

1389
W. A. 1389
DUPLICATE

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1389

ROINN



COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,389

Witness

Sean Gaynor,
Tyone,
Nenagh,
Co. Tipperary.

Identity.

Adjutant (later Commandant)
No. 1, North Tipperary Brigade;
Adjutant 3rd Southern Division.

Subject.

National and military activities,
Nenagh, Co; Tipperary, 1914-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

S. 2700

File No.

Form B.S.M. 2

DUPLICATE

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1389

STATEMENT BY SEÁN GAYNOR,
Tyone, Nenagh, Co. Tipperary.

(Formerly Divisional Adjutant, 3rd Southern Division,
and Commandant, No. 1 (North Tipperary) Brigade.)

I was born in Tyone, Nenagh on 25th July, 1894. My father was a farmer, and I was the eldest son of his second family. A step-brother of mine, Father Pat Gaynor, was a member of the Standing Committee of the Sinn Féin organisation from 1917 to 1922. I was educated at the Nenagh Christian Brothers School, but owing to my father having developed poor health, I was taken from school at the age of thirteen years to work at home on the farm.

My first association with the Volunteers in 1914 was short lived. I was then a raw country lad of twenty, on whom had devolved the responsibility of working my mother's farm - my father being dead - and, though full of enthusiasm to strike a blow for Ireland, I became disgusted when the Redmondite split occurred, and was too little known by the men who controlled the extreme section of the Volunteers to be asked to join with them, and so I finished with the Volunteers of that time.

All my sympathies were with the extreme element, and I was enthusiastic in support of the men of Easter Week, but had still made no contact with the local Volunteers and, in fact, didn't know of the existence of such a body.

It was early in 1917 at the house of Martin Ryan, Tyone - a staunch Sinn Feiner - where I used to scjourn at night to play cards - that I was asked by Denis Carey, who was murdered by the Tans in 1920, if I would like to join the Volunteers, and I jumped at the chance. A few nights later I attended my first parade at Christopher O'Brien's farm at Solsboro, about a mile outside Nenagh, where the Volunteers drilled in secret, and so at last I became an Irish Volunteer and a member of the Nenagh Company. I attended weekly secret parades until Tomás Ashe died in Mountjoy jail as a result of being forcibly fed when on hunger-strike.

From that time, the Irish Volunteers in Nenagh were ordered to parade in public, and we formed up in the Courthouse Square every Sunday after second Mass in Nenagh, under Frank McGrath, our O/C, and marched off on a route march or on manoeuvres. All our movements were closely watched by the B.I.C. and soon the arrest of the leaders began. Frank McGrath was arrested, and on the following Sunday we paraded as usual under the command of Bill Hoolan. He, in turn being arrested, was succeeded by Jimmie Nolan who, on being arrested, was succeeded by Ned Kennedy. The situation at this stage was getting serious as all our prominent officers were in jail, with the exception of Frank Flannery who had been instructed by Frank McGrath to keep under cover, so that there would be someone left to keep the organisation going.

While Ned Kennedy was still at liberty, Frank Flannery asked for volunteers to step into the breach to fill recurring vacancies. About a dozen, including myself, volunteered and the names were drawn out of a hat. Tim Whealey, the first drawn, refused to act

when Ned Kennedy was arrested, and I arrived on parade at the Courthouse Square, Nenagh, as usual the following Sunday, to be informed that I was to take charge. I had acquired a little experience in giving military commands at this stage as some time previously I had been appointed section leader of No. 4 Section in charge of ten men. I felt, however, very self-conscious as I stepped out to order a hundred or more men to fall in, and this in the presence of a good part of the population of Nenagh who generally waited to see us march off, not to mention the two usual note-takers of the R.I.C. I acquitted myself tolerably well, and gaining confidence after that initial experience, I became a reasonably good instructor. The R.I.C., however, no doubt believing that I was put up for a blind and having never seen or heard of me before, refused to take serious notice of me, and I continued to take charge of the Company parades until the boys were released from jail.

Up to this period there was no real cohesion between the different units of the Volunteers in North Tipperary, but Headquarters now set out to build the Volunteer force on proper army lines. The unit of the Volunteers was the "company", and the "company" was based on the parish. Thus there was a Volunteer Company in every parish.

