

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1,334

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

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,334.....

Witness

Joseph Stanford,
Ballybane,
Gort,
Co. Galway.

Identity.

Captain Gort Company Irish Volunteers,
Co. Galway, 1915 - ;

Brigade O/C. later.

Subject.

Gort Company, Irish Volunteers,
Co. Galway, 1915-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

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STATEMENT OF MR. JOSEPH STANFORD,

Ballybane, Gort, Co. Galway.

I was born at Ballybane in April, 1893. My father died when I was three years old, and I cannot say if he had any interest in any national movement at that time. But I do know that my grandfather, on my mother's side, and two uncles were in the Irish Republican Brotherhood. A pistol, belonging to my grandfather, and a box of bullets were found by us when removing a fence at the back of our house. It was a muzzle loading type and fired by caps. The bullets were heavy and would be about twenty bore. It was he, with a man named Pat Foundation, who kept and hid the last of the pikes in this district.

I joined the Volunteers in 1915, about October, and was drilled and paraded under Liam Mellows, mostly on Sunday evenings after Rosary in Gort. The pioneers in forming the Company were John Hayes, who was Captain of our local hurling club, Paddy Piggott, Thomas Stephenson and Michael Trayers. Prior to the forming of our Company, there was a Company of Redmond Volunteers in Gort, composed mostly of ex service and old militia men and

and their friends, who also paraded with wooden guns on Sunday evenings. I do not think that at that time the R.I.C. in the area distinguished between those and our newly formed Company, as we were never interfered with during our early drill parades (even late in 1915) as we drilled beside the church in public.

Training in 1915 consisted of close and extended order drill without any arms. While there was a shotgun in almost every house, there were no other arms except a few privately owned revolvers. All hardware shops in the town sold shotguns and ammunition, and a good supply of revolvers was on display at Stephenson's. These remained on show practically up to the Rising.

Early in 1916 the authorities seemed to get suspicious of the intentions of the newly formed Volunteers and proceeded to shadow Mellows and Padraig Fahy who travelled with him organising companies in Derrybrien, Peterswell and Ardrahan. After January, 1916, all training was done in the fields, away from the town, with general parades arranged for two or three companies on Sundays in the mountains.

By this time, owing, I would say, to Redmond's statement in the House of Commons pledging the youth of Ireland to fight for small nations in Flanders, most of the Redmondite Volunteers in Gort had either left them or came over to us and, instead of our first parades consisting of ten or fourteen, we could parade thirty. We seldom saw Mellows now as he had to go on organising work, and drilling of our Company was carried out by P. Piggott and John Hayes.

Early in 1916, about March, a public meeting was called for Athenry. Several speakers were present and all organised companies of Volunteers were on parade. Excursions were run from different stations and the crowd was large. To my mind, this gathering did much to kindle the national feeling in all present and did much to stop recruiting for the British army. While some did join, it was only those whose fathers before them were in the army or militia.

While our Company O/C may have got word of the Rising in 1916, the Company was not called out and, when the countermanding order became known, it finished

mobilisation of our unit, and none of them went to Moyode or Limepark; only three were arrested and deported.

The general feeling of the people at this time was that, while the leaders were brave men, they were foolish to attempt the Rising.

After the general release of prisoners at Christmas, 1916, all those who had suffered the hardships of jail and camps were looked up to and respected in the minds of our younger people, and even those who thought the Rising a mistake began to look at it in a different light as it gradually dawned on them that our country was misled by the Redmondites and the Irish Party.

In May, 1917, reorganisation of I.R.A. began again in our area very cautiously. Members were enrolled, picked according as the organisers thought the best material, and all drilling was carried out in secret. During this period, Company strength was not to exceed twenty men. The Company area now was the parish. Formerly, units were formed in villages.

I was again attached to Gort Company under Captain

John Hayes, and the Battalion area comprised eight Companies: Ballindereen, Ardrahan, Kinvara, Kilmacduagh, Gort, Kilbeacanty, Beagh and Derrybrien, stretching from Clarenbridge to East Clare border. Officers were: Thomas McInerney, O/C, Peter Howley, Vice O/C, Paddy Piggott, Adjutant, Michael Trayers, Quartermaster. This area was known as an independent Battalion, taking its orders from G.H.Q. direct. All meetings of the Battalion were held either at hurling matches or in some old ruined castle in the area. The only arms in the area up to 1918 were about five or six Martini rifles. Shotguns were plentiful but the amount of shotgun and other ammunition was very small. Revolvers numbered about ten up to 1918. There was a private collection made in the area for arms and sent to G.H.Q. but no arms arrived.

In 1918 the Sinn Féin Courts were established in the area and each Company had to do duty when the court sat in the Company area. All police work, collection of fines, transport and upkeep and guarding of prisoners were done by special men in each Company. This lasted until the courts ceased in early 1920.

In 1918 material for home-made bombs was collected at forges and on railways and made in homes of Company Engineers. All big houses in the area were raided for arms, and good results in some cases brought our stock of rifles up to about ten. Some good automatics were also captured in those raids, with about a hundred rounds for rifle and shotgun. The arms and stuff captured thus were kept in the Company area in which they were got and checked by the Battalion Quartermaster from time to time. Some time early in 1918, soldiers home from the front were allowed to bring rifle and kit with them. One arrived in Gort and, with his family, started to celebrate, keeping the rifle in the kitchen. When they were all fairly tight, Pat Ruane and myself, who knew the lay-out of the house, walked in the front door and out the back, with the rifle. This was used to go to the different Companies at night for training in its use.

During the early part of 1918, recruiting for the I.R.B. was started in the area, probably about March, and seven others and myself were sworn in by Padraic Fahy. At the time, an order was issued (I do not know whether from I.R.A. Headquarters or from Head Centre of the

I.R.B.) that all key positions and ranks were to be filled by I.R.B. men in each Company area. As far as I know, all Company Captains were members and attended Centre meetings in secluded places. What effect this order had for good or ill has to be written for a much later period. The strength of each centre was from eight to twelve for each Company, Ardahan being the largest with twelve.

Conscription being pressed for by England now brought every young man of military age flocking into the Companies and, instead of our twenty picked men, it was usual to see up to a hundred on parade. Many of these fell away again when the threat of conscription was removed at the end of the war. Now came the swearing in of all Volunteers and one or other of the Battalion Staff visited each Company and swore them in on the appointed night.

Training went on as usual in 1919. Courts were now working hard in all areas and there was a general boycott of all British courts and R.I.C. By now, no one who was in the I.R.A. would be seen talking to a policeman,

and any girl or woman who kept company with them was shunned at all social functions. This boycott of the R.I.C. was so complete as to render their intelligence service useless later on. While the British courts were completely boycotted, our parish and district courts were fully supported; even the landlord class brought their cases to our courts. There was one case in particular where not only was the complainant a landlord but was also an Army Captain in the 1914-18 War. This man won his case in our court and praised its administration.

Our police work during the year was working perfectly, and many cases of thefts of wool and other articles were investigated and culprits punished. Fines were imposed and duly collected by our men. In cases too, imprisonment sentences were given. This meant that the prisoner was transported by night to a distant Company area and guarded by our men in some big house not then occupied. In contrast to this, the last British quarter sessions held in Gort in April, 1919, had only some police case and no defendants put in an appearance, so the R.M. and a few police had not a busy day.

At this quarter sessions, the infamous Sergeant

Elliott of Ardrahan had some case from that area, and John Quinn, Paddy Piggott and myself were told off to get him, going home from Gort to Ardrahan at Tullyra, at five o'clock in the evening. The guns were sent out in a timber car the day before, also a box of No. 1 (or buckshot) cartridges, and were hidden in a cock of hay inside the back gate of Tullyra. We were to go there at half-past four o'clock, get the guns and cartridges from a Bill Thompson and proceed across Tullyra to the main road leading to Ardrahan. All three left Gort as arranged and went a different direction, going out the Loughrea road and circling away from that at Early's Wood, down north to the back gate as arranged. We were there in good time and found the guns in the hay, but no Thompson or cartridges. After searching for some time, we went across Tullyra to where we were to get Elliott, and had to stand inside the wall to see him and a constable cycle leisurely by to Ardrahan.

