

W.S. 1,383

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRA MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1383

ROINN  COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,383 .....

Witness

Patrick McCannon,  
Cliffoney,  
Co: Sligo.

Identity.

Intelligence Officer for A.S.U.  
North Sligo.

Subject.

National activities, Cliffoney, North Sligo.  
1914-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

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STATEMENT BY PATRICK McCANNON,

Cliffoney, Co. Sligo.

To the north of the County Sligo, overlooking the broad Atlantic and fanned by its invigorating and refreshing breeze, lies the small but picturesque village known as Cliffoney. Partly facing it on one side are the beautiful hills of Donegal, rising in majestic splendour and forming an endless chain in the distant horizon. In the background it is flanked by a chain of mountains, a continuation of the Ben Bulbin range, whose massive boulders and variety bedecked hills lend enchantment to the scenic view. Like many villages of its kind throughout the length and breadth of Ireland, for many long years it remained in obscurity, unmindful of the happenings of other days, of sacrifices for faith and fatherland, of the privations and sufferings of the penal and famine days.

Early in the year 1914 Cliffoney and its surroundings was awakened from its slumberings by the arrival in the village, to minister as a curate, of that great priest and patriot, the ever memorable and never to be forgotten Rev. Fr. Michael O'Flanagan. His eloquent address and manly bearing had an inspiring effect and soon he became the idol of the entire half parish. He went about amongst the people, sympathising in their sorrows and making himself acquainted with their difficulties and trials. Soon he discovered their steadfast loyalty to their faith but humble submission to landlord and alien rule.

At that particular period fuel was in short supply owing to the lack of bog for turf cutting, while in the immediate vicinity lay a large tract of bog never perhaps

entered by man and kept in reserve for some undefined purpose by the landlord and his agent, dread descendants of the nobility of England. Fr. O'Flanagan wasted no time. He called together his parishioners, led them to the bog, cut the first sod himself and recommended his followers to do likewise. He then recommended the taking over and distribution of the bog. Accordingly a considerable amount of turf was cut on the first and subsequent days. However, landlordism and the forces of occupation were not so easily to be deprived of their prey. Police and military were alerted, with orders to arrest and imprison anyone found entering or trespassing on the bog again.

Notwithstanding this, loyal to their leader, the people, at opportune specified periods, went again to the bog, and though several arrests were made the turf was cut and won.

Then by night it was removed from the bog despite the vigilance of the forces of occupation and stacked almost opposite the R.I.C. barracks and directly in front of an old school belonging to the landlord which some time previously had been closed. Next the stack of turf was gaily decorated with a very inspiring banner of green, white and gold with the words beautifully inscribed in Irish: "Our own turf for own people; foreigners have no rights here". Passers-by, who were numerous, as the main road from the north to the west runs through the village, viewed the inscription with curiosity and wonder. Soon the courage and daring of Fr. O'Flanagan and his men were an inspiration to many in different parts of Ireland.

In the midst of the rejoicings of the people in having tasted the first fruits of victory in a fight, which perhaps, unknowingly at that time, illumed and inspired

the greater fight in the not too distant future and roused again the dormant spirit in the hearts and minds of the true born sons of the Gael, the unwelcome, perhaps tragic, news was conveyed from the Bishop, Most Rev. Dr. Coyne, to the good priest and pastor that his removal from Cliffoney would be in the best interests of all concerned and that forthwith he must take his departure. Imagine the dismay of his loyal and true followers to be deprived of the leadership of one whom they loved and cherished by the alleged cunning and strategy of the wily Saxon foe.

Fr. O'Flanagan, great priest that he was, nobly, though sorrowfully, bowed to submission and obediently accepted the direction of his Bishop and made hasty arrangements for his departure. Before he left the people whom he loved, the people in whose minds and hearts he indelibly indented the love of God and devotion to their native land, he called them, young and old, together, and, knowing their temperament, implored them with all the eloquence at his command to let him go in peace, with a reminder, perhaps a memory in future years, that the bog fight in Cliffoney perchance might be the beginning of a new era, the dawn of a great awakening, the dawn of freedom. As Fr. O'Flanagan moved away from his sorrow stricken flock the procession was over a mile long. Many indeed were the expressions of sorrow and regret while the procession slowly filed away after walking a considerable distance from the village. About a dozen young men went with him to Roscommon.