Headquarters sent organisers from Dublin and North Tipperary, with Nenagh as its centre, and taking in an area from Roscrea to North of Borrisoleigh, through the mountain districts of Kilcommon, Rearcross and Newport to Birdhill and Ballina and thence on the left bank of the Shannon to Portumna Bridge - from there to Lorrha and across to Shinrone was formed into a Battalion towards the end of 1917.

There were thirty-three companies in this area, and two representatives of each Company met in Nenagh to elect a Battalion Staff to consist of Battalion Commandant, Vice Commandant, Adjutant and Quartermaster. The election was by ballot. Frank McGrath, Bill Hoolan and Frank Flannery were elected unanimously as Commandant, Vice Commandant and Quartermaster, respectively. When it came to election of Adjutant, my name was proposed as was also that of Patrick Maher (Widger), captain of the famous "Toomevara Greyhounds" hurling team and one of the best Volunteers and most popular man in the area. I was elected, however, by a small majority, mainly because I lived on the outskirts of Nenagh and was, therefore, in a better position to keep in touch with the Battalion Staff, all of whom lived in the town.

I now found myself with a practically whole-time clerical job on hands. It was my duty to deal with correspondence from all the Companies in the Battalion as well as with Headquarters. It was then I first came in contact with Michael Collins who was Adjutant-General at that time and the driving force behind the Irish Volunteers. The job of communicating with thirty-three Companies was a heart-breaking one, and during this period I invariably worked to the small hours of the morning. It did not last long, however, as the organisation was now growing apace and, about January, 1918, Headquarters decided to form Brigades.

There were three Brigades established in Tipperary, and our Battalion, converted into a Brigade, became No. 1 Tipperary Brigade, Mid Tipperary being

No. 2 and South Tipperary, No: 3. We now had to form companies into battalions of which we had seven as follows:-

- 1st Battalion - Nenagh.
- 2nd Battalion - Toomevara.
- 3rd Battalion - Ballywilliam.
- 4th Battalion - Borrisokane.
- 5th Battalion - Templederry.
- 6th Battalion - Newport.
- 7th Battalion - Roscrea.

There was an average of five companies in each battalion, and about forty to fifty men in each company.

Battalion staffs had now to be elected in each battalion area and as the best of the company officers were invariably elected, new company officers had in turn to be elected.

I give hereunder a list showing the names of the commandants of each of these battalions from the date of the establishment of the battalions to the Truce, and the reason for the changes in each case.

1st Battalion - Michael O'Donoghue, an Irish teacher who left the district soon after his appointment. He was replaced by David Shortall, a native of Waterford, where he returned after a few months. Succeeded by Ned O'Leary who held the post until he was appointed O/C, Brigade Active Service Unit in September, 1920. He was followed by Austin McCurtain, and on McCurtain being transferred to the Brigade Staff as Intelligence Officer, Con Spain was appointed and he held the rank until the Truce.

2nd Battalion - Jeremiah Collison - in office until June 1921 when he was demoted in consequence of his failure to ensure the safety of the battalion fund which amounted to about £300 and which disappeared at the time. This money was subsequently refunded during the Truce by one of the priests in Toomevara, presumably handed to him by way of restitution. Paddy Kennedy, Moneygall, a member of the A.S.U., replaced Collison and he remained in the post until the Truce.

3rd Battalion - William Gleeson - removed from post on grounds of unsuitability. Succeeded by Paddy McDonnell who held rank until Truce.

4th Battalion - Felim Cronin - held rank until June 1921 when, on promotion to Brigade Vice Commandant, he was succeeded by Martin Haugh. No other change.

5th Battalion - Michael Hogan - in post until about September 1920. Deposed on grounds of unsuitability. Replaced by Patrick Doherty who held rank until about December 1920, but not being a success, was transferred to take charge of police in battalion. Succeeded by John Caples. No further change.

6th Battalion - William Gleeson - In charge till Truce.

7th Battalion - Edward Quinlan - In charge till Truce.

