bedding or boots for the next two nights. There was no glass in the windows; the floors were strewn with mortar, broken bricks and glass, and looking back I believe that these two nights were the toughest I ever experienced. The food was taken round as usual but nobody touched it and it remained outside the door. The only thing the men took was water. On Saturday the Chief Warder and Governor visited the cells

and said the beds would be given back if we gave an undertaking that we wouldn't break or tear them up. No undertaking was given, but the beds were brought back to the cells on that Saturday evening. On that evening, too, forcible feeding was commenced and the hunger-strikers were fed for the first time with milk and eggs pumped through rubber tubing into the stomach. The operation was repeated on Sunday, twice on Monday and once on Tuesday morning. I was taken to be forcibly fed on this Tuesday morning. A new doctor named Dr. Lowe was in the cell where the food was forcibly administered and he proceeded to insert the tube, which I thought hurt more than usual, and on the first stroke of the pump I coughed violently. Dr. Lowe withdrew the tube, re-inserted it after the fit of coughing had ceased and then completed the operation. I was on the ground floor and after I was taken back to the cell I saw Tom Ashe going to be forcibly fed. After a short while I saw a warder go to his cell, which was placed on the next floor over mine and opposite to me, (the number of his cell was 34) and I then saw the warder return with his overcoat. I wondered, and on that night I heard he had collapsed when being forcibly fed by Dr. Lowe and was taken out to the Mater Hospital, where he died that evening, the 25th September, 1917. On that day we were forcibly fed once only, but on the next day, Wednesday, we were forcibly fed twice, twice again on Thursday, on Friday and on Saturday. On Saturday night, the 29th September, Austin Stack had a visit from the Lord Mayor of Dublin, Ald. Laurence O'Neill, who informed him that the authorities had agreed to treat us as prisoners of war. The strike was accordingly declared off and we had our first meal for 10 days on the following

Sunday morning. Our cell doors were thrown open all day and on that Sunday, 30th September, 1917, we were able to catch an occasional glimpse of the funeral of Tomás Ághas as it went on to Glasnevin, where he was laid to rest in the Republican Plot.

Tom Ashe's death swept over the country like wildfire and by now all support for the constitutional methods of the Irish Parliamentary Party had ceased to exist. We had self-government within the prison and everything went on grand. We were allowed visitors, our menu was alright, we had concerts, debating societies, classes on military matters, tactics, morse code and general training. Confined in Mountjoy at this time were a number of "Conscientious Objectors", one of whom we knew as Francis. He was a carpenter. He was asked to make a special forcible feeding chair during our period of hunger-strike and refused. When one of our men asked him one day why he did not join the British Army, he said he was a Quaker and, consequently, a conscientious objector. When asked was he always a Quaker, he said no, he was only a Quaker since the conscription racket commenced. "Necessity, you know", he said, "is the mother of conversion". We learned that Dundalk Prison was being prepared to house all political prisoners, and we were transferred there on the first days of December, 1917.

When we arrived at Dundalk it transpired that the verbal agreement conveyed to us through the Lord Mayor, Aldermen Laurence O'Neill, was not being adhered to by the Governor of Dundalk Gaol, the food bordered on the usual prison fare, while the cell doors were being locked at hours much earlier than those stipulated. It was



It was decided to hunger strike again, and the prisoners' Commandant, Austin Stack, accordingly informed the Governor that the hunger strike would go on until the conditions agreed to in Mountjoy were put into operation. After a few days hunger strike the prisoners were released in batches over three or four days under the "Cat and Mouse Act", an order was handed to each prisoner on release demanding that he return to the prison on a given date and informing him that "while you are at large under this order the currency of your sentence is suspended". When we left the prison at Dundalk the townspeople had cars at the prison gates to meet us and we were taken to the local hotels, where we were given a light meal. We explored the town on the following morning and met some people who happened to be from Clare. One youth from Castlebellingham, Martin O'Donnell, a cousin of mine, cycled into Dundalk to see me and asked that I'd go to Castlebellingham to meet his parents, kin of my own from County Clare. We had, however, already arranged to travel in a body on the midday train to Dublin, so I was unfortunately unable to go. Martin O'Donnell is now a Commandant at Baldonnell Aerodrome.

On reaching home our activities were renewed more vigorously than ever. Greater enthusiasm prevailed elsewhere. Volunteer companies were doubled and new battalions had to be formed. Our battalion area was divided and formed into two battalions, and the other neighbouring battalions were also doubled, and by Christmas of 1917 and New Year of 1918 became extremely active. Many who continued the public drill campaign since our arrest in August, 1917, were 'on the run' and the R.I.C. were kept pretty busy raiding for them. Early in 1918

a wave of cattledriving swept east and north Clare. Martial law was proclaimed and large forces of military were drafted into the county. Curfew orders were made, concerts, dances, etc. were suppressed, but notwithstanding all this the usual organising activities continued.

During this period an unusual and amusing incident took place at Ennis Court. A number of men, more than a dozen as well as I can remember, were being tried before the R.M. for cattledriving or agrarian offences of some kind. A remark in court brought forth a cheer. The R.M. immediately ordered the court to be cleared and some confusion ensued. The prisoners' guard were unable to grasp what had actually occurred, and, seizing their chance, the prisoners leaped over the dock and escaped from custody. Not one of them was recaptured, although the Courthouse and grounds were full of police and military.

The dates specified for return under the "Cat and Mouse" order had now elapsed, and while not exactly going 'on the run', I kept out of the way of arrest as much as possible and slept at home only occasionally. I chanced to do so one night in March, 1918, and was unlucky to be arrested early on the following morning by R.I.C. and military. I was taken to Belfast Gaol that night, arriving there about one o'clock in the morning. I found out on arrival that I was the only "political" prisoner there. Other prisoners from Clare who were convicted of ploughing up ranch lands or of driving cattle off ranches or demesne lands were there already and at Mass I had a word with one or two of them - Colonel Tom McGrath and Peadar O'Loughlin of Liscannor. They were not being accorded political treatment and were removed to Derry Gaol on the following day.

After being there some days on my own other prisoners were brought in, viz. Mr. Frank Aiken, and Mr. Joseph McDonagh, a brother of Thos. McDonagh who was executed in Easter Week. Two days more elapsed and several more were brought in, and we were all then removed to the women's portion of the prison which had been cleared for us. The women prisoners were taken to Armagh Gaol. The boys continued to arrive until, on the arrival of a number of prisoners from Dundalk, the number in Belfast now reached about one hundred and sixty (160).