That was escape no. 1 for Elliott. It was not until the following 15th of August, 1919, that Dan Ryan and John Coen were sent to get him at Castletaylor Wood, close to Ardrahan barracks. The pathway was from a house

where his family were staying, and every morning Elliott went there to the barrack. Ryan and Coen were from Kilbeacanty Company and had to cycle about twelve miles to Castletaylor. They were to be met at the wood by Martin Thompson and John Joyce of Ardrahan with guns and ammunition. Ryan and Coen arrived in time as did Joyce and Thompson with the stuff. (These two were to hang around the wood to take the guns when the job was finished, so as to let those engaged get away out of the area, as there was danger of their being surrounded so close to the barrack.) The path ran close to a wall in the wood and behind this our two men waited for mostly an hour until Elliott arrived. He fell with the first volley, and Ryan suggested giving him another round. This they did, and considered him finished. They went to give up the guns to the Ardrahan men (but only Joyce was there) when they heard a blast of a police whistle. Apparently, Elliott had enough life left to summon assistance from the barrack. He did not die but spent months in hospital and was never able to resume duty.

Now, Ryan and Coen had to cycle away by a circuitous route to avoid being seen near the scene, and later

appeared at a flapper race meeting in Peterswell where they were told Elliott was shot - and, of course, they were surprised! The remainder of the year

The remainder of the year, 1919, was devoted to visits to different Companies learning rifle use and taking groups of five or six each night. Of course, no rifle practice was allowed, as the small amount of .303 ammunition we had was not to be wasted. It was now difficult to get even shotgun stuff as no licences were taken out and all in the shops was taken to the barracks and dished out from there to the few who asked for a licence.

Early in 1920, the Gaelic Athletic Association was among the organisations banned by the British, and hurling matches were broken up by the R.I.C. Once, in Kilbeacanty, the R.I.C. charged the people with batons and even the womenfolk present were roughly handled and some of them kicked by them. This had the effect of only increasing public hatred for the R.I.C. and made even those half friendly with them keep away entirely.

While we carried hurleys after Mass on Sundays for

practice, there was no interference but no inter parish matches were allowed.

Sometime in early Spring, patrols of two or three R.I.C. went out from all local barracks and, as was usual, met the R.I.C. from next area. In most cases, they carried revolvers. Rifles were not carried by them at that period. The order was issued to all Companies to take patrols as they went in the Company area and, while not harming them, to disarm them. For this purpose, each Company Captain picked his strong men and this disarming was carried out without loss of life at Ballindereen, Ardahan, Peterswell, Beagh. In each case, two .45 revolvers were taken with ammunition. Raids on big houses and gamekeepers' lodges were arranged and carried out, one at Chevychase in Kilbeacanty Company and one at Loughcutra in Beagh Company. Michael Reilly was in charge of Chevychase, and Dan Ryan was in charge of Loughcutra. A rifle and shotgun, with gun ammunition, were got at Chevychase, and one small rifle, an automatic and about thirty rounds for same at Loughcutra. There was a raid also carried out at Carr's of Tiernevan. This yielded only some ammunition and a sword. John Forde,

John Flaherty and Martin Nestor took part. This man, Carr, was an officer in the British army and afterwards joined the Tans. After the raid, he spent most of his time in Gort barracks, only going home at rare intervals. Several attempts to get him were made by Patrick Ruane, John Quinn and myself. Finally, he joined up and was very active in raiding the houses of I.R.A. men, taking away photos of wanted men for identification purposes.

The week previous to Easter, 1920, all small barracks were evacuated by the R.I.C. who were drafted into the larger barracks and reinforced by military in some cases. On Easter Saturday night, all evacuated posts were burned.- a hut at Kilbeacanty, a barracks at Tubber and one in Crusheen in mid Clare. In all cases, the local Company did the work except Crusheen which was carried out by men from Gort and Beagh Companies. We travelled in sidecars and bicycles, reaching Crusheen about midnight. We had to break into the railway station for petrol and paraffin, as the locals had not enough to set it going.

After Easter, enemy patrols got scarce. Any that travelled were either in trucks or large cycle patrols. One patrol car came weekly from Corofin in mid Clare to Gort for supplies. This patrol car was to be attacked at Kilmacduagh, three miles west of Gort, and men were mobilised by order of Battalion O/C Thomas McInerney, some from Ardrahan Company, some from Gort, Kilbeacanty, Beagh Companies, numbering in all about thirty, including some locals from Kilmacduagh. All spent the night in a hayshed, a short distance from the Gort-Corofin road. The intention was to move into position at daybreak and await the car. This was not done, as word was brought that the patrol car did not come on the previous weekly run, nor did it afterwards. T. McInerney was in charge. Food was supplied by Kilmacduagh Company who brought cans of tea and bread from nearby houses. All returned home in the early morning. This would be the end of August, 1920.

Following this, on the last Sunday in August, a party of two R.I.C. men came from Gort to meet two local ladies in a haunt called the Punchbowl. We, thinking they would be armed, decided to pounce on them when they met

the girls. Pat Ruane, Michael Shaughnessy, Martin Nealon and myself followed them and came on them in a deep hollow so swiftly that there was no struggle. They had no arms so we took off their tunics and belts and drove them before us towards the town. They looked a sore lot going through the town without coats. This, we expected, would bring them out armed on the following Sunday for revenge. So we called on the Kilbeacanty and Beagh Companies for men for the following Sunday, the first Sunday of September. Our party comprised about twelve men armed with shotguns, four from Beagh Company, four from Kilbeacanty Company, four from Gort and one scout, also from Gort. The site chosen was at a crossroads just a mile from the town, with woods at both sides of the main Gort-Ennis road. Our scout was directed to proceed by this road and contact our party if he saw any enemy proceeding in our direction. We assembled in a wood in Prospect, about a quarter of a mile south-east of the Blackwater, and awaited scout's return. Having waited for some time without any information from him, we decided to proceed to take up the chosen position, crossing fields and coming to the crossroad through a narrow wood, with a river flowing

at its edge and disappearing just at the main road, h
going underground at this point. Our intention was to
occupy both sides of the road, as this would cover also
two bye-roads as well as the main road. To do this, we
would have to cross this small wood to the edge of the
river, go through a gap to one of the bye-roads mentioned
(the one leading south-east to the Punchbowl) and send one
section across the main road to occupy the wood opposite.
As we got to the wood, we saw three or four local men
playing a game of pitch-and-toss, and all looked quite
normal.

We had just got our first men into the wood,
preparing to cross to the other side of the position, when
there was a burst of revolver fire from three R.I.C. men
who had taken cover behind a strong road wall and pinned
some four of us to the side wall of the bye-road. The
remainder of our men had not yet got into the wood, and
Dan Ryan, John Quinn and myself were being held to the
wall - our R.I.C. men still firing and moving along
behind their wall towards Gort and safety. They had to
cross the narrow bye-road end and, at this point only, had

our men any chance of firing. At least four or five Volunteers did fire, and one R.I.C. man was wounded. Lest any blame be put on our scout, I must state that the R.I.C. came a circuitous route from Gort via Church Street, by road, to Tubber and turning left at Ballybane cross instead of direct by road from the barracks, George's Street, and the main Ennis road to Blackwater. I may mention that once the R.I.C. had crossed the end of the bye-road, no fire from us could be effective as, by the time we got out on the road, they were two hundred yards away, running.

From this time, raids on homes of I.R.A. in the area became more frequent and, while many of us worked at home by day, we did not sleep there but sheltered in outhouses and haysheds in backward places away from roads.