The battalions being now organised and officered, the next job was the election of the brigade staff. For this purpose, the four staff officers of each battalion attended a meeting in Nenagh, but the election proved a formal affair as the original members of the battalion staff were unanimously chosen, and so I became Brigade Adjutant of Tipperary No. 1 Brigade. Frank McGrath became Brigade Commandant, Liam Hoolan, Vice Brigade Commandant and Frank Flannery, Brigade Quartermaster.

The tempo of the organisation was now stepped up, and we were getting into our stride as a military force. The R.I.C. began to get perturbed, and a big round-up landed most of our officers in jail. I, among the others, was hauled out of my bed at 4 a.m. on a morning in March, 1918, by a large force of police under two District Inspectors - Hunt and Wilson - both of whom were shot by the I.R.A. a couple of years later. I was conveyed in a police van - a Black Maria we used to call such vehicles - to Templemore barracks, and from there to Limerick jail.

The Volunteers by this time, through hunger-strikes, wrecking of prisons and general indiscipline from the enemy point of view, had won political treatment, and I found that life in jail was not as bad as one might expect, the confinement, for one used to an open air life, being the worst feature. After a week in Limerick, I with others - one of whom was Tom Devaney, afterwards shot by Black and Tans - were brought for trial to Templemore. We were greeted in the street by a large crowd who cheered us, and then I

witnessed a most brutal baton charge by the police on this defenceless crowd. It was a savage business which increased my dislike of the R.I.C.

Our trial was, of course, a farce. We began by refusing to remove our caps in court, but they were forcibly removed. In this connection, an awkward situation arose when my brother, Father Pat Gaynor, who arrived to watch the proceedings, refused to remove his hat when ordered to do so, but he saved the situation by asking my permission to take it off, which I promptly gave him. We refused to recognise the court and treated the proceedings with contempt. I was charged with wearing a uniform and illegal drilling, and got three months with the option of bail. This option was, of course, refused with scorn. The other prisoners got similar sentences. The proceedings were enlivened by Father Pat challenging Mike Gleeson, Crown Prosecutor, over an alleged statement by Dr. Fogarty, Bishop of Killaloe, who was a staunch supporter of the cause.

We were brought back to Limerick jail and, after a fortnight, were transferred to Belfast. This was my first sojourn into the northern stronghold of bigotry, and no doubt the concentration of the I.R.A. prisoners there was due to the fact that the British were contemplating conscription for Ireland. We were well treated in Belfast jail. We had our own officers and only took orders from them. We organised concerts as well as having strenuous games of football played with a rag ball in the exercise yard. We had Irish classes and debates, and generally speaking the jail might be regarded as a military college. We studied tactics

and made plans which later bore fruit when the fight began in earnest.

I was in Belfast only a month when an order came from Headquarters, with whom we were in constant touch, that all Volunteers who had the option of bail were to give bail and thereby secure release. The conscription threat was at its height and it was felt we could do more useful work outside. A big number of prisoners were thus set at liberty, including myself.

On my release, I got a message from my Brigade O/C, Frank McGrath, who was also a prisoner but without the option of bail, to deliver to Mick Collins at 32 Bachelors Walk, Dublin. I was excited at the prospect of meeting Mick who was my hero and with whom I had been corresponding for a long time in my capacity as Brigade Adjutant. I called to Bachelors Walk and stated my business, and asked to see him. I was scrutinised through a grill before I gained admittance, and the first thing Mick said was, "You are Seán Gaynor". I was amazed as he had never seen me before and had no reason to expect me. On seeing my surprise, he said, "Your brother, Fr. Pat, was here yesterday and I know you out of him". Mick was a fine, upstanding cut of a young fellow, with a cheery smile, and I took an instant liking to him (a liking which remained even during the civil war and to this day). I was struck by Mick's business capacity and his thorough grasp of everything connected with the Irish Volunteer movement. I got very clear and precise instructions as to our line of action and the steps to be taken to resist conscription.

After my interview with Lick, I had a rather amusing experience. There was a great scarcity of silver at the time and, as my total cash amounted to three pound notes, I was unable to buy anything in the city as nobody would change a pound. I tried several shops and purchased items varying from one to five shillings but, when I produced the pound, my purchases were quickly removed. Eventually, I went into the Wicklow Hotel and ordered my dinner. When I had eaten, I tendered the pound in payment and I wasn't long getting the change then.