All this particular block was now filled, and in the evenings, when the doors of the cells were locked after tea-time, a concert took place. It so happened that the top storeys overlooked Crumlin Road, and after a concert or two rival parties of Orangemen and women congregated there sang Dolly's Brae and other Orange anti-Irish songs. Considerable confusion took place and about June 25th or so a force of warders removed us one by one to cells on the ground floor. To protest against this, the prisoners smashed up their cells and windows and, as a result, we were all handcuffed and were kept handcuffed all the time for the next few days. When going to Mass (handcuffed) on 29th June one of our lads spotted a bunch of handcuff keys, and immediately Mass was over the handcuffs were removed from everybody's wrists and smashed on the iron balcony on the way back to their cells. That evening an overwhelming force of R.I.C. was brought into the prison and we were all handcuffed again, mostly behind our backs, and removed to a different wing of the prison. The prisoners were then charged before the Visiting Justices with insubordination, and when asked by the chairman if they had anything to say to the charge, invariably replied in

the able way prompted by Austin Stack, who was the prisoners' Commandant and who was the first prisoner charged. His reply was "That the collected representatives of all the Orange Lodges of Belfast acting for the British Government will not be able to wrest my rights from me." A sentence of seven days bread and water was imposed on each one of the prisoners and they were still kept under handcuffs, muffs being used in a good many cases. In this campaign, during the day the boys rested and after the Rosary in the evening had been recited, usually by Fionán Lynch, a concert began which lasted into the early hours of the following morning. Each item was followed by prolonged applause and shouting, great noise was created by rattling the windows in their iron frames during outbursts of applause. As the gaol was situated in a residential area and proximate to a large hospital, many protests started to reach the Governor, but he could do nothing about it. Eventually after a few days we were all marched to the centre of the prison, where we were addressed by Sir James Kennedy, Chairman of the Visiting Justices. He told us that through the graciousness and leniency of Dublin Castle, our privileges were being restored, and he hoped that there would be no further outbreaks of insubordination, that we should be very appreciative of Dublin Castle's action and that we should show our thanks by being good boys for the future. When he had concluded, Austin Stack immediately stepped forward and told Sir James that we understood the leniency which Dublin Castle extended to us from the history of the past and the personal experience of the present, and that such leniency was just on a par with England's pretended love for small nationalities. A mighty roar from the boys forced Sir James to retire and we saw him no more.

Normal prison life was resumed and continued so for some months. Many notable figures occupied cells in Belfast at this time. It would be impossible to give all their names in a document of this kind.

Various activities were organised to pass away the time. In addition to military classes, Irish classes, one of which, by the way, was conducted by "An Seabhach", physical training and, occasionally, sports (athletic) in a small way were held. Debates were also inaugurated and mock court cases, including breaches of promise were staged. The "Jail Birds' Journal" was promulgated by Seamus Murray of Dublin and Seamus McEvelly of Mayo, while Ernest Blythe edited a journal called "Glór na gCharcrach". In each case one copy only was available, which the editor read standing on a bench in the laundry.

There were at this time about one hundred and sixty prisoners in Belfast and the war was being waged in Europe with great intensity. Probably conditions there caused a 'flu epidemic throughout Europe and America and eventually it found its way into Belfast Gaol. Many were laid up, some seriously who were sent to hospital in the prison or outside, and doctors were working or pretending to work full-time. I escaped for a time, but eventually I had to lie up. Spring beds were put into the cells instead of the plank ones and were more comfortable. The doctor, an assistant to the M.O., would just stand at the door and command you to put out your tongue and would then hastily retreat. I spent almost a week in this manner without being properly examined at any time. When another doctor came, a Catholic and conscientious man, Dr. McSorley, I got a thorough examination and was

dispatched immediately to the prison hospital suffering from pneumonia. I was heavily poulticed for three or four days and eventually pulled out of it. Usually in prison hospitals the attendants are warders, but two nurses were brought in at this time to look after the patients. The night nurse was Miss McCartan, a cousin of Dr. McCartan from Carrickmore, Co. Tyrone, and the day nurse was Miss Ryan from Downpatrick. General Brennan and Gerald Boland were patients in the hospital at this time also. One of the patients in the hospital, I think the name was Patrick Murphy, Cork, became delirious and fell from the bed on to the floor. Some bedroom ware was broken by him in falling and he received a nasty cut in the leg. He lay practically all night there and was found in a pool of blood in the morning. He had a strong constitution, however, and recovered from it all. I may add that out of the total number of 160 or so patients there at this time, up to 150 of them were laid up with 'flu and there was not one fatal case in the lot.

The European war was now drawing to a close, and on the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month a huge roar from a thousand big guns fired simultaneously brought World War 1 to a close. We had our celebrations in the jail, too, and in the hospital. Unknown to the authorities a considerable quantity of rockets etc. had been smuggled in, and at a given signal on that night of the 11th November the fireworks began. The prison authorities were in a panic for some time until finally it dawned on them that what was taking place was only a demonstration.

While we were in the hospital, about December, 1918, a prisoner was brought into Belfast Gaol convicted of having firearms and was taken to the criminal section of the gaol

to serve his sentence. He was John Doran of Loughinisland, near Downpatrick, Co. Down. Our Commandant, Austin Stack, got busy immediately and at the first available chance John Doran, or "Wee John" as he was called - he was over six feet two inches in height - was brought into the political prisoners section of the gaol and hidden away. The prison officials were unable to locate him and matters became very strained between them and the political prisoners for the next fortnight. Although I was all this time in hospital, I could hear about everything that took place. Our people took complete control of the political wing of the gaol and guards with iron bars prevented warders and other prison officials from having access to this particular section and they were allowed through only when accompanied by an escort of the prisoners, and so Christmas 1918 approached.

Two days before Christmas Day I was informed that I was to be released on the following day. Micheál Brennan was also told to get ready, and on the 24th December, 1918, the two of us were released. It was too late to think of getting home for Christmas Day, so we decided to remain in Belfast over Christmas and St.

Stephen's Day and we put up at the Albert Hotel in High St. After we had booked in we were directed to a publican in a nearby street whose name was Thomas MacAleenan, and with his help we were able to get some Christmas refreshments into the boys at Crumlin Road. We had our Christmas dinner at Corr's of 107, Ormeau Road, and we attended a hooley or céilí at the Gaelic League rooms in Grosvenor Place on St. Stephen's night. Here I met John O'Neill, a Belfast man, with his arm all bandaged up.

He had been badly beaten by a crowd of Orangemen and police, and had then been arrested by the police into the bargain and lodged in Crumlin Road Jail. He had been released a few days before our meeting. We called at the jail on the 27th December and asked to see two of the men inside, viz. Joe McMahon, a Clareman from Kilmaley, and Ernest Blythe. We could see there was tremendous excitement. A group of the prisoners had assembled on top of the laundry overlooking Crumlin Road and were singing national songs, while a crowd of Orangemen were collected in the Crumlin Road roaring back at them with all the fire and language usually at their command. In the meantime Micheál Brennan and I went inside and met E. Blythe and Joe McMahon. They told us that matters were getting worse and that the boys were preparing for a siege, and they told us that "Wee John" was still with them and that they expected the authorities would attack in strength. After we left the jail we moved up Crumlin Road to the crowd confronting the boys on the laundry. A Belfast lad who had been to the jail came with us. The people up there evidently sensed that we did not belong to them and, acting on advice given by our Belfast friend, we withdrew after a few minutes. We could recognise several of the lads on the roof of the laundry, but we kept quiet as we did not want to provoke the outside mob. We saluted them, however, as we were leaving, half expecting a stampede by the mob in our direction, but they allowed us to quietly move away.