At a meeting of the Battalion some time late in September, 1920^U, it was decided that ^aprotection force of three R.I.C. who guarded a steward in Drumharsna every day at his work should be attacked and, by order of the Battalion O/C, men from Kinvara, Ballindereen, Ardrahan and Gort Companies were ordered to be there early in the

morning when the steward and his men went to work.

Just on the day previous to this, it was decided to call off the engagement and, while Gort and Ardrahan Companies were notified of this, the other two Companies were not, with the result that they went to Drumharsna and, while waiting for the remainder of our men to come along, were spotted by the R.I.C. who opened fire on them and brought reinforcements from Ardrahan Barracks who sought to surround them. A running fight went on from Drumharsna to Kinvara across country. As our men were armed only with shotguns against police carbines, many of them had narrow escapes but none were captured. Houses were burned that night, including McInerney's and Howley's, and the house of a man named Burke who had no connection with the I.R.A.

The following week saw the first visit of the Tans to the area and, at about 8 p.m. one night, all traffic was held up in Gort. There were patrol lorries at all entrances to the town and all pedestrians were halted and searched. It happened that Police Chief P. Ruane and myself were walking up George's Street to his home when we were ordered "hands up and advance". I had four revolver bullets in my pocket. I dropped them and then advanced

quickly, was searched and let go. Returning, I picked up my bullets and we both left the town. From then on, it was not safe to be seen in daylight, as usually one or two R.I.C. went, masked, with the Tans for identification purposes and were with them in all raids. There was also a local man named Carr whose father was in the R.I.C. and Carr himself had served in the Great War as Lieutenant. When he returned home, his house was raided by our men and his revolver and some ammunition taken. From then, he was continually in the barracks and finally joined the Tans. We had waited for him several nights on the way from the barracks to his home, without success.

Our next mobilisation was a Cappard House, above the village of Peterswell (south-east of it), as a patrol of R.I.C. were coming from Kilchreest to Peterswell and usually returned by a different route to that taken on the outward journey. It was decided to attack them. So, on the night of October 30th, Cappard House was taken over by men from Ardrahan, Kilbeacanty, Peterswell and Gort Companies. Provisions were provided from the local shop and we all had some grub and lay about in the house

until dark in the morning. We crossed by the mountain to Scalp, overlooking Castledaly church. As we approached this point, we saw clearly five R.I.C. men on bicycles, armed with rifles. They passed on towards Peterswell and were likely to turn again at any moment, so we were got into position along the road facing the church. We numbered between forty and forty-five, armed mostly with shotguns. There were at least one service rifle and two Martini rifles. The Battalion O/C and Vice O/C were armed with revolvers.

A scout was sent after the patrol towards Peterswell to bring back to the Column information as to what way they (the R.I.C.) would turn from Peterswell cross. This scout, named Martin Dooley, followed the R.I.C. on a bicycle and returned with the information that they were coming back straight to our position. As the scout returned to us, a man named Daly made repeated attempts on horseback to warn the R.I.C., and Dooley and Jack Flaherty were put in charge of him. It was only at the threat of shooting him that we ceased his effort.

As the R.I.C. were travelling about ten or twelve paces apart, they covered a stretch of road, sixty or

seventy yards. So we were placed in sections of seven or eight, stretching from Cross road to Daly's Gate, covering about ninety or a hundred yards. Nobody was placed in the church grounds but some men were placed outside it on the road leading to back of church; these would number four or five and had at least two rifles. The instructions were that each section was to take a man and see to him. No. 1 section were composed of Ardrahan Company, No.2, Kilbeacanty and Beagh, including Pat Loughnane of Shaneglish, and one from Gort. The other sections were made up of Peterswell and Ardrahan Companies. The R.I.C. rode straight into us at a fairly slow pace, and the shooting began. Number one cycled past ~~his~~ our No. 1 section, taking his rifle with him. No. 2 was knocked off his bicycle and staggered to the church side of the road and got over the low wall of the church grounds. He was unable to go any farther, as fire was continuous on him, and he died there. Numbers 3 and 4 got off their bicycles and left them and their rifles on the road, crossing the church grounds and across Roxboro demesne towards the barrack. Our men, who were placed on that road, opened fire on them but did not get any of them, although one was wounded. No. 5 also took this route to

safety. While the result was not too good for the number of men engaged, it could be put down to two factors. One was the site chosen; the other was the fact that, owing to intensive raids, all ammunition had to be kept out-of-doors and was partly damp. Another factor was the fact that all R.I.C. men's coats were lined with a double texture of flannel and cotton and, except at close range, would not be penetrated by faulty gun cartridges. This we found out from examining the tunics taken earlier at Punchbowl.

(The following should be included in September, 1920)

Some time in the first week of September, John Quinn and myself were told by the O/C to go to mid Clare area and get some rifles and .303. We went by a roundabout road and reach^{ed} Sean McNamara's house on the Ennis side of Crusheen village, a distance of nine miles. We got a note from Sean to go to the house of a man named James Diviney, and there we got two Martini's and twenty rounds of .303. These we brought back and left in a hide-out in my place awaiting the ambush. The

rifles remained there for almost a fortnight.

Coming home at about five o'clock on the evening of Sunday, 17th October, I found a despatch which stated that the stuff was to be at Crusheen bridge at 6 p.m. This set me thinking that something urgent was on. The time given was so short that it left me no alternative but to tie the two rifles on my back and mount my bicycle to do nine miles along the main road. It was a bright moonlight night. I arrived at the bridge at six o'clock to find Crusheen and Ballinruan Companies mobilised and on their way to attack Ruan barrack. I handed the stuff to Michael Moroney, of Crusheen who asked me if I cared to go with them, but as no gun was available, I cycled home again.

Raids now became so numerous that it was almost impossible to get even a bite of food at home, and all men on the run had to shift away and make groups of seven or eight, keeping what arms they had with them. Except for the few who meant to see it all through, the average Company dwindled down to, in most cases, ten men. This was noted mostly in the town Companies where, with the

exception of two or three intelligence men, we were almost out of touch.

After Castledaly, wholesale firing by R.I.C. and Tans was constant along the roads from their lorries, and on November 1st, 1920, leaving Gort in two lorries for Galway, the Tans kept firing at houses and anyone that happened to be within range. Mrs. Quinn of Corker, Gort, was sitting on the stile at her own gate, holding her young baby, and was shot from one of the lorries, dying almost at once.

We had, for a few months earlier in the year, 1920, a man on the run from Co. Clare, named Jack Killoughrey, and he was settled in as a workman with a man in Kilbeacanty, named Lally, and was known about the place as Jack Lally, even venturing into town on fair days where R.I.C. were plentiful and being specially shunned by the few of our men who knew him on those days. Now, as matters were getting hot, Lally was required in his own area and, as nobody knew of his whereabouts but the Chief of Police and myself, we had to watch for the escort from home that would come to take him back.

It happened that P. Ruane went away one night in late October to some friends and left word for me to meet Killoughrey's friends as they were to come along that night for him. I also knew that there was a spare bed in the Master's quarters in the workhouse. I knew every doorway there too and I said if those Clare people called, they could easily get in touch with me, as I had told Ruane's brother where I was to be found. I hung around the outskirts of the town until all was quiet. I then slipped in at the back wall of the workhouse and to bed. It was a cold, frosty night. About twelve o'clock, I retired. The lay-out of the workhouse was such that the porter has his quarters in the front of the building, and along a passage, about thirty yards back, stood the Master's quarters. The front gate, overlooking George's Street, was always locked at a regular hour by the porter, named Gallagher, who was at the time building a house for his family in George's Street and had his brother helping him and staying with him in the workhouse. The porter knew I had gone to the Master's quarters as I had pass through his to get there.

I had only been about an hour in bed when

Killoughrey's brother and another man arrived in a side-car and called at Ruane's house. P. Ruane's brother brought them to the porters' quarters in the workhouse and sent him for me. Gallagher called me and told me Ruane and two other men wanted me. I dressed myself and, putting a scarf around my neck, went to meet them.