When I arrived home, excitement was at its height and active preparations were being made to resist conscription. Nationalist opinion, and indeed lots of the local unionists too, were all united in opposition to the measure. The hierarchy and clergy were solidly behind the people. But while the moderates were advocating passive resistance, we of the Volunteers knew that, if conscription came, it would have to be resisted by force. All our energies were devoted to training and arming the men under our command. Recruits were flocking in in hundreds and during this period our numbers increased by one hundred per cent. While we had been quietly getting what arms we could up to this, and these were very few indeed, the time had now arrived when some kind of a weapon would have to be provided for every Volunteer. Raids for arms were made on the homes of the ascendancy gang in the country, and friendly people were asked to surrender shotguns or any guns they had. Patterns of pikes were secured, and every blacksmith in the country was pressed into the service of making pike heads.

Handles had to be secured for them, and every suitable piece of ash was cut down. Many and varied were the pikes turned out - depending on the skill of individual blacksmiths, but they certainly were turned out in thousands.

In the course of raids for arms which occurred in the houses of loyalists, there was one outstanding - Castle Otway, Templeberry, owned by a retired British army Major, named Finch. He was reputed to be a man who would resist the seizure of his guns by us. At the request of the local Company, I personally conducted the raid on his place. We met with no opposition, and collected two shotguns, three miniature rifles, one .45 revolver, found under the Major's pillow, and a couple of hundred rounds of .22 ammunition. Outside of my knowledge, a sword was also seized. It appears that this weapon had been presented to the Major by King Edward VII of England and, on that account, bore a very high sentimental value for the owner who, on its seizure, appealed to Frank McGrath, the former Brigade O/C, to return the sword to him. I delivered it to him one night soon after the raid on the castle, and he was so pleased with this action that he made me a present of a .45 British bulldog revolver; he also complimented me on the manner in which the raid was carried out and on the discipline and integrity of the men who assisted me.

On the same night, as far as I remember, members of the Nenagh Company were conducting a raid on County Inspector (Galway) Foley's house in Ballytogher when they were fired on by the owner from an upstairs window. The Volunteers returned the fire and wounded the owner

in the head. Entrance to the house was then gained, and the first action of the raiders was to dress the wounded man and then, having got the shotgun, they departed.

Between collecting the shotguns from our own friendly supporters and the raiding for arms of the houses and mansions of those who were opposed to us a total of above two hundred and fifty shotguns and a couple of thousand cartridges came under the control of the Tipperary No. 1 Brigade. Few, if any, of these stores were ever captured by the enemy.

Tipperary No. 1 Brigade was working smoothly and efficiently under Liam Hoolan, who had evaded arrest, and Frank Flannery who, acting on instructions, had kept in the background. And so the conscription threat, faced with the resistance of an organised, ill-armed but determined people, was withdrawn. It was followed however by an intensification of enemy activity against the Volunteers. Day and night raids and arrests were now the order of the day, under the pretence of an alleged German plot, and many of our most important officers were put under lock and key. During long periods, the only officers who were left in the Tipperary No. 1 Brigade were the Quartermaster and myself. On these occasions, it was my duty to assume command of the Brigade as Acting Brigadier.

Side by side with the military organisation, the political organisation of Sinn Fein was growing apace, and in this the Volunteers played the leading part. In the 1918 election when political feeling was running high and the Irish Party had still some strongholds in

the country, I was detailed to take charge of eighty men from Tipperary No. 1 Brigade and proceed to Waterford City - a hot-bed of Redmondism - to protect our voters at the polls. Here we were up against a hostile people and a more hostile armed police force, and our little band of Tipperary Volunteers, reinforced by men from other counties, had a very trying, nerve-wracking experience for the week preceding and particularly on the day of the election. Were it not for the protection afforded by the many contingents of Volunteers from all parts of Munster, very few Sinn Féin voters would have got to the polls. There I met Seán Finn with his West Limerick lads, and Seán Wall with the men of East Limerick, both fine officers and splendid men, who were fated to give their lives for Ireland in the dark days of 1921.