During these few days I visited a few friends and college mates in Belfast. One of the places visited was the Duffin home at 64, Clonard Gardens, near the celebrated



Redemptorist Monastery. I met Paddy Duffin, who was in St. Patrick's Training College, Drumcondra, Dublin, during the same years that I was there, and his brother Seán, whom I also met in the Training College. His father and another brother, Dan, were also there when I called. I mention these particularly because two years later Paddy and his brother Dan were savagely murdered in their own home by the R.I.C. Though they denied their part in the horrible transaction, the R.I.C. were convicted by the fact that the local D.I.'s dog was found in the kitchen where the bodies lay on that particular morning.

Micheál Brennan and I moved about a good deal during the few days we were there, but we weren't able to see many of the places which we had read about in our histories and we had to be content with a distant view of Cave Hill with its Napoleonic profile, where Wolfe Tone founded and set the United Irishmen on their march to freedom. We decided to travel to Dublin on 28th December. On looking at the paper on that morning we saw where the political prisoners were in open revolt. The roof had been completely stripped off that particular wing during the night, and the prisoners had completely isolated themselves from the rest of the prison and the authorities were excluded from contact. It was not until we had met Dr. McGeehan, now Bishop of Down and Connor and who was then one of the prison chaplains, that we had any idea of the real situation. He gave us a written account of conditions inside the prison which he had prepared himself. He told us how the boys had retired from the ground floor to the two top tiers of cells, how the iron staircase had been broken down and how the overhead balconies had been broken where they connected with other portions of the

prison, leaving the boys isolated with the stock of provisions which they had stored up during the Christmas. He said that he visited the prison that morning (28th Dec.) and found the corridor a mass of debris. The whole of the roof had been deposited on the ground floor of this particular section, as well as the broken staircases and parts of the balconies. The Governor informed him that the visiting justices had ordered that military be brought in and that the prisoners be fired on. The military were actually there at that particular time and had machine-guns mounted in the circle or centre of the prison. Dr. McGeehan then went as far as he could along the debris strewn ground floor and he called for Austin Stack, who appeared at a cell doorway overhead and he said: "Austin, the military have orders to fire". Austin answered: "Let them fire". Dr. McGeehan then asked all the boys to come to their cell doors, which they did, and raising his hand he gave them General Absolution. He then left and, although one of the nominated chaplains, he was not afterwards allowed into the prison.

It was learned later that the Governor would not take on himself the responsibility of ordering the military to fire on the prisoners and rang up Dublin Castle for instructions. He was told not to fire under any circumstances.

With Dr. McGeehan's note Micheál Brennan and I set out for Dublin, leaving Belfast by the afternoon train about 2.30 p.m. When we arrived at Amiens St. we proceeded immediately to 6, Harcourt St., and found the street around Sinn Féin headquarters thronged to get the 1918 general election results which were then coming in and were being flashed on a screen on the window of No. 6,

where the result could be seen by the crowd outside. Dick Mulcahy was there when we arrived and we told him our story of how things were in Belfast Jail. He immediately stepped out to an opened window and addressing the huge crowd, told them of conditions in Belfast and called on Micheál Brennan, as a released prisoner, to give them the full story, which Micheál did in a surprisingly able way. The following day, 29th December, we saw the Lord Mayor of Dublin, Alderman Laurence O'Neill, at the Mansion House. He left for Belfast almost immediately and succeeded in bringing about peace in the prison, at least for some little time anyway.

We stayed in Dublin for a few nights at the home of a friend, Liam Cahill, 5, Casimir Road, Mount Argus, and on Sunday forenoon, the 29th December, Dick Mulcahy called and produced a file giving particulars of conditions then prevailing in the Clare Brigade: how Comdt. Paddy Brennan had divided the country into three brigade areas, and constituted the three brigades into a Division and had formed a Divisional staff. General Mulcahy told us that while they thought it a good thing to have the county divided into three brigades, headquarters could not agree to the creation of a Division or to the appointment of a Divisional staff. Comdt. Brennan then resigned in protest, and Gen. Mulcahy asked us our opinion on the question. The brigades had already been set out and provisional officers appointed, with a date in January, 1919, fixed for the proper election of brigade officers. Considering the matter in many aspects, although we would be favourable to the preservation of the county as a military unit, Micheál Brennan and I agreed that the action taken by headquarters was the most reasonable course in view of the fact that it would be virtually impossible

to recruit an efficient Divisional staff and the purpose for which it was needed could be served by inter-brigade co-operation in the various phases of the guerilla warfare, and which was the only warfare we could profitably wage. General Mulcahy then informed us that he would travel to Clare and preside at the brigade elections in January, which he accordingly did.

The West Clare Brigade elections were held at the Workmen's Club, Frances St., Kilrush, about - I am not sure of the exact date - the 8th January, 1919. The East and Mid Clare Brigade appointments had by then been fixed up, Micheál Brennan having been appointed Brigade Comdt. in East Clare and Frank Barrett in Mid Clare. General Mulcahy, who was accompanied by Micheál Brennan, presided at the election and the following Battalion Commandants were present

- 1st Bn. - Coolmen & Kildysart area - Paddy Clancy.
- 2nd Bn. - Tullycrine, Kilmihill,  
Killimer & Kilrush - John Flanagan.
- 3rd Bn. - Cooraclare, Cree, Doonbeg,  
Canermurphy - Dan Sheedy.
- 4th Bn. - Coore, Mullagh, Quilty,  
Kilmurry & Ibrickane - Christy McCarthy.
- 5th Bn. - Kilkee, Doonaha,  
Carrigaholt, Doonaha - Eamon Fennell.

These particulars are entirely from memory, the territorial divisions may not be 100% accurate but I am sure they are reasonably so, the names of the Commandants are exact. The election resulted in the following appointments:

- Brigade Comdt. - Art O'Donnell
- " Vice Comdt. - Seán Liddy
- " Adjutant - Jack O'Dwyer
- " Quartermaster - Patrick Tubridy.

The re-organisation of the brigade was undertaken during the next few months, and beyond meetings and mobilisation there was little other activity, except the strengthening of communication channels within the brigade itself and with other brigades both within and outside the county. We established connection with West Limerick across the Shannon by means of boats, manned by Volunteers of the Labasheeda and Killofin Companies. We had also cross-channel transport available along the Shannon from Labasheeda to Kildysart, the services were reliable and available any hour of the day or night.