It so happened that, in the few minutes that passed while Ruane and the men were waiting for me, a lorry, containing about twenty Tans, pulled up at the workhouse gate and ^{they} climbed quickly out of it. Ruane and his two friends ran from the porter's quarters up to the garden, which was tilled and mostly sown in ridges. About ten Tans followed them, firing as they went. The rest of them swarmed into the porter's place and began to beat ^{up} his brother, who was in bed, and question him. I arrived at the big door leading to his quarters and, on opening it, found myself looking at two .45's and two tough-looking Tans instead. These two pushed me into the porter's kitchen. I slunk over to the window, making myself as small as possible, and was covered by a small, fair-haired officer, while some four more Tans were pulling Gallagher out of bed and beating him. Having pulled him out, they placed him beside me at the window and left to follow

the chase up the garden. It would not be possible for them to make a capture there as the garden was divided through the centre by a deep, narrow drain and many of them were getting trapped in running into it. This chase lasted for what seemed to me about half an hour and, when they returned to Gallagher's quarters again empty-handed, I knew our man was safe.

Among the Tans who returned from the garden was this Carr whom I have mentioned previously. He carefully scrutinised me. I did not flinch and he did not recognise me, although he had previously taken photos of me in a raid at my house.

The whole party of Tans, except the little officer who was guarding the two of us, left for the Master's quarters, bringing the porter with them to show the way. Our guard put his revolver in its holster and took out his cigarettes. He offered us one but, as I was not smoking at that time, I refused and my friend was too terrified to smoke and also refused. While the search of the Master's quarters was taking place, the Tan in charge of the lorry at the gate got somewhat nervy and

blew his whistle. Our guard moved out to see what was wrong but, as his boot soles were of rubber, we could not be sure if he had gone to the gate. I said to Gallagher, "We will beat it". He insisted that we would be shot if we tried it. There was a lavatory at the foot of the stairs, leading to the boardroom overhead the porter's quarters. I said I would go there and if our guard was still there, he would stop me. If not, I told him to be ready to follow me. I got there and was not stopped. So I told him to come after me. I tried at least four doors and found them all locked. So, as a last resort, I tried the one leading to the men's yard. When I got there, I found I had lost my man. I had to return and found him running up and down the passage by which the Tans would have to come back from the search. He was lighting matches and was very excited. I got him to the men's yard, but we were hemmed in by a ten-foot wall. In the dark, we had to get over this to effect our escape. I searched along a slab shed resting against this wall and found a large knot on which I could put my foot. From there, I pulled myself to the top and my friend after me. We did not mind the drop on the other side as it meant freedom and we made our way to a hill above the workhouse and

waited until the raiding party had left. To my surprise, I saw them turn out to my place, and there they waited for an hour for the return of the man who already had the pleasure of their company for an hour. I may add that not one question was put to me that night by any of the Tans. This would be about the first week of November, 1920, and it finished me as an inmate of the workhouse.

It was then that I went to Kilbeacanty Company area and joined with Dan Ryan, the Keely's (John and Tom), Pat Glynn, Michael Reilly and others. We slept in out-of-the-way barns. Once, for a week, we used a hay car in P. Tynan's barn, having for cover an old carpet laid on the body under us and doubled up over us when we undressed. Each man did two hours' sentry outside the barn, and as many as seven slept on the car.

At this time, Drumharsna Castle, four miles northwest of Gort, was occupied by Auxiliaries. Brigade Quartermaster Dan Ryan was sent with Paddy Ruane to East Clare (by O/C McInerney) for rifles and ammunition to attack them coming from Gort. Ryan and Ruane travelled to Quin, a distance of about eighteen miles, and came

back with the stuff, on the understanding that the rifles were to be back again in three days - only to find that the attack was called off, and the same two men had to march back again to Quinn with the stuff.

It was in this month also that we lost one of our best men in Beagh Company. On the 20th November, a large force of R.I.C. and Tans swept through the area in lorries, visiting all the homes of wanted men. They proceeded to Shanaglish to the home of the Loughnane brothers, Pat and Harry, and found them threshing corn. They took both men and a cousin of their's, also a chap named Carroll from Tubber, and brought them to Gort barracks. On the way to Gort, they flung Carroll off the lorry. He got caught in a hook as he fell and was dragged along the road. They pulled him up again and brought him to Gort. It is not certain if the Loughnane brothers were ill-treated in Gort barracks but they must have been identified by some of the R.I.C. and handed over to the Auxies, to be taken to Drumharsna, and what they suffered there, no man can tell. Only a look at their corpses could reveal what devils those Tans and Auxies were. Pat's arms were broken across, and his breast was carved, as sheep is

dressed by the butcher. His skull was blown away, as if an egg-bomb had been forced into his mouth and exploded. Harry was also battered beyond recognition. And, not content with that, they thought to burn the bodies in a wood but failed. It is believed that the Loughnane's were still alive at this time. During the night, they came again to look at the bodies and put them on a lorry, or dragged them by it, to a small lough beside the road, a couple of miles from Drumharsna. There they threw them into the water.

All attempts to trace their whereabouts, or where they were brought to, failed. On enquiry at Gort barracks, the friends were told they were not there, or that they had been brought to Galway, but there was no account of them there. This went on for three days, with a party of Kinvara I.R.A. searching the country around Drumharsna for them until they found them in the lough beside the road and brought them to Kinvara, placing them in Hynes' barn, as the dwellinghouse had been previously burned. Hundreds of people came there to pay respect to the martyrs, including many of their comrades who were on the run.

When word was brought to Gort that the bodies had been found, Dan Ryan, Pat Glynn, John Coen, Jack Flaherty and myself went to the parish priest of Shanaglish and asked him for leave to mark out a Republican plot in the new cemetery there. This request was readily granted. So we prepared and made their grave, waiting in a nearby wood to receive their remains. In spite of the reign of terror at the time, the funeral was one of the largest possible and showed that their deaths had only stiffened the people into greater resistance. The following morning after Mass, a lorry of Tans arrived at the church and they mounted a machine gun on the wall of the church grounds, while a mock inquest was held inside. Then they left, and the funeral took place immediately to the plot, the bodies being carried by their comrades and their grave being closed by those mentioned above. We had placed arms in a wood close by, and fired the three volleys as a final token of respect to two brave soldiers.

Raids were carried out almost nightly at my home and the homes of all I.R.A. men near/^{to}Gort R.I.C. stronghold, and no further mobilisation was ordered by the Battalion O/C. Dan Ryan and myself constructed a

camp on the mountain side, close to Gortacarnane village. It consisted of long, bent poles covered over with a rick cover and firs on top; as the surrounding land was covered with firs, our camp could not be spotted from the air. This camp held seven and sometimes eight men, and was made comfortable with bed-clothes supplied by Dan Ryan's sisters who were most active in Cumann na mBan. Here we remained until after Christmas when Dan Ryan suggested that we get in touch with Commandant Michael Brennan of East Clare with a view to joining up with him or, alternatively, getting help from East Clare.

Dan Ryan set out for Pat Houlihan's of Caher, and they both proceeded to Feakle where they met Captain Tom McGrath who, on hearing of Ryan's errand, told him that a Battalion meeting was called for that night and possibly Commandant Brennan would be there. The meeting was held some two miles east of Feakle village and, in the absence of Commandant Brennan, Captain McGrath presided. At the close of the meeting, Dan Ryan was called and told the Chairman how things were in our area. He, in reply, said he would place the case before Commandant Brennan. And so began our contact with East Clare.

We could, at this time, put eight men together who were staying in the camp. In addition, Captain Jack Fahy of Pèterswell Company could put eight more, making sixteen in all, as follows: Dan Ryan, Pat Glynn, John and Thomas Keely, Michael Reilly, Thomas Craven, John Coen and myself; Jack Fahy, Thomas Fahy, Martin Fahy, Jack Healy, Thomas Slattery, Joe and Sonny Madden and Tom Fahy. These would be armed with shotguns, with the exception of two rifles, but the supply of ammunition was very small. Added to this list, we could call on the services of two ex British army men who had given us some .303 and two bombs. They were John Berry and John Ramplin of Gort.