Nearing the close of election day in Waterford, an incident occurred that had a very amusing sequel. It was at one of the principal booths in the city where the Tipperary No. 1 boys, together with several other units, were on duty that a large body of armed police under a District Inspector suddenly arrived, with their carbines at the ready. The District Inspector ordered us to disperse. I got into a very heated argument with him, during which the attitude of the police became very menacing. Suddenly a company of Volunteers at the end of our line lost their nerve and stampeded, to be followed by the whole body. I was still arguing with the District Inspector when I found that I was alone, and considering discretion the better part of valour, I also beat a hasty retreat. I must have run faster than some of the boys for, after about three

hundred yards, I found myself in front of the Tipperary No. 1 contingent, and, with the help of Matt Ryan (later killed in the Civil War) and Ned Quinlan, succeeded in stopping our own lads and getting them formed up again. As this was happening, another force of armed R.I.C. halted behind us. Our lads were now jittery as a result of the previous stampede. I was unable to hold them, and they took to their heels down the city, leaving Matt Ryan, Ned Quinlan and myself to gape after them.

It was then that the high light of the proceedings happened. As our lads were flying helter skelter, another large body of police, coming in their direction, suddenly turned tail and fled. When I returned to our headquarters in Waterford, I was heartily congratulated on the fact that the North Tipperary Volunteers had put a large force of the R.I.C. to flight. I accepted the congratulations with my tongue in my cheek. I could not blame the Volunteers for these incidents, as they were unarmed except for batons, and it was their first experience of coming up against a well armed force.

It was in the spring of 1919 that serious attention was paid to an aspect of the Irish Volunteer organisation that later on paid excellent dividends - lines of communication. Up to this, our communications were coming by post under covering addresses. All despatches from Headquarters to the Brigade were posted to me under cover of the addresses of Mrs. Martin Ryan, Tyone, Nenagh, and Miss Nora Boland, Ballynaclough, but it was now decided to establish a net-work of communication lines through the Volunteers. For this purpose, call-

houses were established in every Company area and despatch riders appointed. The despatch rider in each area was ready day and night to proceed with despatches received to his next call house, and time sheets were carried and signed, with the date and time of arrival and despatch, thus providing a check on delays if any. A special line had to be set up for Headquarters and inter Brigade despatches, and in our area all Headquarters despatches for Limerick and Clare passed through our hands.

The ordinary routine of training, drilling, raiding for arms, etc., continued until in 1919 Dáil Éireann - the Government of the Irish Republic was established and the Volunteers became the Irish Republican Army. Each member of the I.R.A. had now to take an oath of allegiance to the Republic, and the Brigade Staff had a busy time visiting each company area to administer the oath -

"I _____ do solemnly swear that I will uphold and defend the Irish Republic and the Government of the Irish Republic which is Dáil Éireann against all enemies foreign or domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same. That I take this obligation freely without mental reservation or purpose of evasion, so help me, God!"

Coinciding with the establishment of Dáil Éireann, a raid for a quantity of gelignite under a heavy police guard was carried out by Seán Treacy, Dan Breen, Seumas Robinson and Seán Hogan at a

County Council quarry at Solohead in the Tipperary No. 3 Brigade area, and as the police resisted, some of them were shot dead.

Following this, intense enemy activity resulted in the arrest of Seán Hogan, to be followed later by his rescue by his comrades at the station of Knocklong. Dan Breen was badly wounded in this fight, but he and his comrades got away and, after moving into Clare, they crossed the Shannon at Ballina and so came into North Tipperary. Frank McGrath made arrangements for their transport from Clara in a motor owned and driven by Benny Gill, Nenagh. On the outskirts of Nenagh, they were transferred to a post car (horse and sidecar) owned by Frank Flannery, and were driven towards Toomevara where Jim Devaney, (killed in action in 1921) and myself met them just beyond Ballintotty. We were naturally thrilled to meet such famous men, and when they got off the car, we could see they were provided with a small arsenal. Each of the four carried two revolvers, and they also had a box of grenades. We took them on to Whelehan's of Clash, and all billeting arrangements and guards were made by the Toomevara Company. They remained in Toomevara district for a week, and as they were then anxious to get to Dublin via Offaly, I made arrangements for an escort, and went with them to Carrigahorig where they spent a few days.