Word was passed on to us from Mid Clare about March, 1919, that a man from headquarters staff was coming to our brigade. This was Ernie O'Malley, and he arrived in March and stayed with me at Tullycrine. We visited all the companies in the brigade area, at which he put the men through the various forms of military exercises and addressed them at the conclusion. He informed them that the activities of the Volunteers would be accelerated to war pressure. He asked them to make themselves as familiar and as expert as possible in the use of firearms and to be prepared at any time, if called on, for active service. He also exhorted them to arm themselves as fully as possible and by every means in their power. His talk was forceful and was not to the liking of an odd individual in the ranks, who got 'cold feet' and dropped out. Deflections of this nature were very few. A fairly important operation was planned about this time in conjunction with the other two brigades by Ernie O'Malley. The British military were billeted in the Golf Links Hotel, Lahinch, and it was learned that a

fairly large quantity of arms and ammunition were stored there and it was decided to capture this stuff if at all possible. Plans were accordingly made to attack the hotel on the 13th April, 1919. For some reason or another the attack was called off and did not take place

On this particular day, Palm Sunday, 13th April, 1919, Ernie O'Malley and I were at Mass at Knockerra. We were informed that three armed R.I.C. men - two of them had rifles - were at Mass also at Knockerra, and Ernie O'Malley decided to have a try at disarming them. The local men were mobilised by the Battalion Commandant, J. Flanagan, who started to drill them on the road immediately Mass was over. The three R.I.C. men approached Comdt. Flanagan to warn him, when the men - who were already primed as to what they were to do - jumped on the police and succeeded in taking the rifle off one of them, the man who had it running into a house closeby. The other policeman was too quick and succeeded in getting back so that he was able to cover the men in front of him and hold them at bay. The sergeant, armed with a revolver, engaged in a gun duel with Ernie O'Malley, neither of whom was injured. Previous to the clash, Ernie O'Malley directed me not to have any part in the operation and I went into Nolan's, the house nearby. It so happened that the rifle taken in the first assault was taken in to this house and later discovered by the police. They, the police, then rounded up six or seven of the men, including myself, who had no part in the attack at all and marched us to the police barracks at Kiltrush. We were later that evening removed to Ennis and on Monday 14th April we were taken to Limerick Gaol. After statement of evidence had been taken, we were removed

to Cork Gaol, tried by District Courtmartial and sentenced to two years' hard labour each.

When I had been released from Belfast Gaol on the previous Christmas Eve, my previous sentence had not expired and I was released for medical reasons, so when I arrived at Cork, after being examined by the doctor, I was sent to the prison hospital and released after examination by the Prisons Board Medical Officer on about the 18th June, 1919. On my way home from Cork I remained over in Limerick and met Austin Brennan on the Saturday evening, and he told me that another operation to be undertaken in the three brigade areas (to the extent that on a certain date all members of the enemy forces, police and military were to be shot at sight) was called off, I believe by G.H.Q. I had no knowledge previously that the attack was contemplated. At any rate, I learned that in the West Clare area some groups were actually in position to attack when the countermanding order arrived.

Several local incidents were now happening, all of which were tending to undermine the discipline of the men and create enmity and distrust among themselves. A publican at Danganelly, Cooraclare, was boycotted for being friendly with the Military Commandant. There was absolutely no question of espionage involved. Also, a local Company Captain was carrying on an agrarian campaign against his uncle and a popular Veterinary Surgeon living in Kiltrush. A local clergyman intervened with H.Q. on behalf of the publican and the Brigade Staff was called to Dublin by General Mulcany, who was now Chief of Staff, Cathal Brugha having since the previous January been appointed Minister for Defence in the first Dáil Éireann.

We discussed this matter with General Mulcahy and he, as well as ourselves, agreed that it was imperative to fix these matters at once, and he asked me to take immediate steps to have that done when I got back to my brigade area. General Mulcahy told me then that the Minister for Defence, Cathal Brugha, wanted to see me, so we accordingly appointed to see him that evening at his home. In the course of the interview, in which he referred to a brother of mine whom he knew back in 1908, he informed me that a special force was being organised for particularly dangerous work in England, mainly in executing or shooting prominently bitter British Government members noted for their hatred of this country. He expressed the view that putting one or two of these people out of the way would be far more effective than the wiping out of a battalion of smaller fry in the police and military. He asked our co-operation in raising this force and by sending him any good Volunteer who was prepared to take the chance after all the details had been explained to him. I put the matter before our Brigade Staff and some of the Battalion Commandants, but no Volunteer was forthcoming to take the risk. I met Cathal Brugha later at a house in Marlborough St., Dublin, and told him the result of my search. I offered my own services, but he said I was more valuable in the work I was doing in Clare.

Coming back to the other local matters, on reaching home I had a letter conveyed to the boycotted publican, Edmund Murphy, Danganelly, Cooraclare, asking him to meet me at a certain spot in the road about a half mile from his home. He did so. We talked over certain points in connection with the boycott, and having the gist of the whole affair I drew up a set of conditions, about four in



all, which he agreed to and signed. I instructed the Volunteers to discontinue the boycott and the whole affair ended harmoniously. I settled a similar case a month or so later when a farmer in Shragh having the now rather inappropriate name of the "Fenian" Whelan - Michael Whelan was his name - was boycotted under almost the same circumstances. Conor Whelan, Shragh, was with me on this occasion.

The next big difficulty, also discussed at our Dublin meeting, was controlling the agrarian question, in which all sorts and conditions of people were concerned. Some time previously I had been appointed a co-secretary of the West Clare Sinn Féin executive, the secretary being James McDonnell of Kiltrush. Through some misunderstanding or another, Mr. McDonnell withdrew and I was asked to take on, which I did for the time being. I called a meeting for the 1st November, 1919, which was held at Cunningham's house at Cree. The presiding chairman was Fr. Charles Culligan, and upwards of a hundred delegates were present from the West Clare constituency. Before the regular business of the meeting started I spoke to the delegates in my capacity as Brigade Commandant. I said that on them devolved the civil administration of the country and the more peace was preserved among ourselves the better would be our position in making war on the enemy. I referred to the havoc that was being created in our ranks by land disputes, and I asked the delegates to there and then appoint a court that would go into the justice of these claims and make a decision on them, and I on my part guaranteed that I would back the decision of the court and make it effective. There was considerable applause when I had finished. Fr. C. Culligan then said

"the nail had been struck on the head" and there was general agreement that the court should be established. The following were then appointed to form the first circuit court established in the country. President: Rev. Fr. Charles Culligan, C.C., Kilmihill, Brian O'Higgins, T.D., (or Killard) College, Carrigaholt, James McInerney, Baltard, Doonbeg, Bartholomew Crowley, Co. C., Tullagower, Killimer, Patrick Kelly, Clonina House, Cree, and I was appointed its first secretary or registrar.

