

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1,367

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COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,367

Witness

Joseph Aherne (deceased),

"Carrigeen",
Croughta Park,
Glasheen Road,
Cork.

Identity.

Company Captain, Midleton, Co. Cork;
Commandant, 4th Battalion, Cork No. 1
Brigade.

Subject.

Fourth Battalion, East Cork,
. 1916 - .

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No S. 2691 ...

Form B S M 2

COPY/

"CARRIGEEN",
CROAGHTA PARK,
GLASHEEN ROAD,
CORK.

22 - 3 - 56.

TO THE BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY.

This is to testify that the manuscript copy of my late husband's activities (as a member of the Fourth Battn. East Cork Brigade, I.R.A.) which has been furnished to the Bureau was prepared and written by my husband some months prior to his death in 1951.

(Signed) CECILIA AHERNE

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BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

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STATEMENT OF JOSEPH AHERNE (Decd.),

"Carrigeen", Croughta Park, Glasheen Road, Cork.

The 4th Battalion area, of which I write, corresponded roughly to the old Parliamentary area of East Cork. The extreme western tip was at Dunkettle Bridge. The western boundary ran north through Glanmire village to Knockreha. The northern boundary ran through Leamlanna to Ballincurrig, to Clonmult, Inch, Killeagh, Youghal and the Blackwater. The eastern and southern boundaries took in the coastline to Ballymacoda, Ballycotton, Cobh and the estuary of the River Lee to Dunkettle Bridge.

The first Volunteer company was formed in Cobh in 1913, and many of its members were interned in Frongoch after the 1916 rebellion. After 1916 the area was thoroughly organised and companies were formed in all parishes. Midleton was the first company organised, under the leadership of Mr. Seán Brady, and Youghal, under M. Kelleher, some time later. Knockroha was organised in 1917 under M. Corry, now representing Fianna Fáil interests in An Dáil. Other companies in the area were as follows: Little Island, under M. Cahill; Carrigtwohill, under Tom Cotter; Lisgoold, under - ; Ballincurrig, under Jack Smart; Clonmult, under J. Lawton; Dungourney, under Con Ahern, Ladysbridge, under William O'Connell, Killeagh, under D. O'Leary; Inch, under T. Mulcahy; Ballymacoda, under T. Gumbleton; Ballycotton, W. Walsh; Cloyne, B. Walsh; Aghada, P. O'Keefe.

Our activities really began in 1918 with raids for arms throughout the area. After one raid myself and three other members of the Midleton Company were arrested and conveyed to Midleton Barracks but were subsequently released as the complainants failed to identify us. Arms and ammunition were very scarce in the district and it was decided to collect subscriptions each week for an arms fund. The amounts subscribed varied, as Volunteers anxious to obtain as much equipment as possible purchased arms and equipment when afforded an opportunity to do so. Discussions amongst ourselves about our aims, object and policy of the country were frequent, and many a laugh was had at our expense when we tried to visualise the task confronting the Volunteers. However, as we had a fanatical belief in the justice of our cause we did not consider the possibility of failure, and I believe the motto of every Volunteer in the Midleton Company was "death or victory". We knew nothing about drill, less about tactics, and our armaments consisted of a few shotguns, one or two revolvers of small calibre. The Midleton Company, of which I was an officer, paraded for military instruction three nights a week. The parade ground was a walled enclosure in an old ruined castle yard at Cahermore, Midleton. Diarmuid Hurley was our instructor and occasionally I gave assistance. A few simple movements in foot drill and squad drill was all we were capable of getting through, and musketry instruction was also confined to a few movements such as shouldering, ordering and presenting arms. Our rifles were stout branches broken off nearby trees, and it always raised a laugh when we were told to 'fall out' and get our rifles.

Our first military adventure was participation in an attempted raid on Ballyquirke Aerodrome, under the leadership of Terence MacSwiney, Lord Mayor of Cork. The aerodrome, which is situated about nine miles from Midleton, was occupied by a platoon of the Wiltshire Regiment and was considered an easy job. However, owing to the breakdown of the transport conveying the principal officers to the assembly point, the officer in charge of the city battalions decided to order the Volunteers to disperse. Cycling home alone I met the cars at Killmaintain Crossroads, about four miles from Midleton, but as I was not informed about them and thinking that they were British military, I took cover inside the roadside fence and, when they had passed, proceeded on my way home.

Some time later we decided to attack the aerodrome ourselves without the assistance of the brigade. Picked Volunteers from the Cobh and Midleton Companies were to participate, but as we had only three revolvers in the Midleton Company and four or five in the Cobh Company we had to devise ways and means to carry out the raid with a reasonable chance of success. The plan was simple if unorthodox. The three revolvers were given to the three officers of the company and the remainder of the company were given stout ash clubs. The troops occupied a two storeyed building close to the railway line. The ground floor consisted of one long room and an improvised guardroom. The N.C.O.'s and men's beds were placed against the wall along its entire length, with a passage down the centre. We had information that there was only one sentry on duty at the time. The sentry was to be disarmed by the two company officers who were to lead the attack. That accomplished, the ground floor was to be rushed by the

Volunteers armed with clubs, and the sleeping soldiers knocked out or compelled to surrender before they would have time to get their rifles. I was assigned to cover the back portion of the building and for this purpose was given a .22 revolver. The point of assembly this time was a disused quarry situated about two hundred yards from our objective.

The night was very dark and a cold drizzle of rain was falling and, as most of us had walked the nine miles from Midleton, we arrived in a heated condition. We had a considerable time to wait as the Cobh Volunteers were out cutting the telephone wires and some of our company were scouting the position and reporting the movements of the sentry. After a time of course we began to feel the cold and, as movement was out of the question, we had to grin and bear it as best we could. During this period one of the Volunteers, Dave Desmond, came to me and whispered: "You know I was just thinking, Jose". I asked him what he was thinking about and he replied, "I was thinking that it was one thing to read Irish history but it is another thing to make it, when you are up against a man with a rifle with only a club in your hand". The joke raised a subdued laugh which, surprisingly, warmed us up a little bit and, in fact, put us on our toes madly eager to finish the job. However, we were doomed to disappointment.

The Cobh men, after making a thorough job of the telephones lines, were reporting back to the officer in charge on the railway. It was very dark and, as they had to walk on the permanent way, they made a considerable amount of noise in their eagerness to be on time. The sentry raised the alarm and the lights went up in the building, and for the second time we had to retreat without attaining our objective.

Our arms fund had by this time reached fairly reasonable proportions and it was decided to purchase some revolvers. With this end in view, Mr. Tadhg Manly, N.T., made a journey to Belfast at his own expense and succeeded in getting seven revolvers and a small quantity of ammunition for each. The purchase was made at a most opportune time as the brigade decided to attack several police barracks as early as possible in 1920. Carrigtwohill police barracks was selected in the 4th Battalion area and the attack was carried out by the Cobh and Midleton Companies under the leadership of Comdt. Leahy, Cobh. The date of the attack was January 3rd, 1920, and the point of assembly was Carrigtwohill schoolhouse. Early in the night Volunteers from the Cobh Company were detailed to cut the communications and, as usual, made a thorough job of it. An incident which occurred prior to the attack is worth relating as it throws a light on the peculiar conditions under which the minions of the British and the Volunteers were operating. Two of the Cobh Volunteers, having finished their work, were reporting back to the assembly point and were proceeding along the street of the village. The R.I.C., whose suspicions had been aroused, had sent out a patrol and succeeded in capturing one of the Volunteers. Diarmuid Hurley, Tadhg Manly and Michael Burke of Cobh, who had been detailed to clear the street of any R.I.C., noticed his plight and proceeded to his assistance. In the meantime the Volunteer had noticed his comrades coming towards him and succeeded in wriggling out of his coat. Leaving it in the hands of the astonished R.I.C. men, he started to run towards his comrades. The R.I.C. now noticed the Volunteer patrol coming towards them and, taking fright, ran back to the safety of their barracks.

The attack opened about midnight with a volley from the rear of the barracks. The effect was negligible except for the fact that it kept the R.I.C. busy and attracted their attention. The adjoining building had been occupied for the purpose of breaching the gable end. I had a roving commission and, as it was my first time under fire, I went round the back of the building to test my reactions. The results were good, so I proceeded to visit the outposts situated at various points in the village where I met Hurley. I asked him what was going to be done now. He replied that we were going in. I then asked him who was going in and he replied, "yourself and myself". He added that the O/C wanted somebody else but that he chose me. We proceeded to the barracks and negotiated the crossing safely. Entering the outbuilding, we took some time to accustom our eyes to the intense darkness and after some instructions from the O/C proceeded to crawl through the aperture. Hurley was first and I got through almost immediately. Standing in the day-room, we shook hands before proceeding to cross towards the staircase where we could hear slight movements in the intense silence which now prevailed. When we got to the doorway situated at the foot of the staircase Hurley whispered to me to kneel down. It was well we took the precaution as at that moment the R.I.C., who either heard us moving or saw us silhouetted in the faint light that was coming through the fanlight, now opened fire. Chunks of plaster fell all round and ^{on} top of us, and in the confined space the noise was intense. We returned the fire, I slowly, as the repeating spring of my revolver was broken and it was necessary to push forward the trigger after each shot.

However, I did get off the six chambers. Apparently Hurley was noting everything carefully, as I heard a whisper in my ear inquiring how many rounds I had fired. I replied "six". He told me to reload as he had fired four and he wished to reload. This accomplished, he shouted to the R.I.C. to surrender. There was a lull in the firing and we heard sounds of a discussion going on upstairs. After a time we heard a woman's voice inquiring if we would leave a woman out. Hurley replied that he certainly would and instructed her to come down at once as we were going to set fire to the barracks. A very frightened woman arrived at the bottom of the staircase and inquired what we would do to the police if they surrendered. Hurley informed her that they would be quite safe. She communicated this to the R.I.C. who shouted that they were prepared to surrender if their lives were spared. After getting the necessary guarantee they came down in single file with their hands above their heads. Volunteers were now coming through the breach. The lamps were relighted and the arms and ammunition carefully collected. The first R.I.C. barracks in Ireland had been captured. The first blow had been struck to eliminate the eyes and ears of the British military. Without the local knowledge the British forces were practically blind and deaf and, therefore, at a great disadvantage in the type of warfare that was now about to be waged against them.