On Dan Ryan's return from East Clare, he, with myself, travelled by foot to the old silver mines, five miles north-west of Gort, where O/C McInerney had his camp. With him were John Quinn, Jack Niland, John Joyce,^{and} Martin Murphy, and they had in arms two rifles, two shotguns and three revolvers, with ammunition for them. Ryan and myself chatted matters over with them and suggested that we join up and go to Gort on a certain night, as we had heard from Intelligence Officer Michael Kelly that a

patrol came nightly from the barrack to the workhouse gate in George's Street. We got no definite answer, so we tramped back again to our camp, about eight miles.

Some time before Christmas, five of our men had left Kinvara and joined Sean McNamara's Column in North Clare and became very active there. These were Padraig Fahy, Paddy and Joe Kilkelly, and Willie and Michael Hynes. Our Vice Battalion Commandant, P. Houlihan, had gone to East Galway and had only returned for a couple of days at Christmas. We did not see him again until the meeting in Limepark on April 1st, at which the Brigades were formed and reorganised.

In February, 1921, an auction of timber was held at Rosepark, three miles south of Gort. The auctioneer was a man named Quinn, and we had our suspicions of him for giving away information to the R.I.C. So we decided at the camp that Dan Ryan, John Coen and myself would go to the auction and, when in full swing, get Quinn and fire a few shots at him, so as to keep him at least confined to the town of Gort. Coen and Ryan had revolvers, and I had a shotgun. We had Mick Healy of Beagh Company

scouting on the road for us. He was unarmed. The auction started, with a good crowd of people present, so we went into the centre of the crowd, pulled out Quinn and ordered him to run. This he did, for a short distance, and then paused to look back, seemingly to identify us. Ryan and Coen had already fired from their revolvers at him but the distance must have been over thirty yards. As he turned about, I gave him the contents of the shotgun and he did go then. He was wounded and, after being brought to Gort, was sent to a Dublin Hospital and had an eye removed. Had we been as wise that day as we were when we took over the barrack at Gort or the evening of Ballyturn ambush, there would have been no need for this man to go to Dublin. (I will deal with this under intelligence again.)

As far as I can recollect, it was in March, 1921, that Commandant General Michael Brennan came into our area (although we had been in touch with him since Dan Ryan's visit to East Clare after Christmas, 1920). The occasion of his visit to our area was a secret meeting of Clare County Council. With him were Captain Tommy McGrath and Captain Michael Hannon, Dan Ryan, Pat Glynn

and myself conveyed them to Ballygegan House, owned by the Miss Geoghegan's, where we all stayed for the night. Next morning, all set out for Crusheen in Mid Clare area where we handed them over to Con McMahon of Clooney who was to convey them to the meeting place.

The next visit of General Brennan was in April, 1921, when he had instructions from G.H.Q. to organise the Galway Brigades, East and South. The meeting for South Galway was held at Limepark and officers were appointed for the Brigade as well as for three Battalions. Dan Ryan was appointed Quartermaster, Martin Niland, Brigade Adjutant. Myself was put in charge as Brigade O/C. Jack Fahy was appointed Battalion O/C, 1st Battalion. Gilbert Morrissey, an old 1916 man, was put in charge of Athenry Battalion. Thomas McInerney became Battalion O/C, 2nd. Battalion. At this meeting, the formation of active service units was discussed, and General Brennan gave an assurance that some of his Column men in East Clare would come in to help, telling us to be ready at short notice.

The first meeting of Galway-South and East Clare men was at Derrybrien when a despatch from General

Brennan reached Dan Ryan's home on Holy Thursday, April 22nd, to have all available men in Derrybrien by nightfall. From South Galway Brigade we mustered roughly twenty men, all from 1st Battalion, with about the same number from East Clare. General Michael Brennan was present and in charge.

We left Derrybrien at nightfall, going along the mountain road to Abbey where there was supposed to be a lorry of Tans and R.I.C. travelling two days a week from Loughrea to Woodford. Having gone in this direction, east of Derrybrien, for about six miles, we were met by Seamus Reilly of Tynagh who was scouting that area during that week, and his information was that the enemy had ceased to travel as expected. Here we were met by Larry Kelly who had been appointed Brigade O/C for East Galway and with him about twelve or fifteen men from his area. All told, the I.R.A. would be about fifty-five or sixty men, all armed, mostly with shotguns. The Clare men had a good number of rifles and about a dozen bombs. There would be no more than four rifles in ^{the} South Galway party; all the rest had shotguns.

After a consultation with Brigade O/C Larry Kelly and some of his officers, it was decided to turn north for Dalystown House, hold up the mail car and raid it - and await the result when the driver reached Loughrea. Brigade O/C Kelly was to go before us to take over the big house which was occupied by the caretaker. The distance from where the scout was met, to Dalystown, would be about twelve miles. We arrived there about 3 a.m., drenched, as it rained hard all night, and found there was very little food in the place. Some got a cold cup of tea, or a raw egg, and we lay about in our wet clothes in the halls and rooms as best we could. The mails were raided, their contents brought in and examined. Then, out at daybreak to take up our position at the crossroad on the outskirts of the demesne. This position was a triangular one, as the road branching east had to be cut off. Here, most of the riflemen were placed in four houses covering the road. The men with shotguns were lined inside the demesne wall, stretching to both sides of the cross and covered by a wood. Here, also, our bombs were to be used. We waited in position until about 4 p.m. and, as none of the enemy had turned out in the meantime, the O/C called us up.

We proceeded east again towards Derrybrien. About a quarter of a mile on this road were two villages, one on each side, and into these we went for food. The people indeed were very nice and set about preparing a meal as quickly as possible. Some had taken a cup of tea when the whistle blew, and out we had to go again, to see two lorries of Tans pass by the spot which we had occupied scarcely half an hour before. If they had spotted us on the mountainside, as they could have, they kept on their way, but returned later that night and burned the houses we had occupied. We continued our journey to Derrybrien, arriving there again at nightfall. Some of the men had not tasted food since leaving there twenty-four hours before.

General Brennan's next visit to our area was, as far as I can recollect, in May, 1921, when arrangements were made to form a large column from our 1st Battalion and men from East Clare. A weekly report of enemy movements and strength of those was to be furnished to his Headquarters in East Clare.

As a report had been received that a lorry of

Tans were travelling from Galway to Gort each Saturday. I was instructed to go early the next Saturday and scout the road. As the journey was long from our camp, I left at about 7 a.m. and travelled across country. Reaching my own home, I had breakfast there and set out again for Kiltartan, getting there about 9.30 a.m. Here, I remained in a wood in view of the road until 8 p.m., during which time no enemy patrol or lorry passed. Having completed my task, I started back again for our camp in the mountain, had a much-needed meal at my home and reach^{ed} camp about midnight, having covered about twenty miles in the day.

I may add that, at this time, no single lorry of Tans was travelling and no cycle patrols of R.I.C. were on the roads near Gort. Thus matters stood, with enemy coming out in strong numbers and we, on our part, too badly equipped to attack them. We could find no small task to suit us until one of the Cumann na mBan members, Miss Bridget Ryan, sister of our Quartermaster, returning from Gort by Kilbeacanty, saw this tall man in a motor car coming from Ballyturn House and turning towards Gort. From the description she gave to us, we suspected that the

man must be Inspector Blake, in charge of the R.I.C. This man had built up a very bad reputation for himself in the district, threatening women with his revolver in the homes of wanted men and going into the shops in the town throwing his revolver on the counters, with a demand to be served at once. His wife also carried a revolver and, when shopping, threatened those serving her at the counter that, if anything happened to her husband, she would shoot and burn the town. This would be the first Saturday in May, 1921.