The first court consisting of the above members was held very soon afterwards at O'Donnell's, Tullycrine, (my own home) and the two cases disposed of were:

McGrath V. McGrath and Tubridy.

Brown V. Ryan.

All people concerned had to sign documents consenting to abide by the decision of the court. Solicitors appeared for all the clients and many points, legal and otherwise, were debated. Suffice it to say that decisions were given in both these cases and were given effect. Many cases followed, but owing to my duties as Brigade Commandant I was unable to continue in my capacity as court registrar and I was succeeded in this, as well as in the position of secretary to the West Clare Executive, by Dan Sheedy, Coolanummeragh, Cooraclare. I may mention, too, that as cases came pouring in for decision it became necessary to devise rules and regulations to govern the procedure to be adopted in order to cover the many circumstances arising out of the claims. For this purpose a special meeting of the five men comprising the court, together with the secretary, was called to meet at Moyasta on New Year's Day,

1920. I was unable to be present at that meeting but I learned that a set of rules had been drafted and were submitted to Austin Stack, Minister for Justice, Dáil Éireann, and were in the main both sanctioned and adopted for other similar courts throughout the country.

Many light skirmishes were now taking place in the brigade area, some ambushes were undertaken, without much success, but fortunately no casualties were recorded. One attempt at ambush, however, had disastrous consequences, as one of the men, Volunteer Michael Darcy of Cooraclare, while being pursued by some enemy forces attempted to cross the river east of Cooraclare village and was drowned. I attended the funeral, which was characterised by a show of British force. No attempt was made to arrest anybody at the funeral. The military did not travel as far as the graveyard and volleys were fired by the boys when the grave had been filled in.

A rather disturbing affair took place in Carrigaholt early in 1920, about February I believe. A boycott of police was instituted and extended to some traders who had been the strongest supporters of the Volunteer movement, or, I should say, the Irish Republican Army since the Volunteers had now accepted Dáil Éireann as the government of the Irish Republic, and men in the local company took different sides. Two of the traders, publicans, Miss Molly Behan and Mr. Carmody, had been very good supporters of the I.R.A. all through even before 1916, and considering that they could not have refused to supply the local police without jeopardising their licences, a number of the men considered the boycott ill-advised. I stayed at Miss Behan's whenever I went to Carrigaholt

and so did Comdt. P. Brennan and many others, even from H.Q. Dublin. The affair was reported to me and I went to Carrigaholt to investigate. Having heard the circumstances, I, too, considered the boycott inadvisable and told the local officers so, and told them plainly also that at this stage there was only one efficient way to deal with police and that way was to attack them on every possible occasion. I insisted that the boycott be dropped. Some of the local officers felt peeved over my action, and the local Battalion Commandant and another of the Battalion Staff - E. Fennell and T. Haier respectively - sent a report through me to G.H.Q. of their side of the matter and demanded my courtmartial. I received a sharp note from the Adjutant General, stating that I delayed furnishing the report and to come to Dublin for interview as soon as possible. The report may have been delayed a few days but that was inevitable, it was not delayed intentionally nor for any great length of time and I considered the letter unwarranted. However, I went to Dublin and met Gearóid O'Sullivan, Adjutant General. He was accompanied by Fionán Lynch, who stated he was assisting Gearóid. Gearóid's remarks were sharp and incisive. He appeared to have already made up his mind on the whole question and straight away stated that I must resign. I did so, and remained in office only until a new Brigade Comdt. was appointed. I had interviews with General Mulcahy, Chief of Staff, afterwards and also with Diarmuid O'Hegarty, who asked me if I would like to join the Dublin Brigade. I told Mr. Hegarty that I would prefer to be with my own men, even as a private, in anything that would be undertaken there.

About the time I was in Dublin many of the boys were in Dublin hospitals after hunger-strike in Mountjoy, amongst whom was Peadar Clancy whose home place was Cranny, Co. Clare, a few miles from me. It so happened that Peadar was coming to Clare after leaving hospital and he travelled down with me. We took the West Limerick route as being the least noticeable, as I carried a travelling bag containing about a dozen revolvers and ammunition. We left the train at Ardagh and I picked up my bicycle at Con Sullivan's house at Ardagh. We walked from there to Colbert's in Ballysteen, and Jim Colbert drove us to Foynes where we got a boat to Cahercon. I gave the bike to Peadar and stayed at Finucane's in Effernan, and travelled home with my bag of revolvers on the following day. Peadar got to Cranny on the bike that night at a pretty late hour.

When I reached home my first duty was to arrange for the election of a Brigade Commandant, and so a meeting of the Brigade Staff and Battalion Commandants was called. Peadar Clancy presided and the Brigade Vice Commandant, Seán Liddy, was appointed Brigadier, so I dropped back to the ranks and the fortunes and responsibilities of the brigade were now on other shoulders. This was in May, 1920, and I am sure of the exact date.

It now became imperative, as indeed it was apparent for many months previously, that the campaign against enemy forces should be intensified, and accordingly a conference of Brigade and Battalion Officers was called to discuss the best means of achieving this, to which I was invited. It was suggested that two picked men from each company be brought together, bringing with them all available

equipment for special training, with a view to establishing an effective mobile column, and the suggestion was adopted. Instructions were issued to each Company Captain to select two of the best men in his company and to send them, with equipment, to Tullycrine on a certain date about the first week in June. Many Company Captains did not comply with the instructions and instead put the matter before a full meeting of the company, the selection being invariably made by drawing lots. As a result, many men were selected who had no intention of going on active service, some actually claiming exemption on the grounds of some imaginary physical defect. When the full column had mobilised, Comdt. Liddy asked if I would take charge and I agreed. I set about examining the possibilities of each and found that only about a dozen would be suitable. I billeted them all, however, in the locality and arranged a quiet spot to meet next morning. Liam Haugh, a returned American and an American ex-army man took them on hand at shooting practice.