The captured arms were now loaded in a captured motor car and, as I was the only Volunteer able to drive, I was given the job of taking them to a place of safety where they would be carefully stored and looked after with a view to future use. Tadhg Manly accompanied me, and as we drove through the night he, Tadhg, unloaded the police

carbines by the simple process of pulling the trigger. The hood of the car was perforated in several places, which would necessitate a new hood, and I hope the owner received adequate compensation. Arriving in a townland rejoicing in the name of Tubbernamine, we were met by Tadhg's brother, Seán, and a few other Volunteers, who quickly removed the arms from the car. Tadhg remained behind and I started on my homeward journey alone. Arriving at Ballyedmond Bridge, about two miles from Middleton, I abandoned the car and walked cross country home. It was then about 6 a.m., and getting into bed tired out I was quickly in a sound sleep but, unfortunately, not for long as the R.I.C. from the local barracks arrived about 7 a.m. I did not know anything about their arrival until I was awakened by a shaking and, opening my eyes, I saw a face surmounted by a glazed police cap bending over me. After a second or two I was wide awake and found myself answering questions as to my movements on the previous night. The answers weren't to the satisfaction of my questioners, as they went off saying they would see me again. Three days afterwards I, with four of my comrades - M. Desmond, D. Desmond, brother, M. Hallinan, Jerh. Ahern, last-named being a first cousin - were arrested and conveyed to the local police barracks, where we were paraded for identification before the Carrigtwohill R.I.C. They failed to identify us and we were released immediately. Some of the Cobh Volunteers were also arrested but none was detained.

Arrangements were now going ahead for further attacks, with the idea of clearing the whole area of R.I.C. barracks. The task was rather difficult as there were two big military barracks in the area, i.e. Youghal and Cobh.

There were, in addition, several coastguard stations which were reinforced with parties of marines. There were altogether nine R.I.C. barracks, five coastguard stations, two military barracks and, of course, the naval base at Cobh and Carlisle Fort which was occupied by a detachment of Artillery troops and later reinforced by a company of Auxiliaries - all in an area 30 miles long and approximately 15 miles at its broadest point. In addition, big forces of military were stationed in Cork who were continually patrolling the area day and night. Nothing daunted, the Volunteers carried on with their task, working at their ordinary jobs by day and drilling and patrolling by night.

Opportunities for attacking enemy forces had to be watched and such an opportunity occurred on the night of the 9th February, 1920. It was fair day in the town of Middleton and, in addition to the ordinary police patrol, groups of police were stationed at various vantage points in the town. The R.I.C. were kept under close observation by Volunteers and Cumann na mBan and it was noted that a sergeant and one of the constables were from the village of Castlemartyre, five miles distant. This information was conveyed to Lt. Hurley, who immediately made arrangements for their capture on their return journey. Tadhg Manly was sent to the village of Churchtown North, where he contacted Section Leader Mick Kearney. Getting a few other Volunteers, they waited patiently for some hours in a gateway on the main Middleton-Castlemartyre road. The two R.I.C. men arrived at 6 p.m., and as they were passing, the Volunteers rushed out and captured them. The two R.I.C. men were conveyed to the vicinity of Castlemartyre and it was intended to compel them to go to the door of the barracks for the purpose of getting it opened. I, with

other members of the company, walked the five miles to Castlemartyre and, on arrival, found that the plan had miscarried as the two R.I.C. men refused point blank to have anything to do with it. Threats, persuasion and bribes were of no avail, and the constable went so far as to advise us not to attempt to capture the barracks, pointing out how strongly fortified it was and added that the police would fight to the last. He added that if he happened to be in the barracks he would do the same. After some discussion, Hurley, who was in command, was inclined to accept the constable's advice and said that there seemed to be nothing for it but to go home. It was then that Volunteer Tomás Hourihan, N.T., who had played a prominent part in the two abortive raids on Ballyquirke Aerodrome and Carrigwohill R.I.C. barracks, said, in tones of disgust, "Are we always going to go home"? This brought us up with a jolt and we decided to attack. A small number of picked men approached the barracks and concealed themselves as best they could behind the low wall in front of the building. Hurley mounted the steps and knocked at the door. The constable on duty, coming to the door, inquired, "Who's there"? Hurley, imitating Sergt. O'Brien's voice, replied, "Sergt. O'Brien", whereupon the constable, withdrawing the bolts, opened the door slightly. Hurley immediately stuck his foot in the opening and, at the same time, endeavoured to push the door in. The door, however, was still secured by a strong chain. In addition, the constable, who was now thoroughly alarmed, was exerting all his strength to close it. He also started to fire through the aperture, to which Hurley replied. In the excitement of the next few seconds neither Hurley, the constable nor the other Volunteers

thought of firing through the door. The strange duel lasted a much shorter time than it takes to tell. Owing to the position of the two contestants, neither of the two could hit the other as, owing to the pressure inside, both revolvers were pointing away from their targets. Hurley, finding he could do no damage by firing, now attacked the chain, holding the door, with the butt of his revolver. His attack was made in such a frenzy of strength that he succeeded in breaking what in the ordinary course would stand up to the blows of a sledge hammer. Thomas Hourihan and I now added our strength to that of Hurley, and our combined efforts succeeded in dislodging the constable sufficiently to enable Hurley to get inside. Getting inside immediately afterwards, I saw the constable and Hurley with their revolvers pointed at each other's chest and heard the click of the hammers as they fell against the now empty chambers. They immediately realised this, and, being both brave men with their fighting spirit aroused, they closed endeavouring to use the butts of their revolvers on each other. However, the constable had no chance against three of us and he was soon rendered hors to combat. The door was now pulled open and the remainder of the Volunteers came in. The ground floor was quickly searched and, with this accomplished, Hurley turned to me and, indicating the constable, said: "Mind him as he will go mad in a minute; we are going upstairs". The constable was bleeding profusely from a wound in the eye and was shouting loudly for a priest and doctor, his remarks being interspersed with oaths and blasphemies. I told him to go in to the dayroom and, indicating a form, told him to sit down. I also assured him that the priest and doctor had been sent for. This seemed to calm him.

Taking stock of the room, I noticed that three revolvers were hanging in their holsters on the wall. I examined them and found they were fully loaded. Despite his wound, the constable was still full of fight and I think he would have taken a chance of grabbing a revolver if I hadn't noticed and removed them in time. Only a sergeant and a constable were found in the upper portion of the building, who surrendered without a struggle. The arms were quickly collected and the telephone dismantled. We handcuffed the R.I.C. and started our five miles march home with our booty in high spirits.

I was questioned the following day by a constable and a police sergeant. I wasn't very polite and was admonished by the constable. I, in turn, admonished the constable to be a little careful, and the sergeant, who was a nervous type, also admonished the constable. Raids on the houses of Volunteers became so frequent that some of us whose houses were raided more frequently than others decided to sleep out. Our first sleeping place was a stable a few miles outside the town, and as we suffered severely from cold we abandoned it for a wool loft in the town. This loft and a few haybarns were our sleeping places. We changed frequently as the police became more and more active. One constable named Clancy became very obnoxious and it was decided to warn him in the name of the I.R.A. The warning had the desired effect, as that particular constable was not afterwards sent out in the raiding parties and was transferred out of the district after a few months.

We had by now a fair supply of arms and ammunition together with a few egg bombs, so we felt fairly confident

when we received orders to attack Cloyne R.I.C. barracks a few months afterwards. The attack was timed for the 8th May, 1920, and as we had daylight up to a late hour a concert under the auspices of the Gaelic League was arranged to facilitate transport of arms and ammunition. Everything went smoothly; revolvers, carbines and ammunition were taken with traps for the concert to the local hall just outside the town of Cloyne.

Cobh and Midleton Companies were detailed to make the actual attack, while other companies were instructed to block all the main roads. Reporting to the hall at Cloyne at about 8 p.m., the Volunteers collected their arms and instructions issued about the plan of attack. Volunteers were instructed to occupy buildings in the front and rear of the barracks for the purpose of keeping the police engaged. Two other parties, one under Comdt. Hurley and the other under Comdt. Leahy, were detailed to break into houses on either side of the barracks and were to carry out the main assault. Going up the street it was necessary to pass the barracks, so that great caution was necessary as we did not wish to draw suspicion of the R.I.C. before the attack commenced. However, on arriving at the building my party were detailed to occupy, we found that after repeated knockings we were unable to gain an entrance. The opposite party had by this time safely negotiated their entry. As we were standing on the footpath under the windows of the barracks and fearing that our knocking had aroused the R.I.C., I decided to take no further risks. Seizing a pickaxe, I burst in the panel of the door on the ground floor and released the bar on the inside. The only occupants were an old woman and a girl. We got them to a place

of safety a few houses up the street and returned to continue our task of rooting out the R.I.C. Leahy, Manly and the other parties had by this time opened the attack and Manly had climbed to the roof of an adjoining building and was dropping bombs down the chimney of the barracks. Hurley, to facilitate our return, was engaged in firing through the loopholes of the steel shutters on the ground floor. This mode of attack was quite effective while it lasted, as it compelled the R.I.C. to remain under cover and prevented them from using the loopholes to fire through. Fire had been also opened on the building from the parties occupying positions in front and rear of the building - Jack Aherne and P. Whelan. Our task was to breach a hole in the gable end and, if possible, to enter and capture the garrison. As we had no explosives at our disposal, we attacked the wall with a crowbar and sledge. The wall was sounder than we anticipated but after an hour's strenuous work we succeeded in making a small breach. The police were waiting and they now began to fire at and through the hole, which we returned. Hurley was slightly wounded at this time. In an endeavour to clear out the police I threw in a hand grenade. This had the desired effect and we continued the good work of widening the breach, but all our efforts were unavailing to widen the breach sufficiently to permit the passage of a man's body. The police, after an interval, had found a safe place to return our fire through the breach and additional hand grenades failed to show any appreciable effect. As the hours of daylight were limited, Hurley decided to set fire to the building. A tin of petrol was procured. I poured some through the hole and Hurley procured some rags, which he wrapped around

an old brush soaked in petrol. This made an ideal torch. The building was soon ablaze and in a few seconds we had to quit the building. As I reached the front door leading on to the street I had a quick look round to see that all the party were safe, when, to my amazement, I saw a white pillow being thrown from the top storey of the barracks. It was the signal of surrender by the R.I.C. The police were met at the door of the barracks by the Volunteers, who quickly disarmed them. One of the R.I.C. handed his carbine to me. He was smiling as he handed it over and it was only afterwards I discovered the reason. He had removed the bolt from the carbine and thrown it into the burning building.