Fr. O'Flanagan some time previously invited these men to accompany him. All were members of the Irish Volunteers and I.R.B. organised in 1914 by Fr. O'Flanagan and Alex

McCabe. The Volunteers were organised on a parish basis and we were not in touch with any other units, if any, in the county. William Gilmartin, Cliffoney, now deceased, was O/C of the unit. My two brothers and I were amongst the number sworn into the I.R.B. circle at that time.

On arrival at his new found home he called the men together, arranged them in pairs and requested them, by using every means of conveyance obtainable, to go into the villages and towns of different counties, get in touch with the people, tell them of Cliffoney and exhort everyone who was imbued with a desire for national freedom to prepare himself to strike another blow, perhaps the final one, for their native land. In other words, their task was to organise companies of the Irish Volunteers and I.R.B. circles. The counties covered by these men were: Longford, Leitrim and Roscommon. Though their efforts were not entirely successful, they were appreciated and afterwards recognised.

Hardly had Fr. O'Flanagan reached Roscommon than the parish of Cliffoney was ablaze with excitement. A monster meeting was held and a deputation of the stalwart parishioners was appointed to interview the Bishop in Sligo next day. All who could conveniently do so were requested to accompany the deputation. Next morning at dawn of day was heard the footsteps of marching men, the noise of "horses" and "donkeys" hooves; cars, carts and every mode of conveyance obtainable at that time was mustered to bring this human freight the fifteen miles journey to the Bishop to implore him to reconsider his decision and return to them their faithful pastor. Though this plea was most sympathetically considered, the good Bishop found it too

difficult to reverse his decision, and though the deputation felt aggrieved and disappointed it submitted to fate and peacefully returned home..

At that period the Great War of 1914-18 was getting more terrible and devastating day by day and each of the opposing armies was throwing everything into the fray. John Redmond and his Parliamentarians had succeeded in getting some form of Home Rule in cold storage to be implemented on the Cathleen Mavourneen system and, consequently, recommended Irishmen of all classes to assist their nearest neighbour (England) in her hour of trial and danger. So Irishmen, for the first time in years, got an opportunity of drilling and training in public and making themselves acquainted with the use of firearms but, as a precaution, were only issued with wooden guns. They were informed by Britain's recruiting agents that they would be provided with the real weapons on joining the British forces..

As all great men do not think alike, while Mr. Redmond and his followers advocated co-operation with Britain others thought that England's difficulty was Ireland's opportunity and were averse to the idea of asking Irishmen to fight for and in defence of their age-long foe in some distant land for what purpose they knew not, and considered that the place for Irishmen to fight and die, if needs be, was in Ireland and for Ireland. So Cliffoney, remembering the cunning and deceit of British Imperialism, threw in their lot with the Republican or Irish Volunteer movement, over sixty young men joining.

At this time a branch of Cumann na mBan was formed in Cliffoney and Tullaghan. It was known as the Tullaghan

branch. The organisation fell through after the Rebellion of 1916. It was reorganised by Miss O'Mullane from Sligo town in 1917 and continued to function until the truce in July, 1921. Miss S. Bonar, Tullaghan, was Captain.

The men were trained in the use of firearms in secret haunts, and towards the close of 1915 about twenty shotguns, single barrel, and a few revolvers were smuggled into the area and kept in secret hiding places until an opportune moment would arrive. Willie Gilmartin got instructions to collect the guns in Dublin. At that time motor cars were rare. At the same time, the only possible way to collect the guns and get them to Cliffoney was by road. Gilmartin and a Volunteer named John Kane went to a man named Millar in Ballyshannon who had the only motor car for miles around. Millar, being a Protestant and Loyalist, could not be made aware of the mission for which the car was required, so they told him that a relative of theirs had died in Dublin and it was necessary for them to get there immediately. Millar drove them to Dublin but when he discovered the nature of their business he refused to drive them home. It then became necessary to compel him at the point of the revolver to proceed, later impressing on him what his fate would be if he gave any information about the episode.