A certain operation, viz. the execution of an R.I.C. detective at Kilrush, had been ordered and four men went to the Ennis-Kilrush road to commandeer a car to carry out the order. The four men were: W. Shannon, Thos. Marinan, Frank O'Donnell and Paddy Clancy. They saw what they thought was an ordinary Ford car coming from Kilrush, and at a place called 'The Grove' at Tullycrine one of the men stepped out and halted the car while the others went round to the rear - it was a Ford van, open at the back - and saw seven armed police seated in the van. One of the lads fired a shot at random and the four of them immediately took refuge in 'The Grove' and escaped. This incident made it necessary to disband the column for a

few days as there was immediate military and police activity in the neighbourhood. When the effects of the incident had died away and when it was considered that the men should be brought together again, it happened that our musketry instructor, Liam Haugh, passing through Kilrush, saw the condemned police detective on his own and decided to do the job himself. He followed O'Hanlon into Walsh's publichouse in Moore St. and shot O'Hanlon there. He escaped on his bicycle. This also helped to postpone the re-mobilisation of the column. No progress was made in this direction, when the local elections took place that summer and Sinn Féin candidates were returned in all the County Council and District Council constituencies. At their first meeting after the usual appointments of chairmen and committees had been made, resolutions were unanimously adopted repudiating the authority of the British Local Government Board and acknowledging Dáil Éireann as the only lawful authority. Secretaries and clerks were instructed not to produce any documents or accounts to inspectors or auditors of the British L.G.B., and a special committee was appointed by the County Council to devise some scheme by which the funds of the Council could be preserved against seizure and confiscation by the British authorities. These Councils were nearly all composed of I.R.A. officers and men, and Comdt. Micheál Brennan was appointed Chairman of the Clare County Council. The committee appointed to devise a financial scheme for the Council included Peter J. O'Loughlen of Ballyvaughan, and the then Assistant Secretary of the County Council - Michael J. Carey - acted as secretary to the committee. A system, in which council funds were held by trustees and administered by a paymaster, was formed and all the

details submitted to the Minister for Local Government under Dáil Éireann, who was then Mr. William T. Cosgrave. The whole scheme was submitted and explained by P.J. O'Loughlen and Mr. Michael J. Carey and was adopted by Mr. Cosgrave. I was appointed paymaster under this scheme and the following were the trustees Very Rev. W. Canon O'Kennedy, St. Flannan's College; Patrick J. O'Byrne, O'Connell St., Ennis, Patrick Roughan, Stamer Park, Ennis, Rev. Fr. M. Crowe, C.C., Roslevan, Ennis, Daniel H. McParland, Parnell St., Ennis, Miss M.A. Lally, Railway Hotel, O'Connell St., Ennis.

The paymaster received the funds from the rate collector when collected, and distributed them amongst the trustees. All the funds were lodged with Mr. McParland, who drew cheques in favour of certain of the other trustees in their turn. These trustees lodged the money to their own accounts and produced, when called upon, the funds to meet the Council's commitments. The County of Clare was divided into a number of rural districts, nine in all, and thirty-two rate collectors got their warrants and sent (as at present) demand notes to the ratepayers. When substantial amounts had been collected the money was paid over to me as paymaster, and having given a receipt to the collector I lodged the amount with Trustee No. 5, who was Mr. McParland. Mr. McParland lodged the amount in his bank and cleared the lot almost immediately by issuing cheques in favour of the other five trustees, or in favour of any one or more of them, according as the amount involved was small or substantial. Payments were recorded in specially prepared advice notes and were made fortnightly; the aggregate, when ascertained, was got by applying to one of the trustees, who paid over



the money to me on production of the necessary authority signed by the Chairman and Council's Secretary. I then paid the money in cash in accordance with the items specified in the advice note. Regular days for payments were set out. Road workers, payments, salaries of office staff and other payments were made fortnightly; transfers to hospitals, unions, R.D. Councils and Co. Council Committees, i.e. Mental Hospital and Committees of Agriculture and Technical Instruction, were made, or should have been made, quarterly in advance, salaries of Secretary, Assistant Secretary, County and Assistant Surveyors and a number of other officers, as well as pensions, were paid quarterly in arrear. Payments of a miscellaneous nature were authorised and paid also after each monthly meeting.

I was kept fairly busy with all this work for a few months, taking due care that if I were apprehended by the enemy I would not have any monies on me which they could confiscate or seize. Despite this, however, it became necessary for me when making transfers to public bodies to have considerable sums of money in actual cash on my person overnight, amounting to on two occasions as much as twenty-five thousand pounds. I took up duty about 20th August, 1920, and when arrested on duty at the Courthouse, Ennis, on Monday 22nd November, 1920, (the day after Bloody Sunday) I had received the sum of one hundred and eight thousand pounds from rate collectors and other sources and had paid out in wages, salaries etc. almost one hundred thousand pounds. I had no money on me when arrested and of loose cash I had some silver only. I claimed this as my own. I was taken in a military lorry to the "Home" Barracks. This barracks, in which the

British military were quartered, was originally a gaol. It was converted into a home for inebriates under the Prisons' Board, but it had been evacuated by that Board at this time and the military were now using it as a barracks. A number of prisoners were brought in that day as there appeared to have been a general round-up. By evening upwards of fifty or sixty prisoners were lodged in cells there, resembling the usual prison cells but a lot more cheerless and dank smelling, as they evidently had not been in use for many years. The floors were flagged and cold and at this particular time the whole place was freezing as no heating system was in operation. Fr. Meade, who was at this time Adm. in Ennis, celebrated Mass on the following Sunday, and he told me that friends outside were anxious to send in some food and other delicacies not usually on the prison dietary system and he asked to find out names of prisoners and numbers with a view to having this done. The authorities, however, gave no facilities for accomplishing this, but a good deal of extras came in all the same. I had been in the place for some days when one night, almost outside my door, I heard two men being beaten by the military police who were in charge of the prisoners. I found out through a friendly military policeman on the following day that the two men were brought in from Feakle district and that their names were Considine and Fennessy. I cannot actually recall his description of the extent to which they were beaten, but he said at any rate that they were seriously hurt. The military policeman whose voice I heard in the course of the beating was named Connolly. I reported the incident to an officer on the following morning, who said that he'd investigate it. I heard no more about it.

We were removed from the "Home" Barracks about the end of November to the Ordnance Barracks in Upper William St., Limerick, and quartered in a stable from which horses had just been removed. The place was swept out and cleaned and military bunks and blankets were installed. Prior to our leaving Ennis, as we were lined up outside an officer, addressing the soldier escort, told them "in case of ambush or attempted ambush, shoot the prisoners". We were not, however, ambused on our way to Limerick and so reached our destination safely. After some days, a week or so, we were again on the move, now for Cork, about December 12th or so, in a convoy of fourteen lorries armoured cars etc. We set out from the New Barracks, Limerick, and again heard the order issued to the escort to shoot the prisoners in case of ambush. In the absence of perfection of the internal combustion engine at the time, it was understandable that cars were breaking down every few miles of the road. It took a day to reach Buttevant from Limerick, where we halted for the night and had an early start the following morning. At the start the officer instructed the escort, if attacked to use the prisoners as cover or as shield. There was the usual number of halts for repairs on the way and I recall that between Mallow and Cork we were halted on the road for a considerable time, while the snow came down. It was a miracle that nobody collapsed under such trying circumstances. It was after dark when we reached Cork, and Patrick St. was still smouldering from the intense bombardment of a few days before. We were brought to Cork Jail at Sunday's Well, and a short time after arriving I was asked by a warder to come to a friend's cell. I found that Frank O'Donnell from Kiltrush had had

a recurrence of stomach trouble and was very ill. He was, I think, taken to hospital and was interned afterwards, when he recovered, at Spike Island. We were but a short time in Cork Jail that evening, a few hours at most, when we were again moved and put on board a boat. We were housed right at the bottom of the craft and were right up against the iron walls of the ship, the floor being only five or six feet wide immediately over the keel. The air was foul and cold and for the next two and a half days we had to endure this. We were brought on deck once for a breather. Many of the lads got very sick, which was not surprising under the circumstances. We got very little food all this time, a few very hard biscuits and a bucket of hot tea, insufficient to make the rounds, and we arrived at last at Belfast, where a crowd of Orangemen and shipyard workers gave us a rather hot reception - "What will de Valera do for you now" etc. Some missiles were thrown but no harm was done. We were soon brought away in lorries to the Belfast and Co. Down Railway Station, and on arrival at Ballykinlar Halt we were marched with our goods and chattels to Ballykinlar Camp, about three miles and