As the ground floor was still intact we searched it rapidly but discovered nothing except empty ammunition cases. The police apparently, when they found the building was untenable, had thrown all the spare ammunition into the portion of the barracks that was on fire, as it was exploding fiercely in the upper portion of the building. However, Leahy decided to try and salvage some of it. Ordering the sergeant of the R.I.C. up the stairs, he told him to point out the spot where the spare ammunition was dumped. I accompanied Leahy and the sergeant but we only succeeded in getting halfway up before being driven back by the intense heat and exploding ammunition. The companies were now ordered to disperse and the police were marched a short distance outside the town and released. I succeeded in procuring a motor car, and together with Hurley and Manly drove to O'Shea's, Tubbernamine. O'Shea was Manly's brother-in-law and an extensive farmer in the district. Dog tired, our faces covered with grime from the smoke of the fire, we must have looked a disreputable lot.

The following night, Sunday, the 7th May, was concert night in the town of Cloyne. Most of the Volunteers who had taken part in the attack on the previous night attended. Mr. Dan H (?), wellknown Cork comedian, was the principal guest artist. Everyone was in high good humour and songs were chorused with great gusto, winding up with "The Soldier's Song", which, I am sure, was heard echoing through the town.

Searches were now intensified, but having warned the local R.I.C. to be careful we were still able to get about our business without much trouble during the daytime. We still carried on with our training, drilling, organising, attending meetings, lectures etc. The principal part of our duties was intelligence, and in carrying them out Daniel Desmond, another Volunteer, and I cycled to the village of Killeagh for the purpose of reconnoitring the police there.

We entered the village from the western end and as we approached the barracks we saw a group of R.I.C. standing at the door. That they were keeping us under observation was obvious, as after a short time two of them detached themselves from the group and came towards us. We saw immediately that they were armed, and now the question arose what we were to do if questioned and perhaps searched. Anyone at this time found with arms in their possession incurred a death penalty. However, we decided that retreat was impossible so we decided to put up a bold front and, if necessary, to make a fight of it. Keeping a tight grip on our revolvers, we wheeled our bicycles forward until we were within a few yards of the two approaching R.I.C. We halted and

pretended to be looking for a defect in one of the bicycles. The police continued their walk and eyed us warily as they passed but made no attempt to question us. It was a tense moment ^{as they} passed, and Dan looked at me and smiled as we continued on our way. We had still to pass the group at the barracks door, but we concluded that they would see no reason to halt us if the two they had sent out to get a close-up saw no reason to do so. We were right in this assumption as we got past the barracks without incident.

Turning the events of the day over in my mind as we cycled back, I decided to raid the police mails in Midleton for the purpose of ascertaining if any report would be made to the D.I., whose residence was situated in the town and was also headquarters of the district. I arranged matters with Jeremiah Aherne's first cousin, whose brother was employed in the post office in Midleton. We carried out the raid at 8 a.m. and found the police mails in a nice little bundle on the counter. On opening we found the sergeant's report. It was quite an heroic document, stating that he had noticed us in the village and was anticipating an attack on the barracks and that they were quite ready and would fight to the last round. The attack never took place as the powers-that-be decided to evacuate the barracks a fortnight afterwards.

There was another document which was of far more importance in the shape of a circular to the D.I. It was apparently a reply to a report of the state of the district by District Inspector Murphy and the difficulty in defending isolated barracks, and was over the signature of Gen. Higginson. The gist of the document was that a

system of block-houses were to be established throughout the south. The block-houses were to be five miles apart and manned by military with cycle patrols in between.

In pursuance of this plan a company of the 2nd Cameron Highlanders arrived in Midleton. It was a fine sunny day in June, 1920, and the company, in full regimentals and fixed bayonets, headed by a pipe band, made a brave show as they marched to their quarters, which was an old disused creamery at the northern end of the town. Watching them at close quarters, I noticed that with few exceptions they were veterans of the Great War, 1914-18, and, therefore, seasoned soldiers. However, they were in a strange country and were likely to take some time to settle down to their new job of maintaining what the British described as "law and order".

In the meantime, they were under close observation at all hours of the day from the moment they arrived in the town. As a result of this close watching a report was received that night about 7 p.m. that a party of 11 soldiers, one N.C.O. and one R.I.C. man had left the barracks on bicycles and were proceeding in the direction of Carrigtwohill by what was described as the back road. Having Gen. Higginson's circular in mind, we came to the conclusion that after reaching the village of Carrigtwohill they would return by the main Cork road to their barracks. Hurried arrangements were made to intercept them on their return journey. Two scouts were sent out to trail the party while this was being done. The Volunteers were notified to collect their revolvers and to report back to an assembly point on the Cork road just outside the town. It was planned to knock the soldiers off their

bicycles before they would have time to use their rifles. Altogether we were only able to collect nine Volunteers and seven revolvers. On our way out we happened to meet another Volunteer named Cotter, who was able to give us the exact location of the patrol as he had passed them on his way in from Carrigtwohill to Middleton.

Bowl throwing is quite a popular game in Cork, which must not be confused with the English game. The contestants agree to throw the bowls over a certain distance along the road, which is usually two or three miles. The bowls are 28 ounce metal spheres and the thrower taking the least number of throws is the winner. As the bowls are small there is a danger of losing them in the long grass on the side of the road. Consequently, a number of men are sent out in front to watch them and also to mark the road for the throwers. Hurley, who could be always relied on to think up a nice plan on the spur of the moment, thought that a bowling match would be a suitable method to employ to enable the Volunteers to get close enough to the cyclists. Hurley and Tadhg Manly were the contestants and the remainder spread out in front, ostensibly to mark the road and watch the bowls.

All went well until we reached a spot called Mile Bush about a mile or two outside the town of Middleton, when notice was signalled of the approach of the military patrol. Everybody carried on as if nothing was afoot and the patrol cycled unsuspectingly through the markers. When the head of the patrol reached the two throwers Manly drew his gun and fired in the air, which was the signal to rush. Immediately the rush took place and Volunteers and soldiers were mixed up in a confused mass on the road. However, four or five of the Camerons

escaped the net and, after getting over their first surprise, took cover inside the wall on the roadside and opened fire. The fire continued for a few seconds until Hurley ordered the Lance Corporal of the party to order his men to surrender. After a little parley they agreed and came towards us with their hands up. Indeed, one had his rifle in one hand while the other was raised above his head. We were congratulating ourselves on our easy capture when suddenly we noticed another Cameron cycling furiously towards us. When he got within two hundred yards of the ambush he dismounted. Something had happened to his bicycle on his way back from Carrigtwohill and, stopping to repair it, he had lost contact with his party. He turned out to be the corporal, which was fortunate for us as he was full of fight and proceeded to hold us up with his rifle and ordered us to go back as we advanced down the road towards him. We had not yet retrieved the rifles, and finding one handy I opened fire. This had the desired effect, as he quitted his position and made off. We afterwards recovered his rifle but failed to find his equipment which, I presume, he discarded. A motor car approaching along the road was stopped and the twelve rifles, 1,200 rounds of ammunition, steel helmets and bayonets were piled into the back. Tadhg Manly and I drove off to the accompaniment of cheers from our own party.

We handed over the captured arms to Lt. Fitzgerald, Ballinbrittas, Knockraha Company, and returned to Midleton by what I previously described as the back Carrigtwohill-Midleton road. Going back by this route it was necessary to pass the military headquarters, and when we were within

fifty yards of it we saw a lorry emerging. I hastily stopped the car and Manly and I slipped in to a friendly doorway, where we remained for some time until the danger from the military was past. Getting into the car again, we drove past the military barracks and also the police barracks which was situated about one hundred yards further on. Manly was expecting a little trouble on the way and to cope with it he held a revolver in one hand and a Mills hand grenade in the other. I drew a sigh of relief as we negotiated the passage safely, and after reaching a spot about two miles outside the town we parked the car.

Here we met two Volunteers named Murphy who had a farm nearby, and to them we explained what occurred. They were quite elated and willingly co-operated when we informed them that the Midleton Company was being mobilised the following day (Sunday) for the purpose of attacking Ballycotton R.I.C. barracks. This attack had been planned prior to the capture of the military patrol on the Cork-Midleton road and we saw no reason why we should alter the plans. The two Murphy brothers soon procured the tools which we required for the assault in the shape of a crowbar and sledge. These were parked in the car which we left in their care before proceeding to Midleton on foot.

In Midleton we met most of the Volunteers who had participated in the raid, and anticipating raids on houses of Volunteers that night most of us arranged to sleep out. It was late before the final arrangements were completed, and as we were about to leave fire was opened down the main street by the military. Taking shelter in some deep

doorways, we waited until the firing slackened and then proceeded to our various billets.

The following morning, which was Sunday, some of the Volunteers made their way to Ballycotton, ten miles distant. Some were walking, some had bicycles and others procured other means of transport. All arrived in time and, as instructions had already been issued, they took up their positions about the village or mixed with the various groups of visitors. Hurley, Manly, Tomás Hourihan and I were to form the spearhead of the attack and took up our position adjacent to the barracks. Indeed, for some time we were sitting on the sea wall in front of the barracks. Apparently we attracted the attention of the R.I.C., as on some given signal parties of military began to return to the barracks. It was one of the rare occasions that our intelligence department was at fault, as we were not informed of the fact that a party of military had been billeted in the R.I.C. barracks. We found it necessary to call off the projected attack, but our little effort was not without results as the barracks was evacuated three weeks afterwards. This was all to the good as we now had a fairly wide area free from supervision and it was apparent that Gen. Higginson's block-house plan was not working to his liking.

The following day, Monday, Hurley's lodgings were raided by a large party of police and military. Hurley had time to get clear, but, unfortunately for us and the company, Manly was arrested. We saw him being conveyed to the local barracks between the files of military and police, who were taking no chances as he was tightly handcuffed and closely guarded by a special battery of police.