The next day, Sunday, my sister, Rita, and Annie Ryan, another sister of Dan Ryan, came as usual to Ryan's house where they gave us each Sunday reports of enemy movements and round-ups. They in turn told us that this Captain Blake ~~was~~ conveyed a Mrs. de Blaquire home in his car on Saturday evenings from Gort to Tubber, five miles south-west of Gort. This lady was one of the landlord class and certainly an Imperialist. Dan Ryan, Pat Glynn, Tom Keely and myself decided that I should go home on Saturday evening and remain near the road leading from Gort to Tubber, to have a good look at this man. This I did; and sure enough, at the time given by our girls,

along came a motor car with Blake and the lady. I had a close look at him and could easily identify him again.

He was a tall, well-built man, well over six feet, wearing a grey sportscoat and a cap so grey as to be almost white.

In the meantime, we got information that a party was to be held at Baggott's of Ballyturn on the following day, Sunday. So, putting our clues together, we decided that, as Blake was visiting there a week previous, he would be in the party. Having sent word of our plan to Pat Houlihan of Cahir, Feakle, asking him to come along as he was already experienced, we also sent word to Michael Kelly, who was foreman at Coen's of Gort and knew Captain Blake well. He was also one of our Intelligence Officers. It was decided to go to Ballyturn the following day, Sunday, 15th May. If we were not successful there, our other plan was the Gort-Tubber road the next Saturday evening and get him returning from Tubber. Just as we were discussing our plans in the camp, Pat Houlihan arrived with his rifle. Thomas Greavan, who came from the Tuam area and was on the run in our's, came also. It was decided to go to Ballyturn at 1 p.m. and take up our position.

When we arrived there, at a point on the road which was separated from the drive leading to the big house by a narrow wood, we heard a motor coming in the direction of the house. Pat Glynn and Michael Kelly hastily crossed the strip of wood to get a good look at the car. Returning to us again, Kelly exclaimed, "We have him", meaning Blake. They also said there were women in the car and that it contained five or six people. Midway down the drive to the gatehouse, there was a bridge across a stream, but there was no cover at this point. So we decided on going down to the gatehouse which stood on the offside of the road and to the left of the main gate. Here, we divided our men. Pat Houlihan and John Coen took over the gatehouse, with Tom Keely and Tom Craven taking up a position inside the wall surrounding the house and adjoining the road. These two positions covered the main gate, as well as giving a view of the road leading to Derrybrien. Pat Houlihan took charge of this section. Dan Ryan (Quartermaster), Pat Glynn, Michael Kelly and myself took up a position inside the gate, on the right, leading to the road. There was a group of trees here, running out to the avenue, and this was the only cover, as the opposite side was bare. From our

group or section had to come the "hands up", as the other section in the gatehouse could not have a clear view of the car until it came close to the gate. Houlihan and Coen had service rifles, Tom Keely had a Winchester rifle, and Craven a shotgun. In the other section, Pat Glynn had a police carbine, Ryan, a shotgun, ^{and}/myself, a shotgun. We had, as scouts on the Gort-Kilbeacanty road, John Keely, brother of Tom, and Martin Coen, brother of John Coen. Kelly carried a revolver and was the only one who wore a mask. This we considered necessary, as we intended to let him go back to Gort again to resume his work of us.

We would be in our positions at 1.30 p.m., and our stay there was a long one, as nothing happened until 8 p.m. During this time, we had made all passers-by prisoners until the little gatehouse was crammed to full capacity. I counted seventeen in all. While we waited, our two scouts crept up close to the big house and could see our much-wanted party playing tennis on the court in the lawn. This continued for hours until at last we heard the sound of a motor started from the house. As a precaution, we had closed one half of the gate so that the car had to stop to open it.

When the car came close to the gate and stopped, we gave "hands up". There was a pause for a few seconds as we expected they might consider the safety of their women. Instead, one of them, whom we knew afterwards to be Captain Cornwallis, got out on the right of the car and had only one step to go to get around the curve of the gate wall. From here, he had a clear view of our section and opened fire on us. We, on our part, could do nothing about it, as the wall was of stone, coped on top, one stone flat between two standing, giving him ample room to fire and also protection. As I was nearest to the car, he concentrated his fire in my direction, and I felt the sting of a bullet in my left heel. The next one went through the stock of the gun in my hand. The third cut the bottom from my trousers pocket, bring^{ing} the skin from my right leg. All seemed to concentrate their fire on the car, until Tom Keely saw Cornwallis and brought him down with his Winchester. Blake was in front of the car with him. Mrs. Blake was in the back with Lieutenant McCreevy and Lady Gregory. This lady did a very foolish thing as she came out of the car on the right, where "hands up" came from, and thereby saved her life. She crouched beside the back wheel, so close to us that we could

have touched her with the guns. Had she got out on the other side, she would have shared the fate of Mrs. Blake.

Cornwallis was the only one of the party to use his gun. Blake was dead inside the car, his much vaunted .45 in his pocket. McCreevy was also dead inside the car beside Mrs. Blake, his revolver fully loaded. Cornwallis had a .22 automatic and six rounds, so he must have fired four. Pat Houlihan sounded his whistle, the signal to cease fire, as arranged. Before we left, having searched all the dead party, we left a note for Mr. Baggott, owner of the big house, saying that, if any reprisals were carried out, we in turn would burn down his place.

The homes of John and Michael Fahy and John Coen were burned down that night. When word reached the garrison in Gort of the ambush, they looted and smashed shops in the town, taking what they wanted in drink and cigarettes. As there was no officer left, they got completely out of hand. Having got all they wanted, a large force of R.I.C. and soldiers from Gort, aided by Tans from Galway, arrived in Ballyturn. Here, they

searched the woods, firing in all directions. They sent one of the R.I.C. into a wood to search and shot him dead, having suspected him of giving information to our Intelligence Officers. He was one of those R.I.C. men who did not agree with their methods and they knew it.

Having collected the stuff at Ballyturn, we struck back again for Dan Ryan's, but none of us stayed in our old camp as it was too near to the ambush point. Instead, we got two men from the Company to take the guns to Killeen and provide billets for us. Those two were of constant service to us, guarding any officers who came into the area and blocking roads in the area. They were John Hawkins and John Noone of Gortacarnane. We stayed in Killeen for the night. We counted our ammunition and found that we had now got only twenty rounds of long range stuff. Any that fell into our hands was revolver stuff. This did not include any Pat Houlihan had, which he took back to East Clare that morning. This was so until the end of June, 1921, when a Column of East Clare and South Galway was formed, with Pat Houlihan in charge.

I would like to record here the family who lived

in the gatehouse at Ballyturn - the Connolly's. The father, Frank, was steward at the big house. Jack was yardsman there, and Paddy was coachman and slept over the harness room in the yard. Here, as many as three of us used to stay and sleep on rugs on the cushions of cars, Paddy making sure we did not want for anything (not even a good yarn!). When their house was occupied that Sunday, Frank and his daughter, Molly, were there and knew all of us. Frank went into bed in the room where Houlihan and Coen had taken up their position at the window, turned his back on them and had a good sleep. When questioned by Auxiliaries and Tans, he said he never saw any of the men before, but they all spoke with a Clare accent, so he turned up to the wall and fell asleep.

Curfew was imposed in Gort and the surrounding area after Ballyturn, from 8 p.m. to 8 a.m. This lasted until the Truce, 11th July, 1921.

Early in June, Commandant General Brennan was again in our area after a tour of the 1st, or East, Galway Brigade. He arrived at our Headquarters with Captain Tommy McGrath and Colonel Jim Hannon, staying in

Gortacarnane that night, which was Friday, and ^{they} were escorted into East Clare by Dan Ryan, Pat Glynn and myself. They intended to stay in Sean Moroney's of Gortabrulla, who was a member of the A.S.U. in that area, and here they were to stay on Saturday probably for a meeting with the A.S.U.