It is significant that the first attacks on the enemy in our area were made in the localities in which they billeted. Thus, shortly after their departure, a policeman was shot dead in an attack in Lorrha, and later two more were shot dead in Toomevara. The shootings in Solohead marked the beginning of

guerilla warfare by the I.R.A. against the British armed forces in Ireland.

Up to 1920, attacks on the enemy were mainly confined to ambushes of armed police patrols which had the effect of compelling the enemy to concentrate their forces and move out only in large parties. This made it difficult for the poorly armed Volunteer units to handle them effectively, and so, as a natural sequence, the decision was reached to attack them in their strongly fortified barracks on a big and organised scale. Many barracks in the south were successfully attacked, and each Brigade O/C was having a survey made to decide on which barracks in his area offered the most likely chances of success. During this period, the O/C and Vice O/C of Tipperary No. 1 Brigade were in jail, and so the duty devolved on me as Acting O/C to come to a decision on the matter. There were many angles to be considered, as these barracks were now very strongly fortified. With their garrisons constantly on the alert, it was impossible to gain admittance by ruse. The doors were secured by a strong chain which only permitted them to be opened a few inches until a caller was identified. On the slightest sign of attack, Verey lights were sent up to bring reinforcements from the surrounding military garrisons and R.I.C. stations.

Acting on the experience gained in other brigades where barracks were successfully attacked, notably Kilmallock, Co. Limerick, I concentrated on barracks which adjoined other houses - the idea being to break through the roof of the adjoining house and so get on to the roof of the barracks which was the only vulnerable part of the building.

Borrisokane and Rearcross barracks were selected, and it was decided to begin with Borrisokane. It was situated in the middle of the main street and was adjoined by houses on either side. It had a garrison of twelve R.I.C. men and was centrally situated between Nenagh and Birr, both garrison towns with strong military and police forces, and about twenty miles apart.

The idea was as stated, to get on to the roof of the barracks and, on smashing a hole through it, to pour petrol and lighted torches into the building, and so either smoke or burn the garrison out. Petrol being strictly controlled at the time, it presented a minor problem to secure a sufficient quantity for our purpose. In the meantime, the important details of cutting communications and blocking the roads, to delay reinforcements and at the same time leave a line of retreat for our own forces, were gone into minutely. Sites for road blocks having been selected and marked on the map, the carrying out of this part of the job was put in the capable hands of Ned O'Leary, then O/C, 1st Battalion. The blockade idea was to isolate Borrisokane. Every road leading to it was scheduled to be blocked for a radius of ten miles. The west was effectively isolated by the River Shannon, and it was along its banks that we proposed having our line of retreat. O'Leary went into the job minutely and, a fortnight before the attack was to take place, he had every tree marked and men detailed to cut them.

The work of selecting positions for our riflemen was gone into, and officers were appointed in charge of each position. The men were carefully chosen from all parts of the Brigade for these posts of action and

danger, and all details were worked out with precision, with the exception of securing the necessary petrol. Some abortive attempts were made to secure this, and eventually Austin McCurtin got word of a consignment at Menagh railway station. He secured a lorry and, commandeering the petrol, removed it to Moneygall in the 2nd Battalion area. The petrol, being in tins, was hidden in a sandpit, and fortunately it was removed from there early next day by the Moneygall Company, as before evening a large force of police came and searched in the spot where it had been dumped, obviously having got information about it.

The securing of bottles and the bottling of one hundred gallons of petrol was another headache, but this was successfully done by the Moneygall Company who, on the night of the attack, had it transported safely to the scene of action.

All was now ready for the Saturday night in June 1920 that had been decided on for the attack. Midnight was zero hour, and all our forces were mobilised and ready at a quarry, one mile from the town, at 11. p.m. Frank McGrath, Brigade O/C, who had just been released, took command, and the men fell in and marched off at 11.30 p.m.

By this time, Ned O'Leary's road-blocking gangs were at work, and it was safe to assume that every road leading to Borrisokane was effectively blocked as we swung into the main street. As a matter of fact, the blockade was so well done that it took the military a week to clear the roads to get there.

As we entered Borrisokane, a diversion occurred.