Two large lorries had in the meantime arrived from Cork for the purpose of conveying the prisoner to Cork Military Barracks. His loss to the company would be so great that I decided to attempt a rescue if at all possible. With this end in view I collected about six Volunteers and informed them of the project. They were all eager to make the attempt, even at a very great risk to themselves. Having armed ourselves with revolvers, we strolled up the town in twos and threes and mixed with the little knot of curious townsfolk outside the R.I.C. barracks. Manly had by this time been transferred to one of the military lorries. He was standing up handcuffed and surrounded by his escort. I think he saw us but gave no sign. Sizing up the situation, I decided that the risks involved were too great, because even if we did succeed in getting to him, the probabilities were that he would have been shot by his escort if any attempt was made to rescue him. Regretfully we saw him driven off. There was a look of fond defiance on his pale face, and his very attitude seemed to say to us: "Carry on the fight no matter what the cost".

That night two brothers named Buckley were arrested in connection with the Mile Bush ambush. One was formerly an officer of the Middleton Company but was not now taking an active part. They were placed in a lorry and tied back to back. One of the officers then fired at them, killing one of them. The bullet passed through his body and lodged in his brother's spine, and in such a position that it could not be removed and which, unfortunately, crippled him for the remainder of his life.

Hurley, who was now 'on the run', was located in the district of Shanagarry, a few miles from the village of Ballycotton. Always on the alert to take advantage of a situation that would permit him to get in a blow at the enemy, he was favoured with an opportunity after being only three days in the district.

The cycle patrols had now apparently been abandoned as being too vulnerable to attack and the military were now employing light lorries. These lorries seated from eight to ten men, and as they were fast and light they were ideal for the purpose of patrolling. Hurley, on being informed that one of these lorries had passed to the district, made arrangements to attack it on its return journey. Some of the local company were mobilised and a trench dug on the road at a convenient bend. These preparations were, of course, very hurried as the military were now rather jittery and it was anticipated that their stay in Ballycotton would be of short duration. Hurley's calculations proved to be correct as the lorry returned after about an hour. Fire was opened on it when it was in the adjacent vicinity of the trench, which, unfortunately, proved to be too narrow. On being fired upon, the driver put on full speed and succeeded in getting over the trench without damaging the vehicle. Some of the military were wounded in this encounter. The Volunteers suffered no casualties. Searches throughout the district were now intensified and, as a result, Hurley returned to his native West Cork. Our sense of loss was now intense as we had lost our two best men.

A fortnight afterwards a daring raid was carried out by the Cobh Volunteers. A party of nine soldiers

in charge of an N.C.O., who were escorting explosives to a quarry on the island, were ambushed and captured. Not to be outdone and also with the object of raising the morale of the Volunteers, I decided to stage an ambush of a military lorry that was being used to patrol the Midleton-Ballycotton district. I arranged the ambush at Cahermine, a townland about two miles from the town. Mick Kearney, who was in charge of the district, was instructed to cut a tree on the site and insert a wedge to give a tilt without felling it. As the cut was high up, he was compelled to use a hand-saw and, as the time for cutting was limited, it seemed almost an impossible task to have it completed in time. However, he laboured manfully and completed his task in good time. A rope was attached to the top and three Volunteers detailed to pull down the tree as the lorry approached. The company was told to report at Churchtown and, on arrival, were handed out their arms and ammunition. One of the Volunteers was Comdt. P.P. Hyde of Ballinacurra, an ex-British service man who had served during the 1914-18 war in France and newly joined the company. As he was not familiar with our methods, I arranged to meet him a few miles from the ambush position so as to explain exactly what was required of him that day. Phil was a draper by profession and was always well dressed, but when I met him on that date I could not refrain from asking him whether he thought he was going to a wedding or an ambush. Dressed in the latest sports outfit, brown shoes that shone until you could see yourself, and a sprig of sweet pea in his button-hole, he certainly looked nothing like what the military would expect to find manning an ambush position.

He was an expert shot and to him I gave the job of firing the first shot for the purpose of knocking out the driver. Another Volunteer, Seán Kelleher, was acting as scout and was provided with a motor-bike for the purpose. His job was to watch the lorry leaving the barracks and then cycle before it and convey the information to the ambush position.

However, things didn't turn out as we anticipated. After being in position for a short time we heard the rapid approach of the motor bike, which proved to be Seán. He informed us that the military had gone in the direction of Ballycotton via Cloyne and that instead of one lorry there were two. I had' now to decide whether to withdraw or to take on the two lorries, and, after some consideration, decided on the latter. I made some slight alterations in the position and we settled down to wait. It was a rather anxious time as the military would now be coming in the opposite direction to the one we anticipated and there would be two lorries instead of one. About four o'clock in the afternoon Volunteer Jerry O'Sullivan, who had been posted as a look-out, signalled the approach of the military. The signal was scarcely completed when we saw the lorry (fortunately only one) bearing down on our position at top speed. Volunteer Jerry Aherne rushed across the road with the rope, and immediately the Volunteers detailed for the task were felling vigorously. Watching the lorry and the tree at the same time, I saw the latter sway and sit back after the first pull. Then there was another and more vigorous pull and the tree began to fall slowly, ever so slowly. Hyde had opened fire and succeeded, as we discovered afterwards, in knocking out the driver.

However, the driver was not killed outright and he succeeded in keeping the lorry on the road and his foot on the accelerator. The Volunteers were now firing on the lorry and the fire was being replied to by the occupants. I threw a hand grenade as the lorry was nearing the tree, with the intention of getting it into the front of the lorry where the two drivers were seated, but, unfortunately, I saw it hit the hood and fall harmlessly on the road. The lorry was now travelling at full speed, which enabled it to clear the falling tree by a fraction. The driver expired a few hundred yards up the road and we heard the lorry stopping, presumably to change drivers. Having collected all the arms, I instructed the men to disperse. P. Whelan, now Comdt., Capt. J. O'Connell, now Lt. Col., and I then drove away in a motor car, and when we had safely handed over the arms to two Volunteers named Dennehy we thought it advisable to absent ourselves from the vicinity of the town for a few hours.

On returning that evening, we learned that the military were on the scene of the ambush in a very short time and had used bloodhounds, which, I think, was the first time they were used for the purpose of tracking the Volunteers. However, their use yielded no results and they were not used afterwards in East Cork.

On that evening I received a message from Hurley stating that he wanted to see me and that he was staying at Lt. Fitzgerald's house at Ballinbrittas near Knockraha. Of course the message was immediately communicated to the company and it was a great source of satisfaction to see how joyfully it was received. I cycled over that evening to meet him and gave him a report of the ambush.

On reading the report on the "Evening Echo" he was under the impression that we had captured the lorry. However, the ambush had one good result and that was the influx of new Volunteers in the town to the number of seventy-five. They proved their worth afterwards, as they did trojan work for the battalion and the district as a whole. Hurley now mentioned the project of forming a flying column in the district, as many of the Volunteers who participated in the attacks on Carrigtwohill, Cloyne, Castlemartyre, Milebush and Cahermine were in grave danger of being arrested and most of them were of opinion that they would be shot "while trying to escape", a favourite method of the British of executing Volunteers who were considered dangerous from their point of view.

When I returned to Midleton I put the matter to the Volunteers and it was apparent that they were delighted. Many, of course, were disappointed that they were not picked, but owing to the nature of the country we were to operate in we could only afford to operate in small numbers with any degree of safety. Our first camp was situated in Knockraha in a disused farmhouse. We remained there for a few weeks and then moved on to Shanagarry. The house of two Volunteers named Hegarty was being constantly raided and they were also the victims of reprisals. We thought we would have an opportunity of giving them a warm reception on their next visit. We stayed for some weeks in the district but the military made no appearance. The people of the district gave us all the support possible, but most of the column were billeted in a farmhouse whose owner's name was Garde, which, I think, was rather appropriate.

The military from Youghal had in the meantime made a few visits to the district of Ballymacoda, so it was decided to move there in the hope of getting an opportunity of ambushing them. Our luck was out there also, as during our three weeks' stay they did not put in an appearance. We discussed the possibilities of going to Youghal and staging an ambush in the town, but gave up the idea as there were insurmountable difficulties.

Our next move was to Lady's Bridge, to the house of Volunteer Harry O'Brien. We remained there for a few weeks but our luck was still out as no lorries passed through the district. We now moved to Aghada. Curfew had been imposed in the East Cork district at this time and notices had been posted all over the district. Of course these were frequently torn down, so the military made it a practice to renew them every two or three days. The patrols in this particular area were from Fort Carlisle. The distance from the fort to the village was about two miles, and as the patrol did not venture any further than the village we arranged an ambush position between the fort and the village. Before visiting the district we were assured that the patrol came out of the fort every day, but although we arranged to have every poster torn down after our arrival there was no sign of the patrol. We remained in the district for three weeks and the patrol only emerged on one occasion from the fort. On receiving the information, we quickly set out for the ambush position, but before we got there we received information that the patrol had only gone about two hundred yards from their quarters before returning. This damped our hopes considerably and we began to think that there were some spies in the

district. However, we had a laugh when we returned to our camp.

It was the custom to appoint two members of the column as cooks for the day. Some were good, others indifferent and others bad. Our food was what was supplied to us by farmers in the district and consisted mostly of salt bacon, potatoes, vegetables and tea. On this occasion we had a fine piece of bacon and turnips stewing in a pot when the signal was given to take up positions. All members of the column, of course, departed immediately, leaving the stew to look after itself. When we returned we discovered that all the water had evaporated, with the result that the bottom of the pot was now quite red. A burnt smell pervaded the whole house, but to hungry men it was a pleasant one. The now roasted, boiled turnips and bacon were salvaged and served up, and the bacon proved to be excellent. One of the column remarked that in future all bacon should be cooked in like manner. Another said that it was the greatest discovery since the discovery of roast pig by the Chinese.

Cahermore Ambush.