1916 dawned with the Great War still in progress and England's position becoming more precarious and uncertain day by day. The Republican leaders with headquarters in Dublin were keeping in close touch with all units throughout the country. As the days and weeks slowly passed from confidential sources within the Republican movement came the news that another rebellion was contemplated and in the not too far distant future all units would be called upon to play their part. The Volunteers in Cliffoney

were eager for the fray and kept themselves in readiness. A few days prior to the Rising in Dublin a large quantity of potatoes was collected in the district, carted to Bundoran railway station and consigned to a merchant in Dublin. The consignment never reached its destination. The potatoes were taken off at Clones by Crown Forces, as by this time the Rising was on and the R.I.C. suspected the purpose for which they were intended - to be used by the Volunteers there in the event of hostilities breaking out.

On Easter Sunday the welcome news was conveyed that the Rebellion was on in Dublin and all units should go into action on the following day, Easter Monday. The Cliffoney Company, over sixty strong, comprising Volunteers and Fianna boys, mobilised during Sunday night or early on Monday morning. Though some of the arms available were not of a modern type, the will to conquer and rend in twain the bondage chains of centuries was an inspiration to each and every member. At the break of day on Easter Monday the column was ready to march, to take, if possible, Sligo town and fire every R.I.C. barracks en route. Just then, to the great disappointment of all, a dispatch messenger arrived in haste cancelling all active operations pending further orders from G.H.Q. The column remained in readiness for over a week hoping that Cliffoney would be given a chance of participating in the fight, but other counsels prevailed and the column was disbanded for the time being. Early in May, 1916, R.I.C. and British forces made a surprise swoop in the area on a Sunday morning. Though many who were on the alert managed to evade arrest, over twenty men were taken to the British forces headquarters and later conveyed to England for internment. They were



later released in batches of 3, and 4.

When the gallant leaders of 1916 had paid the price of freedom with their blood and the Rebellion was apparently, to my mind, crushed, the first critical period in modern history arrived. If the people were allowed to grow despondent and submit again as willing slaves to alien rule all would be lost and the sacrifices of 1916 would be in vain, but when hope deferred had mellowed hearts of steel, the dauntless courage of the noble and the brave, the few who would not submit still kept the flag of freedom triumphantly floating in the breeze, though it took a superhuman effort to keep intact many of those who were so courageous and optimistic prior to 1916. The Cliffooney Company, desirous of upholding the great reputation of the past, with few exceptions reaffirmed their loyalty to the Republican cause and resolved to await the opportunity to fight another day. Britain, remembering the possibilities of Easter Week, kept a strict watch on all supporters and sympathisers.

1917 arrived with little hope of the Great War abating or reaching a climax. The Republican leaders in Ireland who had escaped and survived the slaughter after Easter Week were once again in active counsel but had to move cautiously as they were continuously watched and shadowed. At that time there was no parish hall in Cliffooney but there was a vacant schoolhouse (belonging to the landlord, Colonel Ashley) which some time previously had been closed. The company leaders had a hungry eye upon it. Others, too, had it under observation as it was ideally situated. As people were returning from Devotions on a certain Sunday, as previously arranged a section of

Volunteers marched to the door of the building, forced it open and took possession, to the bewilderment of the R.I.C. as the barracks was almost directly opposite. As the Irish Volunteers was proclaimed an illegal organisation at that time, the forces of occupation were once again at work contemplating the closing of the building, which was considered a menace.

However, the R.I.C. were outwitted. On entering the occupied building, in force, and on questioning those present they were coolly informed that the occupants were not members of any illegal organisation but belonged to the Irish Trades Union and produced membership cards. Afterwards the building was renovated, gaily decorated and painted in green, white and gold and made a Sinn Féin hall. When opportunity presented it was an instruction and training hall for the Volunteers. It was burned in October, 1920, by British forces.