A. O'Donnell

and I must say that I was glad when we arrived there, as I was practically "dead beat" after such a tough journey from Limerick. We were, however, kept some two or three hours in a building outside the camp, and when I finally got to Camp 2, Hut 16, I needed no rocking.

Camp 1, at Ballykinlar, had already been filled with prisoners and Camp 2. was being filled. Four lines of huts, about ten huts in each line, with the usual cookhouses, dining halls, stores, canteen and parcel's office, comprised the camp.

When our batch of prisoners arrived there on that cold mid-December day in 1920 it was about half-full, and about a dozen or so of our party were lodged in Hut 16 with a crowd of Dublin boys, the majority of whom came from Queen Street and the neighbouring streets. We got on well together. The hut leader was a Dublin man named Joseph Murtagh and he was also "line" Captain. A meeting of ex-officers or officers of the Volunteer Army was announced and the meeting took place in the dining hall. A Camp Council was formed and was allotted as its meeting place a small hut in the compound known as the "Black Hut". The Council consisted of the camp commandant - who was Patrick Colgan from Maynooth, four line captains, and other ex-officers appointed at the general meeting mentioned above. It also included Dr. Tom O'Higgins, Joe McGrath, Barney O'Driscoll, Thomas F. Fitzpatrick who was really Maurice Donegan of Cork, he having exchanged his identity to avoid being charged for the part he played in many major engagements around his native county, myself and a few others. Many steps were taken in this little parliament house for the running of the camp internally, and to make things as easy as possible for the many interned there.

One of the first things that was noticed was the installation of dictaphones or microphones in many of the huts near the stove where the men, when in the huts, would be usually sitting and talking. About three or four were installed in the timber lining of the black hut. They were removed immediately on being discovered, and a close watch was kept for them afterwards up to the time the camp was broken up on the 7th December, 1921. The camp housed many who played a prominent part in the government of the country afterwards, such as Seán Lemass, Seán O'Grady, Joseph McGrath, Dr. O'Higgins, Patrick Hogan, (one time Minister for Agriculture). A number of sub-committees were formed, and classes in various subjects were established. Arrangements were actually being made to issue Diplomas at the close of certain courses to those who passed examination tests when the camp was finally dissolved.

Soon after arriving at Ballykinlar, I got a severe attack of chest trouble and was removed to hospital, some very crudely equipped huts which had, however, spring beds, and were fairly comfortable. Being a suspected T.B. case I was kept here for some time, during which time many of the internees were treated. Seamus Hoey from Bray was brought in at Christmas suffering from pneumonia, and he was very ill. He survived the crisis and spent a long period in hospital; he never seemed to build up any strength and was released after some months in a very delicate state of health. He did not last very long after release. He was a very fine type. I had met him previously in Frongoch after the Rising in 1916.

One evening around Christmas or early January 1921, one of the sentries at the hospital side of the camp fired into a crowd

of prisoners who were walking on the roadway situated between the two camps. The bullet went through a prisoner's chest, killing him, and struck another prisoner in the neck, half severing the head from the body, went next through a paling post and then lodged in the corrugated iron near a hut door where it was found. Those prisoners' names were Tormey and Sloan, and they came from Westmeath. The British authorities promised the usual investigation but nothing, as far as I know, ever resulted. It is doubtful if any investigation ever took place at all.

The humdrum of camp life continued and many differences with the British authorities took place. In the course of a "strike" our camp commandant was shifted to camp No. 1, and he was replaced by Joe McGrath, and matters continued on in the same way with a certain feeling of tension that made one expect that anything may happen at any time.

A playing pitch was staked out in an adjoining field, and championship matches were played. Previous to the acquisition of the playing pitch, matches took place inside the camp between the line huts, and I'm sure that many, who were afterwards inter-county stars in the Gaelic world, took part here in these games.

The will to be free was ever dominant in the minds of the internees and, with this end always in view, many attempts were made to get out of the camp. One effort worth recording was made from Hut 2. A trap-door was very cleverly cut out in the wash-up room of this hut and the making of a tunnel was commenced. Hut 2 was in an extreme position in the camp just inside the barbed wire barricades, and almost under the sentry box.

The tunnelling was carried on almost day and night and the sand - it was all ground of a sandy nature - was taken out and disposed of in various places all over the camp. To prevent the sandy sides and top of the tunnel from subsiding it had to be lined with boards, mostly bed-boards. The passage had been made for more than a hundred yards to a point under a fence which would afford shelter from view, when the Truce was announced on 11th July, 1921.

Fearing that any attempt to escape at this juncture would involve breaking the conditions of the Truce, a communication was sent to G.H.Q. for instructions. Before any reply had been received, an escape took place from the Curragh, and as a precaution against such a thing happening at Ballykinlar the camp authorities immediately dug a trench over four feet deep around the camp, which rendered the discovery of the tunnel inevitable. There was just time to recall some men who were at work in the tunnel. The candles they were using, however, were lighting when the soldiers broke in, some shouting that the place was equipped with electric light. Wooden rails were laid on the bottom of the tunnel and a wooden bogey was pulled in and out with a long cord or rope. In this way the sand excavated was brought in and then disposed of all over the camp. Needless to say, the discovery of the tunnel was a great disappointment, but other attempts were made, and another tunnel was discovered when a heavy military lorry went down through the roadway at the point where the tunnel undermined it.

When the Truce was declared all T.Ds. who were interned were released, amongst whom was our commandant, Joe McGrath, Paddy Hogan and others. "Thomas Fitzpatrick" (Maurice Donegan) now became camp commandant.



When ex-Commandant P. Colgan came to hospital in our camp, Commandant Fitzpatrick and himself, disguised as British tommies, walked out the gate one evening and had reached Gormanstown when, thinking themselves secure, they relaxed from all vigilance and were arrested by British military at that point. They were sentenced to a term of imprisonment in Belfast Jail which had not expired when the general release took place in Dublin on 8th December, 1921.