About fifty yards behind the ambush position there was a farmhouse, the owner's name being Smithwick (pronounced Smithick). The woman of the house was commonly known in the district as Mág. Now Mág was a very hard working individual and, as the wife of a small farmer, hadn't much time to look after or pay much attention to her personal appearance. Consequently, she always looked as if she came straight from the pots and cowsheds. Years of hard work and constant exposure

had tanned and wrinkled her features until she looked more like a male than a female. After the ambush a party of military under a young, rosy cheeked subaltern was detailed to make a search of the farmhouse and outbuildings and to question the occupants. Mág was engaged in one of her part-time jobs of feeding pigs when he arrived in the yard of the farmhouse. You couldn't call her good looking at her best, but now her face was covered with the sweat of honest toil. The subaltern approached as she was coming back from the sty. His first and last question was: "Did you see any of those damned rebels here to-day?". Mág, with a bucket in each hand, her skirts tucked well up displaying a red flannel petticoat, put her head on one side and replied: "I will tell you now if you will give me a kiss". The subaltern blushed to the roots of his hair; the sergeant seemed to develop an acute pain in his stomach, and the remainder of the party took a sudden interest in the fence behind them. Mág, dumping her buckets on the ground, folded her arms and looked on while the military searched the house and outhouses. Of course they found nothing, but before leaving they punctured all the water vessels with their bayonets.

Column at Ballymacoda.

After capturing Castlemartyre police barracks we left it intact as it was situated in the middle of the village. We hadn't the necessary explosives to blow it up and any attempt to burn it would involve the whole village. With no fire fighting services near than Cork, the probabilities were that one side of the village would be burned to the ground before any effective measures

could be taken to get the fire under control. As a result of our consideration for the inhabitants, the barracks was reoccupied by the R.I.C. When the column arrived in Ballymacoda and finding that the raiding parties of British were not arriving, we decided to try our luck in Castlemartyre and make an attempt to capture the police barracks for the second time.

With this end in view, Hurley, P. Gumbleton (the O/C of the Ballymacoda Company) and I visited Castlemartyre village, arrangements having been made for us to interview two of the garrison. The purpose of our interview was to get them to open the door of the barracks to enable the column to gain an entrance. There was one of the constables in White's publichouse about one hundred yards from the barracks. We remained with him for some time but could not get him to promise to open the barracks door without the co-operation of another member of the garrison. We did not tell him that we were also going to interview a second constable that evening, but he stipulated that even if we succeeded in getting another man to co-operate we should not tell him that he, Constable Kelly, was working with the Volunteers. This condition, of course, put us in a very awkward predicament but we decided to carry on.

Our interview with the second constable was carried out in his house with his wife present. The constable, when we entered, was in bed and we were invited to see him in his bedroom, which we accepted. The interview was not a very friendly one, and when

Constable Hassett imposed the same conditions as Constable Kelly I gave him a bit of my mind and inquired if he thought he was speaking to two idiots. I also told him that sooner or later we could capture the barracks and the garrison might not get off so easily the second time, especially if any of our men happened to be knocked out in the attack. The constable's wife, who was standing at the bedside, countered with the words, saying "now hasn't a young fellow like you a terrible cheek to speak to a policeman like that". I could see Hurley repressing a smile and I must admit that it knocked me a bit off my balance. We left without coming to any agreement and returned to White's.

Outside White's we contacted the captain of the Dungourney Company. Hurley remained chatting to him outside the pub. A car driven by Volunteer Wm. Heffernan was waiting for us to take us back to the column headquarters I got in to the car and sat in the back seat chatting to the driver. Hurley remained longer than I anticipated, and, getting rather anxious, I spoke to him, reminding him that as it was a Saturday night it was likely that a police patrol would be out. He replied that he was almost ready to depart. I sat back in the car again and saw two R.I.C. men approaching. They came over to the car and one of them, who I afterwards learned was Sergt. Curley, began to question the driver. The other, a Constable Quinn, was standing a few yards away. As I sat very still as far back in the car as I could, I was sure that the sergeant hadn't noticed me. However, the constable must have become suspicious as he drew his revolver and approached me. I now drew my

gun, and the sergeant on seeing the movement jumped back and drew his gun also. I fired at the constable, who fell back mortally wounded, and then pointed my gun at the sergeant. My gun was a .455 Colt automatic which I had captured at Cloyne R.I.C. barracks. It had jammed and left me at the sergeant's mercy. However, he didn't fire immediately but ran behind the back of our car. I looked around the back of the hood to see where he had gone and found myself looking down the barrel of his .45 revolver. I gave a warning shout to the driver, who had the engine running, but it was too late. As I threw myself back in the seat the sergeant fired, mortally wounding the driver. Hurley now realised what was happening and, drawing his gun, opened fire. His first shot broke the sergeant's arm, who promptly departed. A patrol was now emerging from the barracks a little further up the street, and it was a bit of a race to get the dying Volunteer from behind the wheel and get him away. I lifted him as gently as I could and placed him in the back seat, being aided by Volunteer Murnane, a member of the Midleton Company, who, by the way, was unarmed and therefore had to sit tight while the incident lasted. Michael Murnane participated in the attacks on Carrigtwohill, Cloyne, Castlemartyre R.I.C. barracks, the attack on the military lorry at Cahermore, and spent week-ends serving in the column. His three sisters were the most active members of the Cumann na mBan in the district.

Aghada.

On the following day we received a report that a lorry containing about twenty to thirty-five military

had gone to the fort. We decided to ambush it on its way back and chose a position at a road junction about a mile from the village of Salein.[?] We waited for two days, but as there was no sign of the lorry returning we decided to move on. On the following day it moved out and returned to Cork.

Sequel to Milebush Ambush.

Two days after the ambush Volunteer Jer. Ahern and I were walking on the road to Dungourney, a village of hurling fame. When about a mile outside the town of Middleton we observed one of the British soldiers seated on a wall beside the railway line. He was unarmed and apparently was out for an evening stroll. He was about a mile from his barracks and, apparently not knowing the country, had walked the whole way along the permanent-way. We decided to question him, as it was a rule never to let any opportunity pass, however slight, to gain information. After passing the time of the day and a few adroit questions, we soon had him talking about himself. It turned out that he was one of the party captured at the raid at Milebush, and his description of the Volunteers who carried out the raid were terse and vivid.

He started by telling us that he was born in Sligo and had lived in Glasgow since childhood. He had spent four years in France in the 1914-18 war and was captured by the Germans just before the armistice. His battalion had embarked at Glasgow, had come straight to Cobh (Queenstown) and his company had been sent to Middleton. He had heard something about the fighting in Ireland and summed it up in the following words: "When we

were coming over here we thought we were going to fight big men with beards on the hills, but the are walking around the town with their girls. On last Saturday night, which was our first night in this town, we went out on patrol and the came along throwing iron balls along the road, and before we knew where we were we were knocked off our bicycles and our rifles and equipment taken off us. I spent four years in France and over there you knew where the enemy were, but here you don't know where they are. Och, man, they've a horrible system of fighting over here".

On Monday night following the ambusn, the Camerons, led ~~their~~^{by} their officers, with fixed bayonets and rifles at the ready, marched down the Main St. of Midleton. A number of Volunteers, some armed and others unarmed, watched them closely as they passed. Tadhg Manly was one of a group and as they passed him he remarked: "It can be done again". The patrol was intended to intimidate the townsfolk and Volunteers, but it had the opposite effect. Indeed, there was a hurried consultation between the Volunteer officers on the advisability of attacking them on their way back to barracks, but sufficient Volunteers were not available.

Castlemartyre incident.

Driving through the night, we reached the dispensary doctor's house at Curra, who examined Volunteer Heffernan and pronounced life extinct. He offered to keep the body, notwithstanding the fact that his wife was seriously ill in the house. Hurley thanked him and declined the offer. We now contacted some of the local Volunteers, who directed us to Heffernan's house.

He was an only son and his father, who was almost a cripple with rheumatism, lived alone. I will never forget the anguish of the old man when we informed him of his son's death, but I could also see that he was proud of the fact that his son had given his life for the cause. We buried him the following night with full military honours. Hurley, before departing, gave the old man twenty pounds, which was all he had in the world.

After our return the following day we decided to evacuate Ballymacoda and immediately got busy with our preparations to leave the local company acting as scouts doing duty as sentries during our preparations.

Cloyne.

When the column was moving from Aghada the weather was anything but kind and all got severe wettings. I got a severe attack of tonsillitis and was rendered hors de combat for a week. The column in the meantime had moved to Cloyne, to the house of B. Walshe, the Cloyne Company Captain. This proved to be very unwise as the owner was on the run and the house was liable to be raided. This actually did happen, but fortunately, after a stiff fight, all the column got safely away. The raid occurred on a Sunday morning, but although the scouts hadn't time to give warning the column wasn't caught napping. The house which they occupied was situated at the end of what might be described as the main street of the town, and as the military lorries came in at full speed the scouts were unable to get back in time. However, when the column heard the noise of the lorries they immediately collected their

equipment and got ready for all eventualities. Hurley, who was in charge, made his decisions as quickly and as quietly as if it was only a rehearsal, even though the military were now actually knocking at the door of the house. When they received no reply they proceeded to batter it down and after a few minutes succeeded. Fire was opened on them immediately and they beat a hasty retreat, taking two of their wounded with them. A covering party opened fire and one Volunteer, Jack Ahern, received a bullet through his hat. Otherwise the Volunteers escaped scatheless. Firing as they retreated down the street, the military succeeded in keeping the Volunteers confined to the house for a few minutes. Hurley, however, followed up the retreating soldiers for a short distance, closely followed by another officer, Paddy Whelan, now Commandant. Seizing his opportunity, Hurley ordered the column to cross the street to a large yard where they could get out to the open country. P. Whelan in the meantime was lying in the street returning the fire of a group of military at the cross about 150 yards away. His fire was so accurate that the military kept well under cover and the whole column got across safely.

In the meantime, Volunteer Jack Ahern was having a private duel with one of the British. Both were behind hedges at the opposite side of the road and carried on a conversation while firing at each other. Jock, as Jack called him, would shout: "Look out, Paddy, I am going to fire" or "I am sending over a grenade". Jack, in returning the fire, also warned his adversary, although not in very polite terms. As both were seasoned soldiers, they knew how to take advantage of every scrap

of cover and therefore both were firing at where the sound of the voice came from, with the result that neither of them were hit. Jack eventually withdrew and rejoined the column.