When our escort duty was finished, we returned to our camp and stayed there. Going out to Ryan's on Sunday morning, we waited as usual for our two Cumann na mBan girls who were constant visitors every Sunday and who had all the information about raids and movements of enemy forces. These two were Annie Ryan, sister of Dan's, and my sister, Rita. They arrived about 2 p.m. and had a very urgent message, not alone for us in our own area, but of equal importance to all the men in East Clare, having met our chief Intelligence Officer, Henry Shaughnessy, a shopkeeper, who lived about a hundred yards from the barrack and who had information from two old R.I.C. men. He also had access to the wires to the barrack through two telegram boys, named Joe Quinn and Luke Shinnors. His information on that Sunday was that a large-scale round-up was to start at midnight on that night, taking in our 1st Battalion and embracing East Clare out to Killaloe. This

was to be taken in three circles. So accurate was this man's information that it gave the exact area to be enclosed each day for the three days, the number of cavalry, the number of foot soldiers and R.I.C. taking part. This information was brought correctly, by word of mouth, by our two girls, as it would be dangerous for all concerned if it had been by despatch.

Our duty now was to alert all wanted men in our own 1st Battalion as well as sending our information to East Clare, as there was a danger that the whole staff of the Division as well as the A.S.U. would be encircled and captured. Having sent messages to different parts of the 1st Battalion by Cumann na mBan members and given instructions to our section to get out of the first circle and cross beside Loughcutra to Kilmacduagh, five miles west of it, Dan Ryan and myself left at once for East Clare. We contacted Pat Houlihan who gave our message to Colonel Brennan at Moroney's. This would be a distance of about six miles from our Headquarters at Gortacarnane and meant that we had eleven miles to get back to our men at Kilmacduagh. We passed beside Loughcutra about 11.30 p.m. and could hear the rumble of the lorries as they left to

form their circle. The castle at Loughcutra was their headquarters for two days and nights.

The number of enemy taking part in this round-up was about fifteen hundred cavalry, two hundred in lorries and on foot and about one hundred R.I.C. They also employed two or three aeroplanes which flew low over villages, spotting any movements of ours. They took in, in the first circle, the parishes of Beagh, Kilbeacanty and Peterswell as well as part of Killmeena, an area of about eight miles by five, stretching along the Gort-Ennis road for three miles and the Gort-Loughrea road for five miles. The cavalry rode into the villages and collected all the men they could get who were able to walk (and some who were not so well able) to a point guarded by R.I.C. When all were gathered at a field, two miles each of Gort, and lined up along the walls there, a thorough inspection by some of the older of the R.I.C. took place and, when it was finished, one of them in charge approached the military O/C and said, "I believe ye have not one of them". The second circle was formed that night and, after inspection again by the R.I.C. of all men collected, resulted again in a blank. Only two of the East Clare Column, who were

staying in a cave and, although they got word of the round-up, thought it would be quite safe to stay there, were taken by the enemy. They did not move, but on Tuesday one of them went outside the hide-out and was spotted from an aeroplane which kept hovering low over the spot until the military came and arrested them. They were taken to Loughcutra where they were ill-treated and questioned. These two were Timothy Considine and Joe Toohy of Feakle, Co. Clare. While some arrests were made on the third day of the round-up, not one of the A.S.U. was taken. So, from our point of view, it was a success for us.

After this general round-up, there was very little movement of troops or raids. Any there was consisted of two, three or more lorries and only at random intervals. Coming maybe on Monday of one week and on any other day of the next week, it was almost impossible to get in contact with them. While curfew was strictly enforced in the area, it was hard on the civilian, but it gave us of the I.R.A. greater freedom, as any people abroad after curfew were either supporters of the enemy or members of their force.

On Saturday evening - it would be the last Saturday in June - Jack Flaherty and myself decided to pay a visit close to the town and see what was doing around it. We were armed with revolvers. Coming across country, we came out on the public road at Cloonaha railway bridge which gave a clear view of the bridge at Gort station, a mile away, and held as an outpost by military. Looking from the bridge towards Gort, we saw, on the railway bank, a man in R.I.C. uniform with a girl. They were too far from us to fire and risk losing him, so we decided to wait and see if they would move in our direction. After a short while, they got up from the bank and seemed to us to be heading for a lovers' wood called the Punchbowl. This was what we wanted, but, on coming to a stile leading to the road, they paused, changed their minds and turned back, heading for Gort. This meant that we had to take a circuit around from the bridge, so as to get between them and the post at the other bridge. We got before them at a point half-way between and waited beside the railway wall, keeping a space of about twenty yards between us, so that, if missed by one of us, we would have a second chance. So close were they linked as they approached us

that to fire would mean killing the girl. To avoid this, Flaherty, who was nearest to them, gave "hands up". The Tan was petrified and as good as dead. Not so the girl who pulled his revolver from his holster and said, "Here, Charlie, use this!" By this time, I had been over the railway wall and told her (not very politely) to clear. This she did, but there was a danger that she would alarm the guard at the Gort bridge and, as we were hemmed in between a river on one side and the main Gort-Ennis road, with a bye-road south of us, we could easily be surrounded. Having taken his revolver, we marched him back beyond this bye-road for safety. He was terrified and implored us several times not to shoot him. We charged him with ill-treating the Loughnane brothers, etc. This he denied, saying he was not in the country at that time, and handed us a further six rounds of .45. We took his papers and, on examining them later, found that he was a married man and sending money home to his wife in England. Having called at my home to warn my brother not to be about that night, as the girl who was with the Tan knew me all my life and might say so at the barrack, with bad result to him if caught. We returned to the mountain camp. Needless to say, as the man surrendered when called on,

we did not shoot him.

The next week was spent by us in preparing for the new A.S.U., calling up Jack Fahy and his bunch of eight men with our section at headquarters in Gortacarnane. By this time, our trouble was not to find men but how (not having arms enough) to refuse them and get work for them to do.

On Saturday evening, about July 8th, the East Clare section, numbering about twenty men, arrived in our area and were billeted in the villages of Gortacarnane and ~~Baillinnak~~ Ballinakill, about four miles south-east of Gort. They were armed mostly with rifles. We, in our area, had mustered about twenty men, all from the 1st Battalion, armed with six rifles and the rest with shotguns. Extra ammunition was distributed by the Clare men to us whose supply had almost run out.

On Sunday morning, the Column travelled to the Punchbowl, a mile south of Gort, in charge of Pat Houlihan, arriving there at about 12.30 p.m. and taking cover in a wood. I was sent, with Michael Kelly, to scout the road from Gort to Ennis and the bye-road from Cloonaha leading

into it at Blackwater. Having secured the help of a farmer who had always helped us, named Pat Regan, and who was free to go into Gort at any time, I placed him nearest to the town and in contact with Kelly, with myself nearest to the Column and in touch with them. Tea was brought to the men from Regan's house during their stay in the wood. They were to remain there until any movement of the enemy was observed in town, when they were to take up positions on the road leading to Ennis via Loughcutra. It seemed to be a very quiet day as, from where we were on duty, there seemed not to be even a civilian about. The day wore on until about 7.30 p.m. when, with no enemy movement to report, we left the Punchbowl for Kilbeacanty, crossing by Beagh and Russane. Here, about twenty of us had a meal at John Connolly's where we were very welcome. The other men had a meal in Beagh village. From there, we marched back again to Killeen and Ballinakill and stayed that night there.

It was here that we learned of the Truce on Tuesday morning when our East Clare friends left again for their own area. All our Brigade Staff (with the exception of Martin Fahy, Brigade Engineer, who was sent by General

Brennan to East Galway area to help there) were present with this Column, also all the Company Captains of the 1st Battalion. This, from the organisation point of view, may have been bad, but to deny any of those men a place in the Column would, in their opinion, be to slight them and would be resented. So ended our little contribution to the fight for freedom.

Cumann na mBan:

Branches of Cumann na mBan were formed in every Company or parish area in 1917 and 1918. They did a great service to the I.R.A. in the early days before the Tan war. They organised dances and concerts to raise funds which afterwards found their way to jails and camps in comforts and parcels for the prisoners there. When the Tan war started and men had to go on the run, they were ever ready to assist them and, while the outstanding members were the sisters of the men who were out, or in jail, all were very good.