Martin Walton of Dublin composed a march which was called the Ballykinlar March. It was often played by the camp orchestra and was very popular. Peadar Kearney wrote special words for this march.

On one occasion before the Truce all internees were ordered to their huts, and locked in, and many wondered what was going to happen. Then, hut by hut, in batches of eight we were all taken to a point about ten or twelve feet from the window of an empty hut which had been painted over with whiting and behind which one could almost feel were prying eyes. A military officer sat under this window with a table set in front of him and some papers. The prisoners were halted facing him and each was asked "Have you got your interment order?" We were then marched to the playing field. Everybody immediately became wise to the fact that this was just an identification parade, without any results as far as the British were concerned, and when the whole thing was over we returned to our huts as usual.

As already mentioned, Ballykinlar Camp was situated in a purely sandy area, and the dusty and dry nature of this sand made it a difficult matter to deal with, and it was a menace to the health of the internees in many ways. The slightest breeze sent it into

every hole and corner and it covered clothes, foodstuffs and in many cases internees were being treated for eye complaints such as conjunctivitis. While, however, it was the cause of considerable discomfort, no serious cases of illness were recorded as a result of it, and the deaths in the camp during the time the prisoners were there from disease or sickness was but one or two.

Matters relaxed somewhat after the Truce, but circumstances sometimes suddenly changed, and we were made to "sit up and take notice". On one occasion when a few prisoners were being released on parole an incident happened which resulted in the shooting of a well-known Corkman, Tadhg Barry. Some of the men who were going out on parole were friends of his and as they were passing outside the wire of Camp I, Barry and a few others waved them good-bye. Tadhg was supposed to have been standing on an upturned bucket or box waving his hand when he was immediately shot dead by the sentry. An inquest was held in the camp after the prisoners had been released. Paddy Lynch, James Geoghegan, Albert E. Wood, who were instructed by Mr. King, Solicitor, Newry, appeared for the relatives of Tadhg Barry, and Mr. Babington and others appeared for the Military authorities. The Jury was, of course, well selected and the usual white-washing verdict was returned. As I had to remain over at the camp for a few hours after the others, I was present at the inquest during the two or three days it took place. At the Donard Hotel, Newcastle, I stayed with others connected with the inquest, viz. James Quigley, Engineer, Con O'Halloran and Micheál Cremin both Claremen.

After the escape and re-arrest of "Thomas F. Fitzpatrick", Camp Commandant, Tom Treacy of Kilkenny, took command, and from that on matters were just routine. I had been appointed as camp adjutant in Joe McGrath's period, replacing Fred Crowley, Rathmore, Co. Kerry, who resigned, and I was still adjutant when Tom Treacy

took over. Rumours and counter rumours of peace sometimes and of a breakdown in negotiations at times went the rounds. However, on the morning of the 7th December, 1921, the news of the Treaty swept the camp and later that day preparations began for a general evacuation. All camp property, beds, bedding etc. was ordered to be stored in certain specified huts, and all that night of the 7th/8th December there was absolute freedom within the wires. The gate barrier between the two compounds was thrown open and men of both camps mixed for the first time in twelve months.

At dawn the evacuation began, and batch after batch of men left for the railway station. There was talk of compensation claims by the British for destruction other than wear and tear of camp property, and Frank O'Duffy, commandant of camp I. and myself were asked to wait and meet some British Officers for the purpose of making a tour of inspection of the camp after evacuation. We remained over all that day on the 8th December and in the evening arranged that the officers would pick us up at Tullymurry Station on the following day. We were just about to set out for the station when our Chaplain, Father McLister, arrived with a car and he gave us a lift to Downpatrick. We had tea at the Presbytery, and later took the train for Newcastle where we stayed at the Donard Hotel. We went by train on the morning of the 9th December to Tullymurry, and after some time we were picked up by British Officers, and brought to Ballykinlar Camp. We inspected all the huts, found nothing worth talking about, and another meeting was fixed for Victoria Barracks, Belfast, some days after.

In the meantime, Duffy and myself went back to the Donard Hotel, and during the subsequent days attended the Tadhg Barry inquest. I arranged with Frank O'Duffy to meet him at the Albert Hotel in High Street and that we both could go to Victoria Barracks. He,

however, did not turn up and I did not attend there on my own. I visited some Belfast friends and came back to Downpatrick where I stayed with Willie Smith at Circular Road for a few days and then went to see "Wee" John Doran at Loughinisland with whom I spent a night. I then set out for Dublin, accompanied by "Wee" John and Jimmy Fitzpatrick, a solicitor, and a native of Loughinisland.

Perhaps I shouldn't close this statement without referring to the journal which we had in circulation in the camp. We concluded that we needed a typewriter and duplicator to circulate our paper. Through a friend in Dublin I was able to get a portable Corona Typewriter and a second-hand Roneo Duplicator, with a supply of stencils and duplicating paper. A camp strike was in progress at this particular time and all parcels were held up outside the camp for some days. When the strike was finished, all the parcels were taken in and were being examined in the "Parcels Office", and among them was a tea-chest which contained the typewriter, duplicator, paper and a bottle labelled "lubricating oil". The censor, intrigued by the appearance of the oil, decided to smell it and found that it smelled like whiskey, so he ordered the whole box to be put aside for confiscation, and continued his work, giving an occasional glance at the box. However, other people wanted that box too, and before the censor, Captain Farrer, realised what was happening the whole box had disappeared. No trace of the missing box was found in the course of a hasty search. Captain Farrer evidently regretted losing the bottle of whiskey because, long after on the last night of the camp, he asked me what became of the whiskey. Of course, I told him truthfully that the boys drank it. Our journal, titled "Na Bac Leis" appeared regularly. Hugo McNeill was caricaturist and the editor was Joseph Senan Considine. Many excellent contributors helped and a five or six page paper was produced at intervals. About fifty copies were sold to subscribers and the

money went to the camp fund. Some copies of this paper may have survived. I have one copy myself.

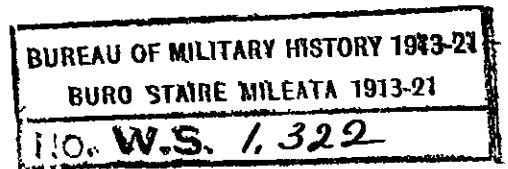
There may have been other incidents that should have been recorded, but I think that many writers have covered the story of the camp in minute detail and I have just given in a general way my own experiences. It may happen that information may be required about some particular instance not recorded here. If such is within my power I shall be only too glad to go into any matter that I can conscientiously state with certainty I have knowledge of.

Signed: Art O'Donnell

Art O'Donnell

Date: 14th December 1955

14th December, 1955.



Witness: D. Griffin

D. Griffin