When the column had proceeded a short distance from Cloyne they were met by the Ladysbridge Company, who had been informed about the raid and were coming to the column's assistance. Aghada and Cloyne Companies had partly mobilised and were also coming to the column's assistance. On being informed of the raid in Midleton by Volunteer M. Murnane, I collected a few Volunteers and proceeded to Coppinginstown, Murnane's residence, where we collected a mauser rifle and a shotgun. I think there were ten in the party altogether.

We had a curious assortment of weapons, which included a German mauser rifle and ten rounds of ammunition, a .45 revolver, three or four shotguns, a few hatchets and a billhook. We started out immediately across the fields for Cloyne, which, by this route, was about two miles. On our way Tom Buckley, an ex officer of the British Army and now a member of the Midleton Volunteers, proceeded to load the mauser. He was unfamiliar with this type of rifle and in testing the safety catch fired a shot. In ordinary circumstances such an occurrence would be alright, but we happened to be moving up to a position on the Cloyne road to get in front and attack a party of nine R.I.C. under D.I. Murphy of Midleton who apparently were going to Cloyne by the same route as ourselves. They were at this time about 600 yards away from us and, to our amazement, on hearing the shot they turned back. Leaving them to their own

devices, we hurried on, crossing the road less than 100 yards from them, but on our way over the hill at the back of Cloyne we were met by one of the column, who informed us that they had all escaped.

As I was still suffering from throat trouble I didn't rejoin the column until they had moved to an outside farm of Capt. Donnellan, former M.P. for East Cork. It was situated at Kilmaintan, a few miles from Middleton. It was now near Xmas and we decided it would be a good time to carry out an attack on the R.I.C. in the town. The R.I.C. barracks, which was situated at the top of the town, was a very strong building. Built of cut stone and strongly fortified, it was garrisoned by a strong force of old R.I.C. men and Black and Tans. As we had very little explosives, it would be futile to attack it. It was decided, therefore, to attack the town patrol. The police patrol numbered nine police, but, in addition, a number of the police were in the habit of drinking in various publichouses in the town.

P. Whelan and Jack Ahern were sent in to the town to contact Volunteers who were posted to observe the movements of the patrol. The assembly of the remainder of the attacking party, numbering nine Volunteers, was in a sawmills in Charles St. Whelan and Ahern reported back about 8 p.m., after being in the town about two hours, and informed us that the patrol were at that moment proceeding down town and away from their barracks. They informed us that there were three parties, consisting of three constables in each party. Their report was a model of accuracy, so that Hurley was able to issue detailed instructions as to the method of attack.

Timing was the whole essence of the affair, as the R.I.C. parties were at each side of the street, i.e. two parties at one side and one at the other. Our plan was to get in between them and open fire when one of the parties reached Charles St. corner. The first shot was to be fired by the leading party of Volunteers.

Jack Ahern fired the opening shot and immediately Volunteers and R.I.C. were involved in what in some cases developed into a hand to hand affair. In an instant a Volunteer named Dennehy had a very narrow escape. He was fired on at point blank range by a Black and Tan. Fortunately, the Tan missed. Dennehy pulled the trigger of his gun but, as he afterwards discovered, there were two dud cartridges in his gun and he had fired the other four. The Tan had also emptied his gun and, as there was no time for reloading, they closed with each other, endeavouring to use the butts of their revolvers. Jack Ahern, who had dealt with his compliment, noticed his plight and came to his assistance and soon put the Tan out of action. Police stragglers now came along and opened fire. Here again Jack Ahern, who was an expert shot with a revolver, came in, as he shot one of them. The other two, who turned out to be the Head Constable and a sergeant, took refuge in a lane. Jack followed up and captured the two of them.

Another Volunteer, Michael Desmond, also had a narrow escape as a Tan fired point blank at him. The flash of the gun actually singed his cheek and it was a mystery how he escaped being hit. Another Volunteer, Jim McCarthy, received a bullet through the wrist, which, of course, put him out of action for some time. McCarthy wasn't actually a member of the A.S.U. but had

participated in all the engagements with the Midleton Company. Altogether, fourteen R.I.C. were killed, wounded and captured by the Volunteers that night.

Sometime after the fight the D.I., Murphy, was noticed coming up the town. He was carrying a walking stick and dressed in civilian clothes. We allowed him to proceed unmolested as we thought he was unarmed and it was not the policy of the Volunteers to attack unarmed men. In support of this, I might state that soldiers when they were stationed in the town were allowed to proceed unmolested when unarmed.

We returned to the column headquarters that night and had a celebration. We moved out a few days later to a cottage near Clonmult, where we remained for some time, and then moved on to a disused farmhouse at Clonmult. Establishing our headquarters at Clonmult, we settled down for some weeks to enable us to assess our work during the time we were training and working as a flying column.

It was during this period that the first official reprisals in Ireland took place. A large party of R.I.C. and military entered the town of Midleton on the January. It was a church holiday and most of the people were at Mass. Returning to their homes, they were searched and questioned and then allowed to proceed, wondering what was afoot. It soon became apparent that the British were there to carry out reprisals for the ambush that had taken place on . Three houses were selected for destruction in the Main St. One was the property of the late Edmund Carey, Esq., T.D., M.C.C., and at that particular period a Sinn Féin magistrate

Another was the property of Mr. Jack O'Shea, O/C Middleton Company. O'Shea, owing to ill health, was not taking an active part in politics. The third was the property of Mr. Paul McCarthy, who was also acting as a Sinn Féin magistrate. Two of the houses, that of O'Shea and Carey, were completely destroyed, while all the furniture was removed from McCarthy's and destroyed. Later another reprisal took place just outside the town when the farmhouse, the property of Mr. S. Kelleher, the father of Seán Kelleher, was pulled to the ground by parties of Black and Tans and military.

At this period, escapes of members of the Volunteers were numerous when in the course of their work they came in contact with the enemy forces. On the occasion of the official reprisals in Middleton a member of the column, Comdt. P. Hyde, was at Mass in Middleton. Thinking it advisable to get out of town until the coast was clear, he made a detour of the town to the Cork road, with the intention of going to Carrigtwohill. As he was walking in the direction of the village of Carrigtwohill he was overtaken by a large furniture van. He signalled the driver and asked for a lift, which was readily given. On reaching Milebush they came across a large party of military. The van was stopped and Phil was pulled off his seat by one of the military. He happened to be a sergeant and was rather the worse for liquor, which wasn't surprising as most of the British forces at that period in Ireland were rather lax from a disciplinary point of view. Phil was placed against the wall and threatened to be shot. However, after a time he bluffed his way and was allowed to proceed.

Another Volunteer, Jack Ahern, who lived in the vicinity of Milebush, was at home when he ran into the same party of military. Called upon to halt, he decided to make a bolt for it as he was armed. The military opened fire at less than 100 yards range but, as usual in Jack's case, missed him. Making good use of all the available cover, he eventually gained the railway line and got clear away.

On another occasion Jack was paying a visit to the town of Middleton, and when passing the R.I.C. barracks on the opposite side of the road with another Volunteer named James Barry he observed two Black and Tans approaching. Both parties continued walking towards each other and, when almost abreast, one of the Tans drew his revolver and stuck it in Barry's abdomen and barked at him: "Where are you going"? Jack immediately drew his gun and jumped for cover. The only available cover was an ornamental shrub on the footpath, the diameter of which was no more than four or five inches. The Tan, now realising that he had to deal with Jack, immediately sheathed his gun and made off. Two more Tans, who were following ten or fifteen yards behind, also saw him and avoided trouble by crossing the road to their barracks.. Jack was just about to proceed on his way when two more Tans appeared, and they also made off across the road. Jack pocketed his gun and walked on as if nothing had happened until getting over the Cork Road bridge at the top of the town, where he procured a bicycle and got safely away. A few minutes afterwards twenty police from the barracks, armed with rifles, were searching for him.

Another story about him was related by the late Wm. Barry, solicitor. Mr. Barry had some business to transact with some client and on his way back to his office entered the Midleton Arms Hotel. While he was having some refreshments a Black and Tan entered the bar, apparently the worse for liquor. As he didn't wish to attract the attention of the Tan, he remained sitting quietly in a corner wondering how he was going to get out without having a spot of bother with the Tan when, to his consternation, Jack entered the bar. The Tan apparently recognised Jack immediately, as Barry saw him stiffen involuntarily in his seat. Jack called for a drink and, when served, approached the Tan and putting his hand on his gun removed it, and then placed his own on the counter, saying, "Now we can drink in peace". The Tan accepted the situation and both were soon talking like old friends. Barry, with a sigh of relief, slipped out and went back to his office.

On another occasion, in Hurley's company he was walking along St. Mary's Road, which is a continuation of the Main St. on the road to Ballycotton, when he saw one of the Black and Tans coming towards him. The Tan spotted them and drew his gun. Both parties continued towards each other on the opposite footpaths and passed each other, the Tan with the gun still in his hand and Hurley and Jack gripping their guns in their pockets.

On another occasion I sent Phil Hyde to Cork to collect fourteen pounds of gelignite from Joe O'Connor. Joe was Brigade Quartermaster and employed by Cash & Co., outfitters, Patrick St., Cork. Phil duly arrived and reported to Joe. Joe told him to wait and he would have

the gelignite made up. When the gelignite arrived it was made up in two neat brown paper parcels, but as they were being handed over to Phil information arrived that a cordon had been thrown across McCurtain St. by the R.I.C. and everybody going to Glanmore station was being searched. As Phil's train was not departing until 5 p.m. and as it was only 3.30 p.m. at that particular time, Phil requested Joe to keep the gelignite and he would call again for them. On going out he happened to see a member of the R.I.C. who was stationed in Midleton. Phil approached him and spoke to him. Phil knew that this particular R.I.C., who was an Englishman named Wilde, did not smoke or drink, so he mentioned casually that he was going to the Pavillion Restaurant for something to eat. He invited Wilde to accompany him and Wilde accepted the invitation. After a good feed Phil called for the bill and then mentioned that he was going back to Midleton on the 5 p.m. train. Wilde then informed Phil that he was going back by the same train and that they could travel together. As they were passing Casn & Co.'s premises on their way to the train, Phil said that he had a few parcels to take with him and entered the shop. Wilde waited until he came out and when Phil appeared carrying two rather heavy parcels, offered to carry one of them. The offer was accepted and the two of them made their way trainwards. On arrival at the Coliseum corner they were held up, whereupon Wilde produced his pass and, pointing to Phil, said, "He is a friend of mine". Both were allowed through without being searched. They travelled to Midleton together and on arrival outside Midleton R.I.C. barracks Wilde handed over his parcel to Phil.