In 1917 the Volunteers were organised on a military basis into companies, battalions and brigades. Cliffoney Company then became a unit of Bundoran Battalion, 1st South Donegal Brigade. William Gilmartin was O/C of the company. Thomas McShea was Battalion O/C and Seamus Ward (deceased) was Brigade O/C. The company was transferred to the Sligo Brigade in December, 1920. John Rooney (deceased), Ballintrillick, was then Battalion O/C.

As 1918 dawned it became apparent that the Great World War was reaching a most critical stage and that all the available manhood of the belligerents must be mobilised in the effort for victory. Britain had an envious eye on Irishmen and resolved to bring Ireland within the scope of her conscription laws. Then for the

first time the wisdom and sacrifices of 1916 were recognised. Priests and people, inspired by the courage of the glorious dead, rallied together as never before to oppose by every means at their disposal this latest threat on their dignity and honour. Needless to say, the young men of Cliffoney, who sometime previously might be regarded as misguided and foolish, came once more into the limelight and would not be found wanting in any emergency that might arise.

The mighty British, subdued by the determination of the people of Ireland both at home and across the wave, dare not at that stage open another battlefront and so had to abandon the idea of forcing Irishmen to fight her battle against their will.

The general election of 1918 by now had got into top gear. Volunteer leaders deemed it wiser to remain in the background for the time being but to assist in every possible manner the political party - Sinn Féin - who would form the government of Ireland and put the Irish Volunteers on a properly constituted basis as the army of Ireland. During the election campaign the Volunteers of Cliffoney were again conspicuous and availed of every opportunity to go into different counties and give every assistance possible. About half a dozen picked men were sent as a bodyguard with Seán Milroy and Fr. O'Flanagan on a tour of the northern counties.

When the election was over and won by Sinn Féin, it was decided to have an extra tillage drive to meet any emergency. As Cliffoney was a very congested area, with little land available for the proposed project, a council of war was held with a twofold object in view, i.e. to till more land and at the same time to have a tilt at

the forces of occupation. Consequently, it was agreed that every available man with plough, spade or other farm implement should enter and take over the lands of Colonel Ashley on a certain specified day. Accordingly the lands were entered and plough and spade went into action. British Imperialism was again a tough nut to crack and R.I.C. and British military forces from Sligo and Finner Camp, Co. Donegal, were soon on the trail. When the people entered the lands the R.I.C. of themselves were of little avail. They notified the military camps but when the military arrived there was nobody on the lands. Scouts were out and the church bell tolled a warning note on the approach of danger. This was repeated from time to time until the military grew tired and annoyed and decided to remain on duty all day. Nothing daunted, when it became apparent to the men that the work could not be done by day it was decided to do it by night. When it sometimes proved too risky to bring horses by night it was a novel treat to see strong enthusiastic young men pull the plough and coolly take them across hedges and ditches on their shoulders when danger threatened.

The next order from England, the home of the landlord, was to turn down every sod that was turned up. The landlord's agent offered a tempting reward to anyone who would do the job for him, but not a solitary man would take the bribe. Though many years have elapsed since then, the furrows made by the plough can still be seen, a lasting monument to the loyalty of the people.

The close of 1918 brought victory to England and her allies and consequent jubilation to the British Dominions. Rebellious Ireland could not expect any favourable

consideration from British statesmen, though Home Rule for Ireland was still in the pickle with little hope of its removal by Mr. Redmond and his few followers.

The fire of 1916, though dark and dim and apparently extinguished, began to glow once more and recruits were coming in a steady flow to join the ranks of the Irish Volunteers. Soon the whole country was organised and united to make a final effort to drive out the invader. The men of Cliffoney were again in action, drilling and equipping themselves, raiding for arms and ammunition, establishing Sinn Féin courts to administer the law in accordance with Irish ideals and custom and in every possible manner uprooting and destroying the administration of alien rule.