During the period, August, 1920, to 11th July, 1921, these girls of Cumann na mBan were the "eyes and ears" of the A.S.U., bringing word to them of raids and bringing

despatches at any hour and at great risk to themselves. When our Intelligence men were arrested, or had to go on the run, it was to those girls we had to look to fill the gap, and this they did without fail. For instance, if it had not been for the intelligence of Bridget Ryan (now Mrs. A. Kerins and sister of Brigade Quartermaster Dan Ryan) in bringing us the description of Captain Blake leaving Baggott's house on horseback, there would have been no ambush at Ballyturn. Again, it was the two girls who brought the exact time and place, as well as the areas enclosed in each of the three days' round-up (inside of two hours after getting the information), to us at our headquarters that made this mighty enemy force look so foolish when, at the end of three days, they drew a blank, having got none of the wanted men. These two were Annie Ryan (another sister of Dan's) and my sister, Rita.

To those especially and to the Keely sisters, Kate and Maggie, must go our undying gratitude for the services they rendered and the care and attention they gave us. And to all the members of Cumann na mBan must go the credit of bearing all the insults and hardships of raids in their

homes by R.I.C., Tans and Auxiliaries while we, at least, were safe, if not captured. That safety we owed in large measure to them.

Intelligence - Enemy and our own:

It is very difficult to estimate the strength of enemy intelligence in the early days of the I.R.A. up to and including 1916 as, at that time, there was a strong Irish Parliamentary Party following in the area, many of whom did not hesitate to condemn the new movement, as they called it, thus assisting, unknown to themselves, the R.I.C. who were the eyes of the British Government in the country and helped to draw special attention from them on any who were suspected of organising or leading the I.R.A.

When the boycott of the R.I.C. came into force after 1918, they lost most of their intelligence which they usually picked up from local contact. In late 1919 and early 1920, they had to depend on one or two people for their information. Certainly, there was someone in the Gort area who did not hesitate to give information to the R.I.C. as late as December, 1920.

For instance, one Sunday in December, 1920, Quartermaster Dan Ryan and myself called to my home while the people were at eleven o'clock Mass. We had a meal and left again, promising my mother to call again the next Sunday. This we intended to do, if possible. When Sunday came, we, who were in the mountain camp, got up and, not being able to go to Mass in any of the country churches, said the Rosary and, as usual, divided so as to get breakfast in different houses. Ryan and I had a chat, and he insisted that, as we had been at my place the last Sunday, it might be dangerous to be there again so soon. In this, he proved to be correct as, at the very time we arrived on Sunday, from all sides of the house came Tans and Auxiliaries who had been waiting in ambush for us. They questioned my mother about our previous visit, telling her the time we had been there. This, in face of the fact that in our journey we did not walk forty yards on a public road. It was all cross country.

At this time, in the Kinvara area it was proved to the I.R.A. that a man, named Morriss, was giving information to the barrack. A trap was set for him and he was promptly

executed by the Kinvara Company.

I have referred to a raid at a public auction in Rosepark where the auctioneer was suspected by us. This was about three miles south of Gort. Dan Ryan, Jack Coen and myself came on this man, named Thomas Quinn, and fired at and wounded him. This caused him to go to a Dublin hospital for treatment. While he was there, someone in Gort sent him a telegram, asking him to meet him, or her, down at the Quays. Possibly, Quinn thought it was a trap, and the next place the telegram appeared was in Captain Blake's pocket when shot at Ballyturn. Further, when we took over the barrack at Gort, there were scores of envelopes belonging to him in the District Inspector's quarters, left there, I believe, by a Lieutenant Arnott for our information. This Lieutenant was a visitor, while in Gort, at Lady Gregory's of Coole and asked one of the workmen one evening if he knew this man, Quinn. He said, "Yes", and was told that this was a very bad Irishman. After he had been fired at, in February, 1921, and Morriss dealt with, there was never any leakage of information to the enemy, and we were free to come and go either by day or night.

Our intelligence was based on the Companies where two or three members were told off to do the work. In most cases, these men were not called out on parades. This enabled them to get information from all classes and was very helpful in cases of theft and crime generally up to September, 1920, when many of them were picked up or were on the run. From that until the Truce, our chief intelligence man was Henry O'Shaughnessy who lived at the corner of the Square, about a hundred yards from the barrack and was a shopkeeper and garage owner. This man took on the work voluntarily and, through him and two members of the Cumann na mBan, kept us informed of raids and round-ups as they were planned. He also had access to telegrams to the barrack through two telegram boys, named Joe Quinn and Luke Skinners. He had full information of the big round-up in June, 1921, full details of each area to be taken on each of three days, where enemy headquarters was to be set up each day and the numbers taking part. This information he passed on to Annie Ryan and my sister, Rita. After Mass on Sunday, these two went immediately to our Brigade Headquarters at Gortacarnane where we in turn despatched it to our other units and on to East Clare. The result was that our Brigade lost no man and East Clare

only two in this monster round-up. Annie Ryan is now Mrs. Kerrigan of New York, and my sister is Mrs. Jordan of Ballindereen. Another sister of Quartermaster Ryan, Bridget, brought us the description of the man she saw coming out from Ballyturn House which turned out to ^{be} Blake and this information led to Ballyturn ambush. She is now Mrs. Kerins of Kilmacduagh.

Communications:

During the years from the reorganisation in 1917 to August, 1920, all communications were sent from Company to Company by despatch, and men were appointed in each Company for this work and no undue delay was incurred. If and when any important despatch for an area or brigade outside our own was being sent, one or other of our officers or Company Captains did the work, as in cases where arrangements for the removal of prisoners were being made. The work was not given to the ordinary Volunteer. This was done for the purpose of secrecy. When the Tan war opened up in our area in September, 1920, this course was rudely upset, and not every man would undertake a journey of, say, ten miles each way with a despatch. With one of our Battalion officers leaving our area and

the Battalion O/C lying low after Castledaly and sending no order or communication to anyone, our line of communication broke down completely.

It was only after the Brigade was formed and reorganised by General Michael Brennan in Limepark, April 1921, that a new line of despatch was formed from Mid Galway Brigade on to Clarenbridge, Ardrahan on to our Headquarters at Gortacarnane and into East Clare. This line was continually worked by two men, Jack Fleming of Clarenbridge, on to Patsy Gillane of Ardrahan, who delivered to our Headquarters and in turn into East Clare. These two men were continually on the work as, at this time, weekly reports were required from each Brigade and most of the journey had to be done on foot.

We also had a line of communication by rail, and despatches from Tuam area, and even from Mayo, were delivered at Gort Station to Signelman Pat Shaughnessy who received them from the engine-driver when exchanging the staffs and passed them on to one or other of our two Cumann na mBan friends who delivered to our Headquarters. This man, Pat Shaughnessy, risked both

his job and his life in doing this work, as there were always enemy detectives there to watch the trains.

This man was no relation of our Intelligence Officer, although both were direct descendants of King Guaire, last King of Connaught, who was an O'Shaughnessy and lived in Gort where the military barrack was.

Enemy Strength:

Gort Barrack was the stronghold in our area and held a company of cavalry, the 17th Lancers, one hundred strong, also about eighty R.I.C. and Tans, with reinforcements of Auxiliaries from their headquarters at Lenaboy, Galway, for raids and round-ups.

Terrain:

The whole Brigade area is one flat plain and it was only in the 1st Battalion area that any rough or mountain cover was to be found, and outside of this area very few sites for an ambush were to be found. In the Ardrahan Battalion, only one good site was to be had - at Raheen, three miles north of Gort. This site was not availed of while only a dozen Tans occupied

Drumharsna, a mile further north, after the Loughnane brothers' murder by them.

It was in the 1st Battalion area, among the smaller farmers, that there was always a warm welcome for those on the run, that there too that many wanted to join the A.S.U. after Ballyturn ambush.