On another occasion I sent Volunteer Dan Cashman to Cork to collect a mine exploder from Joe O'Connor. The exploder was a small affair worked by means of a tin and dry battery. Joe made it up in a neat parcel and handed it over to Dan. On his way to the train a cordon was suddenly thrown across McCurtain St. at the Coliseum corner. Dan had to do some quick thinking as turning back would only make matters worse. He decided to walk straight up to the cordon, placing the battery between his feet when he put his ^{hands} up when ordered to do so. He was thoroughly searched but, fortunately, no notice was taken of the parcel. When told that he could proceed, he picked it up and arrived in Midleton without further incident. Dan Cashman was a member of the column and had participated in nearly all the attacks on the R.I.C. and military in East Cork.

On one occasion I received information that General Strickland, who was O/C of the Crown Forces in Cork, had passed through Midleton on his way to Cork. I was a member of a party of Volunteers who made an attempt to capture him. After getting the information I collected five Volunteers - Cashman, Dan and Mick Desmond, Jack Ahern and M. Spillane. I told them to collect their guns and meet me on the Cork road. I intended to intercept Gen. Strickland's car at the road junction at the Midleton side of Carrigtwohill village. All arrived at the rendezvous in a very short time, and I explained that Gen. Strickland had stopped at the military post in Midleton, presumably to inspect the post. Stopping a passing motor breadvan, I got in in front and the remainder got inside. On arriving at Carrigtwohill we made enquiries about the car and, to

our disappointment, were informed that we had just missed it by a few seconds.

We proceeded to walk back but after going a little way were overtaken by a pony cart. As the day was very warm we decided to avail of it and six of us clambered up. All went well until we arrived at Milebush, when rounding a bend we saw four lorries of military approaching. They were 200 yards distant at that particular time. There was a death sentence at the period for anybody found in illegal possession of arms and, fearing a search, we decided to jump for it. A convenient gate of the local Protestant rectory made our escape from the road easy, but we were only gone about 100 yards through the fields when the military opened fire. After the second burst of fire Mick Desmond snouted to me that he was hit. I dropped back to find out if the injury was serious and discovered that it was only a chip from a ricochet bullet, had hit him behind the ear. Bullets were whizzing and cracking about and above us at this time, and as we were bunched together I shouted to open out, adding to Dan Desmond, who was close to me, that it didn't matter as we would probably be all shot going over the embankment of the railway line which was about 150 yards away. Getting to the embankment, we scrambled over as quickly as possible and, to our satisfaction, nobody was hit. As it was comparatively safe on the railway line, I told the party to get rid of their guns, which we hid in a convenient growth of briars and long grass. My reason for getting rid of the guns was the obvious fact that at the other side of the line was a very large field without cover and there was a danger of getting picked off as we were

going through. However, finding that my breathing was a bit laboured, I decided after getting over the embankment at the other side of the line to take cover in the dyke. There was a fine growth of briars and ferns, and getting to the end it was an easy matter to work right up to the centre underneath. Four of the others worked their way in behind me, but two of the party, namely W. Spillane and Jack Ahern, decided to make a further dash for it. Spillane, who had a green shaded coat and breeches, did afford a grand target as he ran along beside the fence and he was lucky enough to get clear away. Jack Ahern ran right across the field without being hit and got clear also.

We hadn't long to wait in our hiding place before we heard the military crossing the line practically in the same place as we had crossed it ourselves. As we waited we heard one of the men offer the opinion to his officer that he thought that we must be a party going to some assembly point. He addressed him as sir, which is the only reason I have for thinking that it was an officer he was addressing. After a short interval we heard some of the military party drawing into the field where we lay hidden. They came along and stood over us, poking and peering into the dense growth of briars, but luckily for us didn't see us and after a short period they departed, their officers ordering them to search the house further down the line. After what seemed an eternity we heard the lorries proceed on their way and I shouted to those behind me to work their way out. Having got clear of the undergrowth, we stood up to take our bearings and, to my amazement, I noticed that Dan Desmond was still carrying his revolver in his

holster. I asked him why he hadn't put it with the rest of the stuff and he replied that he had so much treasonable matter in his pockets, in his haste to get rid of it he had completely forgotten about the gun. Jack Ahern, judging by the volume of firing after he had got clear of the line of military, reported when he arrived in Midleton that the remainder of us must have been either killed or captured. We did not know this, of course, until we arrived back in town, and I do not know who got the greater surprise, we on hearing of the report or the members of the company when we arrived safe and sound.

After our move to Clonmult our difficulties increased considerably as the British authorities considered nothing less than half a dozen lorries safe from attack. The lorries were usually big Leylands, armoured at the sides and carrying a look-out with a Lewis gun mounted on the hood over the driver's seat. In addition, the military at Cobh were sending out patrols on foot at night, often up to company strength. They crossed by boat to the East Ferry or to Aghada and raided houses in the surrounding country before returning to be picked up again by the naval forces. One such patrol was attacked by the Aghada Company, who inflicted some casualties before being compelled to retire from their positions. The Volunteers were mostly armed with shotguns. The ammunition, having been in a dump for a long period, was damp, with the result that when fired it got jammed in the guns. The military were quick to realise that something had gone wrong and charged the Volunteers' position, but, fortunately, they were able to get away in the darkness without loss.

One of the Volunteer officers, M. Hegarty, was slightly wounded in the hand.

We passed the time at Clonmult organising attacks on Castlemartyre police barracks which were not of a serious nature but more to keep the garrison awake and also to get the military patrols away from more important districts. One attack was carried out by the Dungourney and Ladysbridge Companies. We had some new arrivals in the column at the time and one was Capt. Jack O'Connell of Cobh. Three other Cobh men had also joined us, in addition to the one already with the column, James Glavin. The others were: Capt. James Aherne, Volunteer P. O'Sullivan and Volunteer Maurice Moore.

We were in the district about five weeks and were making arrangements for a serious attack on Castlemartyre R.I.C. barracks when we received a dispatch from the Brigade Adjutant, Mr. Florrie O'Donoghue, to attack a party of eleven soldiers who were either carrying ammunition from Cobh to Cork or bringing it from Cork to Cobh. The party were to travel on the train from Cork to Cobh. The wording of the dispatch was such that it was more or less of a challenge to the column to carry out the attack. It ended with the words: "If you are unable to carry out the job, please let me know immediately and I will make other arrangements". Hurley read the dispatch first and then handed it to me and asked me what I thought of it. I remarked that it was an insult to the column. He said he thought the same. The only help we had received from the brigade during the whole period was a gift of 48lbs of gelignite and a small exploder.

The number of engagements carried out by the other battalions in the brigade did not approach ours, and indeed the engagements carried out by the brigade column were very few. However, we decided to carry out the orders and, with that intention, Hurley, P. Whelan (now Comdt. Whelan) and I left in a motor car to select a suitable ambush position, leaving Capt. Jack O'Connell in charge of the column at Clonmult with instructions to leave at dusk for a rendezvous in Liamadauna. Leaving the car near Killacloyne Bridge, we got on to the railway line between Cobh junction. After walking along the line we decided to carry out the ambush at Dunkettle railway station. Returning along the railway line, which at this point was quite close to the road, we observed a number of large military lorries on their way back to Cork. As this was nothing unusual, we continued our journey. On reaching Killacloyne we met Mick Burke of Cobh, who informed us that the column had been surrounded at Clonmult and had been wiped out. Hurley said he could not believe it to be true, that with the arrangements made with the local companies it couldn't be possible. Getting into the car, which was closeby, we proceeded to Knockraha. Arriving in the village we met some of the Volunteers of the local company, including Martin Corry and Capt. Jack O'Connell. From what they told us we had little hope that anyone had escaped, but we decided that we could go back in case some of the Volunteers were still holding out and, as Hurley remarked, "if we cannot save them, we can die with them".

Hurley, Paddy Whelan, Capt. O'Connell and I left immediately and reached the village of Clonmult in less than three-quarters of an hour and proceeded to cross the fields on foot. Everything was quiet at that time and except for intermittent flames from the burning house there was no sign of life. We proceeded cautiously until we reached the precincts of the house, where we found two members of the Dungourney Company, namely 2nd Lt. Ahern and Volunteer Staunton. They had collected the bodies of the dead Volunteers and performed what services they could under the circumstances. We departed sometime afterwards, feeling rather stunned and unable to realise fully the full gravity of the disaster.

We spent the following night in Midleton at the house of the late Canon Flannery, Castlemartyre, who was at that period C.C. in Midleton. After the usual formalities, the bodies, which had been removed to Cork military barracks for identification, were handed over to the relatives for burial. The bodies were brought to Midleton and interned in a plot we had acquired in the local cemetery. Hurley, Whelan, O'Connell, Jack Aherne, Tom Buckley and all the local Volunteers attended. When the internment had been completed Hurley drew his gun, signalled to Paddy Whelan and O'Connell to do likewise, and we then gave our last salute by firing three volleys over the grave. We then made our way quickly out of the graveyard. We returned to the town by a roundabout way and stayed, of all places, at Mrs. P. Barry's in the Main St.

We remained for two days resting and collecting our wits, and bit by bit we were able to piece together the whole story of the disaster.

It was usual for the column on all occasions to have at least two sentries on duty. One was supplied with a telescope and, of course, they carried full equipment. When Whelan, Hurley and I departed the usual watch was being maintained, but a little time before the departure they returned to pack up their few belongings. In the meantime two lorries of military had stopped on the road some distance from the house occupied by the column. They were unobserved by the members and they were not heard as the way they approached was down hill. The first notice the column received of their approach was when two of the Volunteers, Michael Desmond and John Joe Joyce, went to the well, which was situated adjacent to the house, for a bucket of water. On approaching the well they were called upon to put up their hands. Although covered, they attempted to draw their revolvers but were immediately shot - mortally wounded - and fearing that the remainder of the column had not heard the shots they crawled back to give warning. The Volunteers now saw some more of the military advancing across the fields, and one of them, without waiting for orders, opened fire. The military immediately took cover and were able to get within 20 yards of the house and cover all the exits effectively. O'Connell now ordered his men to open fire and at the same time issued instructions to prepare for a rush, as he intended to get the column out of the house, which, I might add, was a very correct decision as the house was a veritable death trap and there was never any

intention of holding it. It was a one storey building with only one door opening - which opened on to the farmyard. In addition, there were three small windows, also facing the yard, the back wall of the building being quite innocent of any opening.