The arrival of 1920 brought new hope to the ranks of the Irish Volunteers and the consequent intensification of the War of Independence. From henceforth guerrilla tactics were to be pursued with vigour at every available opportunity whenever practicable. It would now be utterly impossible to fight the might of Britain, free from other commitments, in open combat.

The Cliffoney Company, despite the now intensified vigilance of the British forces, participated in raids for arms at Maugherow, Tullyhan and Mullaghmore areas. Well do I remember a cold and dreary night when twenty members of the company and I cycled the long and tedious journey to Belleek on unaccustomed roads to participate in what was considered a big raid on an arms dump belonging to the Ulster Volunteer force. Slowly and cautiously we surrounded the building and called on the occupants to surrender, but their answer was a hail of bullets.

After an exchange of shots which lasted for some time the building was finally captured, but not with the booty we expected. Only a few guns were captured, a number of rifles stored there having been previously removed.

On a lovely Sunday evening in August, 1920, in company with eight members of the Cliffoney Company I went to Bundoran with the object of disarming a patrol of British military who happened to be patrolling the town. A meeting was held in St. Patrick's Hall, Bundoran, but unfortunately the officer in command deferred the attempt to what was considered a more opportune time, which, however, did not occur as a more formidable patrol was afterwards placed on duty in the town. Shortly afterwards we waited in ambush at Mullaghmore for a patrol of R.I.C. For some unknown reason the patrol took another route and our preparations and wait were in vain.

In the early autumn plans were made to attack Kinlough R.I.C. barracks. With some twelve other members of the company I set out to participate in the attack, but seemingly everything did not turn out as planned so after firing some shots at the barracks it was deemed necessary to withdraw as Finner Camp was only a few miles away. My next experience was the arrest and detention of suspects from Bundoran who were considered a menace to the Republican cause. These men were taken to a lonely house surrounded by murky bog land, a considerable distance from their home, kept for some days and treated as well as circumstances permitted. They were tried by courtmartial, cautioned and duly released. Next we were in action in Bundoran, seizing and destroying Belfast goods at the railway station. Shortly afterwards we set fire to and destroyed the

coastguard station at Mullaghmore as it was reported that British forces were about to take it over.

As variety is the spice of life, my next experience was behind prison bars. As the members of the family were relaxing after the midday meal on a lovely August afternoon the house was suddenly surrounded by British forces. One of the usual searches was made. After alleging that a revolver was found in the house my father, two of my brothers and I were taken into custody, removed to the R.I.C. barracks and from there to Sligo prison. After some days we were charged with some offence under the Defence of the Realm Act (known locally as DORA) and tried by courtmartial. We all refused to recognise the court and also refused to answer any questions. We were kept in prison for about two months and then unconditionally released.

After my release I cycled five days weekly to Sligo town to the vocational school to continue my studies for shorthand and accountancy. I was then considered a valuable asset in the area as I could act as scout, despatch rider and I.O. without attracting attention. I kept intimately in touch with Brigadier B. Pilkington (now Rev. William Pilkington). On one occasion he questioned me concerning the commandeering and utilisation of my father's horse and cart and other farm implements by the British forces during our term in prison, which I confirmed to be absolutely authentic. He then informed me that in the near future some of them might regret it as he contemplated action against them in the near future.

On a glorious night in October, 1920, while walking in the village I was hailed by Andrew Conway, Cliffoney, an

officer in the battalion, who was on the look out for me. He enquired what time I would be leaving the village for Sligo the next morning. I told him the time I usually left. He then told me not to leave until the R.I.C. would be leaving their bicycles outside the barracks in preparation for a journey to Grange and Sligo town. My instructions were to precede the R.I.C. on the road and when I arrived at the ambush position at Moneygold near Grange on the main Sligo-Bundoran road I was to pass on the information re strength of the force following me. As my home was very convenient to the barracks I kept it under observation until the appointed time and then proceeded on my journey. Knowing my mission, I cycled slowly to make sure I was not going to outpace those following me. This would enable me to give the exact position of the R.I.C. to the Volunteers in the ambush position. Preparations were then complete to carry out the ambush. The ambush turned out according to plan. A sergeant and four constables were killed. The survivors, numbering 10, were disarmed and all booty captured. I continued my journey to Sligo and was just crossing the bridge going in the direction of O'Connell St. when a number of lorries filled with soldiers and R.I.C. were coming through Stephen's St. I would say I escaped death by about half a minute, for if I met the lorries I would undoubtedly be riddled with bullets.

From that period on to the truce I was continually 'on the run' and had many narrow escapes as I was, generally speaking, doing intelligence work over a wide area.

I now return to Cliffoney and district after the ambush and what happened there. Crown forces of all description swarmed into the village and put it in a state of terror. On that evening they raided our home and



arrested my father and my brother (Charles), the only members of the family found at home. Luckily for them it was military forces who raided; if it had been R.I.C. who carried out the raid my father and brother would have been shown no mercy. However, they were just thrown into a lorry, conveyed to Finner Camp and afterwards to Derry and Belfast for internment. At a courtmartial afterwards in Belfast prison both of them refused to recognise the court and defied it to do its worst. The account of the trial which appeared in the "Derry Journal" and other northern papers of that period was an inspiration to many others in critical times. Reference is also made to the trial in the book "On my keeping and on theirs" by Louis J. Walsh.

Returning again to Cliffoney. During the night our home was again raided, this time by R.I.C., Tans and Auxiliaries. My mother, who was the sole occupant of the house (as nobody dare come to her) was subjected to a most inhuman and abusive interrogation regarding the movements and present whereabouts of her sons. On not getting the required information they used terrible threats with far reaching consequences, using the identical words that some time previously were written in letters to Dublin Castle and captured in raids on mail cars: "A rebel father, a rebel mother and six dangerous rebel sons". As the village was in an indescribable state of terror with squads of drunken British forces patrolling the roads, discharging shots and using every form of intimidation imaginable, the people were all confined to their homes, afraid even to have a look around. My mother had to crouch in the corner of an outhouse until day dawned. She then returned to the dwellinghouse but had hardly time to set a

fire to warm herself when a party of Crown Forces again arrived, this time making a minute search of the entire premises, and while some of them collected and brought with them all male attire available others told my mother to clear out if she wished. Then, after sprinkling the whole place with petrol, they flung lighted matches on to it and in a short time the entire place was a mass of flames. My mother walked the road for a considerable time and then one kind neighbour took her in and gave her shelter. I may mention that neither mother nor any member of my family had any regrets when we learned of the destruction, as for over six months we were subjected to such abuse and annoyance that we could not possibly endure for much longer the physical and mental strain. As our home was situated about one hundred yards from the R.I.C. barracks we were raided almost daily by British forces armed with rifles or revolvers and generally carrying Union Jacks which would be almost pushed into our mouths, and all pictures or other objects which they considered were relating or pertaining to Ireland were smashed and broken to bits with the butts of the rifles. Sometimes during the night shots were discharged at the walls of the house or through the doors and windows. The marks made by the bullets on some of the surrounding walls are still to be seen.

After our home was left in ashes the British forces next concentrated on the local hall which I have already mentioned, set fire to and destroyed it, then put the inscription on the blackened walls: "The vacated home of the murder gang". After this destruction it was anticipated that the next on the list would be the premises of William Gilmartin, Creevykeel, who was O/C Cliffoney Company of the

I.R.A. All available Volunteers were mustered and in the evening a fairly formidable ambush party had assembled in the vicinity of Gilmartin's home, with strict orders to give no quarter or expect none. Although the party remained in position all through the night the Crown Forces did not venture out. As day dawned it was found necessary to abandon the ambush position as it could not be held in daylight. About noon on the following day a strong party of British forces arrived and after throwing the only occupant of the house, an aged woman, on the roadway, set fire to and destroyed the premises. The British forces next visited the homes of Andrew Conway and Edward Harkin, both Volunteer officers, and having evicted the aged occupiers set the houses on fire. Inside a week the home of Charles Gilmartin, Carnduff, Cliffoney, was also in ashes. Next place to be visited was the home of Francis Higgins, Carns, but, due to the fact that a member of the family was critically ill in the house, the house was spared but hay and other property were destroyed.