At this stage there was a slight difference of opinion between the Column O/C and P. Higgins. Higgins was actually the senior officer as he was Battalion Q/M. He countermanded or advised the column to wait in the hope that the local companies would come to their aid and create a diversion. I might add at this stage that when the column entered a company area instructions were issued that if the column happened to be surrounded the local company or companies were to mobilise all available men and come to their aid. In Cloyne the arrangement worked well as Ladysbridge and Cloyne and portion of the Aghada Companies were actually converging on Cloyne when the column fought their way out. I might explain also that Captain O'Connell was appointed O/C of the column because, in my judgement, he was more fitted for the post than O'Higgins. O'Higgins was one of my party in the street ambush in Middleton, the whole success of which depended on timing. O'Higgins on that occasion didn't show any great aptitude for the work, so I decided to pass him over on this occasion.

O'Higgins apparently had no liking to face the guns at Clonmult either. Consequently, he adopted the Micawber attitude and advised the column to wait. O'Connell decided to get out and rightly so, but, unfortunately, did not issue precise instructions or

indicate the route to be followed. Opening the door, he led the charge out, drawing the fire on himself. He was followed by Dick Hegarty, Shanagarry, James Aherne, Cobh, Mick Hallinan, Midleton. O'Connell followed the route which was mapped out in case of attack, and getting around some outbuildings into the haggard he made his way forward to the boreen which led up from the main road to the house. Here he was fired on at a range of a few yards by one of the military but, fortunately, escaped injury. He returned the fire and succeeded in knocking out the soldier. Working his way forward, he was fired on again by the officer in charge of the military party at point blank range. Again he escaped injury and succeeded in knocking out the officer. He was now outside the cordon and making his way to Clonmult. He tried to collect as many local Volunteers as possible, with the intention of attacking the military in the rear and rescuing the remainder of the column.

Hegarty, who went straight across the yard of the farmhouse, was shot and mortally wounded before reaching the wall of the boreen. Wounded though he was, he continued firing while he was able to use his gun. in an endeavour to cover the escape of his comrades. James Aherne succeeded in getting through the cordon of military but was shot before he could reach cover at the other side of the field. The remainder of the Volunteers, thinking, no doubt, that aid was coming, continued to fight inside the house and, when called upon to surrender, replied by singing "The Soldiers" Song".

O'Connell, during this period, succeeded in contacting some Volunteers, whom he sent for help and to collect some shotguns from a local farmhouse. He also sent word to an adjacent column.

The situation in the farmhouse in the meantime had become desperate as the building had been set on fire by the attacking force. The column's ammunition was also almost spent, but the constant calls to surrender were still answered defiantly with volleys from rifles, pistols and shotguns. Eventually, with the blazing roof falling in on them, they now paid heed to the calls of surrender. An officer was contacted and promised that their lives would be spared if the remainder of the column surrendered. They threw their arms in the blazing building and filed out. Capt. D. O'Leary and Volunteer James Clavin, who were wounded during the fighting, were carried out by Volunteer Mce. Moore and Volunteer P. O'Sullivan. The remainder were immediately lined up against the wall and shot. Moore and O'Sullivan were afterwards tried by a military court and were condemned to death. Higgins and O'Leary, on arriving at Cobh barracks, were put in the military hospital. O'Leary had received a wound in the head and Higgins, who had a miraculous escape, was wounded in the mouth. It appears that a sergeant of the R.I.C. carried out the shooting. Coming to Higgins, he forced his revolver into his mouth and fired. The bullet smashed his palate and lodged in his upper jaw. Three weeks later, while sitting in front of the fire he dislodged the bullet with his tongue and managed to remove it. Both were tried and sentenced to death. O'Leary's sentence was afterwards commuted to penal servitude for life, and O'Higgins was released under the Habeas Corpus act after the truce.

During the trial, Moore, who was charged with being a member of various illegal organisations, pleaded not guilty until the prosecution produced a revolver on which his initials were carved. Moore immediately recognised the gun and informed the court that he was a member of all the organisations mentioned in the charge and that he was also a member of the Cumann na mBan.

It appears that shortly after our departure a military force arrived at Clonmult and, after surrounding the house, sent word for reinforcements. Most of them travelled via Lisgoold and on a road which we had to travel for a short distance on our way to Knockraha. It appears that travelling this road we were between two lorries of the British, but, of course, we were quite unaware of the fact and we were fortunate that we were not spotted by the British.

It is also worth noting that one of the Volunteers, Dan Cashman, on week-end leave from the column, on hearing of the attack attempted to block the road to Cork but was unable to organise an ambush owing to the lack of arms and ammunition.

After Clonmult we arranged to stay in houses which were not frequented by the Volunteers prior to the Clonmult conflict, principally Hegarty's of Broomfield, Middleton. Our treatment left nothing to be desired, and indeed we regarded it as a rest-house where we forgot the fact that we were much wanted men. It was while we were staying here that we received a report from T. Hyde, Ballinacurra, that he had discovered some old 9.2 shells in some fishing vessels at Rathcunsey. The shells were large affairs and were being used as ballast

instead of stores as they were nice and compact and easy to handle. They were originally fired during target practice from Templebreedy Fort situated at the entrance to Cork Harbour and were picked up by the fishing vessels when trawling for fish. We decided to make use of them as road mines.

Our first attempt was at Churchtown North, about three miles from Middleton. The timing and the place were due to information we received from a Volunteer named Donovan. We were travelling in the district in a pony and trap ^{with} ~~which~~ the mine nice and snug concealed in a bag on the floor of the vehicle. It was our intention to conceal the mine and await a favourable opportunity to use it. Hurley, on receiving the information that a convoy was on its way from Youghal to Cork, decided that it would be a good opportunity to try it out. The only snag was that we had only 70 yards of wire and the operator (myself) would have a rather hot time in getting away. We chose a site about one mile from Churchtown, a road junction. A few rifles were acquired and Jack O'Connell and P. Whelan took up a position about 150 yards from the road to cover my retreat. We were waiting for some time when the convoy was signalled by Mick Kearney and Volunteer Jack Knowles. It was a large one, consisting of four large Leyland lorries and about ten Crossley tenders. In addition, the Leylands had look-outs on the hoods of the lorries armed with Lewis guns.

I had placed the mine in a heap of broken stones at the side of the road, and to give the explosion

greater effect I placed a tin of petrol and two bottles of paraffin oil on top of the lot. The stones, of course, completely covered the mine and acted as a perfect camouflage and would also act as shrapnel when the mine was exploded. The mine was filled with 7 lbs. of gelnite and the same quantity of home-made powder. I waited patiently until the leading lorry arrived at the mark on the road before pushing over the switch. As the mine exploded there was a tremendous sheet of flame. I could hear the shout of the soldiers in the lorries and the silence for a split second. The British, recovering quickly from their surprise, opened fire, which was returned by Jack O'Connell and P. Whelan. Unfortunately for us, the rifles we had so hurriedly acquired were improperly cleaned, and with the first shots a sheet of smoke and flame issued from the barrels which gave away our position. Needless to say, it was only a few moments before Whelan and O'Connell were compelled to evacuate their positions, and Hurley and I, now completely unprotected, had a choice of running the gauntlet of fire from Lewis guns and rifles or await capture, as the military, discovering that their fire was not being returned, were quick to take advantage and began to advance through the fields from the road. Hurley decided to get outside the circle by going across the fields under cover of the fences and afterwards discovered that he had actually gone through a gap in the line. I was able to observe the military coming up behind and was able to judge the extent of the encircling movement. On reaching my companions I informed them of the position, and it did not take long to come to a decision as to what we should do.

Clearing the fence at the opposite side of the road, we were apparently spotted by the military, as intense fire was opened on us. The fence was an earthen one and rather narrow and didn't afford much cover, as I noticed occasional bullets coming through. Fortunately, no one was hit. As we raced along to get outside the circle I had to do part of the journey on all fours as, being tall, I was unable to get adequate cover, the fence being rather low. On reaching a grove of trees, we halted and watched the military searching the fields about three hundred yards away, and, knowing their habits and mode of procedure, we decided that we were fairly safe unless we happened to walk into another convoy, the lorries of which we could hear in the distance. It was now that we began to notice that Hurley was missing and we thought that he had been shot, so we decided to move into the farmhouse of Mick Murnane, Coppingerstown, which is about a mile from the town of Midleton. All three of his sisters were members of the Cumann na mBan and we knew they would not hesitate if asked to proceed to Midleton for the purpose of getting information.

On our way we met Jack Aherne, who informed us that he had been arrested in Castlemartyre but had bluffed his way out by stating that he was going to Midleton for the fair which was to be held on the following day, Monday. I might say that I half expected to meet Jack, as he had a nose for trouble and always turned up when anything was afoot. I was glad to see him because if there was any dangerous work to be done I knew Jack would be capable of doing it and getting away with it. Jack,

you see, was of the indestructible type. Small, handy-legged and sturdy, he was always reliable and always on hand when wanted. Judge our surprise when we discovered Hurley seated on the table in the kitchen. We both laughed as we shook hands and soon we were discussing the most effective means of using our new weapon. The events of the day were forgotten and new prospects of rendering the roads impassable for the British were visualised, but, as it proved afterwards, we were too optimistic.

We decided to instruct all companies in the use of mines. The supply of exploders created a problem but this, fortunately, was solved. In the Middleton Company, which was made up of all classes, we had a motor mechanic named Maurice Heaphy who, on hearing of our problem, decided to make the exploders. This he successfully accomplished by using coils from a Ford Model T car and dry batteries. The exploders were small, compact and easily handled, so that they proved ideal for the purpose for which they were constructed.