The house of Seamus Devins of Grange was next burned out. Devins was an officer in the Volunteers. Later a tailor's shop belonging to Edward Gillespie in the village of Cliffoney was raided. All articles of clothing found on the premises were put out on the roadside and burned just because Gillespie was a friend of my family.

In passing, I would be failing in my duty in recording this narrative if I did not pay a well deserved tribute to the courage and resignation of these old people who were thrown on the roadside with their homes in flames before their eyes. Their endurance and forbearance was truly magnificent and their self-sacrifice and devotion a marked characteristic of the period and a reminder to

their native land and consider it a privilege to labour and die, if needs be, for its completion.

By this time all R.I.C. barracks between Sligo and Bundoran were closed, with the exception of Cliffoney. This was fortified in such a manner with sand bags, barbed wire, steel shutters, etc., that it would be extremely difficult to capture it. The garrison, which was very formidable, never remained in its entirety within the building but divided itself up, one party doing armed patrol outside, the other party in readiness inside in case an attempt was made to attack it. Rifles and ammunition were very limited at this time, and to make matters infinitely worse the service rifles in the area on being transferred to another district in the brigade were all captured by British forces on the road outside Sligo town. The occupants of the two cars, Linda Kearns, Andrew Conway, Eugene Kilbride and Joe McDevitt were all taken into custody.

The arrival of 1921 brought very little change in the situation. The Volunteers availed of every opportunity to harass and make it impossible for the British forces to maintain a foothold. They, in turn, became more ruthless and tyrannical day by day. When opportunity presented itself the Cliffoney Company kept as active as circumstances would permit. With other members of the company I assisted in the collection of dog licences, in the making of dugouts, blocking of roads, cautioned spies and warned off those who in any way assisted or made contact with the British forces. I also kept under observation the movements of the enemy. On one occasion, in the month of May, 1921, I was keeping a lady under observation who was suspected of giving information to the

British forces. I was keeping her shadowed when suddenly a shot rang out and in the distance I espied an R.I.C. man with a revolver in his hand. I returned the fire and though he tried to encircle me I made good my escape.

About this time another brother (Hugh) was captured by two R.I.C. about a quarter of a mile from their barracks. They were bringing him there for identification and he had an idea what would happen him when the Crown Forces had him identified, so he decided to make a bid to escape. When about fifty yards from the barracks he bolted across the road and made for a gap in the hedge. Revolver fire was immediately opened on him but he threw himself across the hedge at the same time the bullets were hitting the stones on the fence. He did not get wounded and made good his escape. Confident that he was shot and mortally wounded the R.I.C. searched the vicinity well into the night. He had a miraculous escape, though the shock told a tale in after life.

After this incident about a dozen members of the company and I, all that could be gathered at short notice, held a meeting where it was decided, if sufficient arms could be procured, to have another crack at the British forces in our company area. We could not muster enough arms in our own area but units from an adjoining area came to the rescue and an ambush took place at Creevykeel in June, 1921. The ambush was not a success from our point of view. Only one member of the R.I.C. came into the ambush position; he was shot dead. The main body of the British forces by some extraordinary fortune evaded the ambushing party. It is my personal opinion that the ambush position selected was not a good one

as there were not enough fire positions to cover a patrol moving in extended formation.

The above mentioned engagement terminated our activities against the British forces. The truce on the 11th July, 1921, gave us an opportunity to return and try and build up a home and also to prepare to carry on the fight in the event of negotiations with England breaking down.

Signed: Patrick McCannon.  
(Patrick McCannon)

Date: 26 March 1956  
26th March 1956

Witness: James Conway Colonel.  
(James J. Conway) Colonel  
(Investigator)