We noticed barbed wire tied across the street from a telegraph pole to another post, and we held, for interrogation, three men we found on the street as we suspected they had erected the wire. These turned out to be three local robbers - ex British soldiers - who had selected that night to do a bit of burglary. Our advent nipped their little enterprise in the bud, and I arrested them and put them under an armed guard while we proceeded to take up our allotted positions.

The Brigade O/C entered the house adjoining the left-hand side of the barracks from which the attack on the roof was to be made, and at twelve midnight gave the signal to open fire. Immediately, the windows and doors of the barracks were peppered with rifle fire but, as we knew rifle fire was ineffective against the sand-bagged and steel shuttered building, it was merely kept up as a cover for the all important work of breaking through the roof of the barracks.

Immediately the first shots were fired, the garrison got to their loop-holes and returned the fire, while they kept sending up a constant stream of Verey lights. My particular job was to ensure that a constant supply of bottles of petrol reached the men on the roof who very quickly had a breach made and, in a matter of minutes, the barracks had started to burn.

I and my men, who were bringing the petrol from an archway next to the house occupied by the Brigade O/C, were the only ones in the open and exposed to the fire of our own men and splinters from enemy hand grenades. Being our first time under fire, as we dashed from the archway through the street and into the house adjoining

the barracks, we were a bit nervous in the beginning. In fact, I had to threaten some of the lads with my gun to force them to take the first bottles. After the first few runs, they were as cool as veterans - walking in and out in their shirt sleeves, singing and joking, while bullets spattered in all directions around them.

The barracks was well ablaze when we had our first piece of bad luck. One of our men on the roof - Michael Kennedy of Nenagh - was shot through the upper part of the leg. He was carried down and handed over to me, and I had him removed to Dr. Quigley's of Borrisokane where I left him to have his wound dressed. On my return to the attack, more bad news awaited me. Jimmie O'Meara of Toomevara had been shot through the arm as he replaced Michael Kennedy on the roof. Jimmie was also taken to Dr. Quigley's, and his place was taken by Andy Cooney who was to become famous for the stirring part he took in the fight in the years to follow.

Shortly after this - when the fight had been on about two hours - the Brigade O/C sent me word that he was going to withdraw. I was terribly disappointed at this, as it was obvious to me that nothing could now save the barracks and it was only a matter of time until the garrison would have to come out and surrender. I sent back a message, appealing to him not to withdraw, and he consented to remain another hour. At the end of the hour, he sent again to me orders to notify the men in the different positions to withdraw, and it was in a very disappointed frame of mind that I carried out these orders and withdrew from the attack when we were on the verge of success. We discovered later that, half an

hour after we had left, the garrison were forced to leave the burning building.

As I was last to leave the town, having kept my section of men to remove to a safe place what was left of the petrol, I was further annoyed to discover that the Brigade O/C and the main body of the Volunteers had gone and had left our two wounded comrades behind. It was at this stage that I was thankful for the prisoners whom we had arrested in the beginning and who were still under guard. They were able to give us information as to where we could get a lorry to bring the wounded men with us, and one of them was able to drive. Our surplus petrol now came in useful as the petrol tank in the lorry was empty. And so on a commandeered lorry, driven by a confessed burglar, and with his two comrades brought along to prevent them giving information, we collected our wounded men and set out from Borrisokane via Kilbarron, this being the road left open except for one road block - a stone wall - without any clear idea of where we were going or what was best to do for our wounded comrades.

The wounded men were brought by us as far as Puckane where we left Jimmy O'Meara with the local curate, Father Fogarty, who only kept him for a few hours when he drove him in his pony and trap to O'Meara's own home at Toomevara. The second wounded man, whose condition was much more serious, was brought to Ned Slattery's, Ballycommon, three miles from Nenagh. Andy Cooney cycled from there into Nenagh and brought out Dr. Louis Courtney who first treated Kennedy's wound, then went back to Nenagh Hospital and got two Sisters of the St. John of God nursing order to come with him to

avert suspicion. With his passengers, he returned to Ballycommon and took Kennedy from there to Barrington's Hospital, Limerick, where he died after a fortnight. His remains were taken home and, after a military funeral, he was buried in Kilbarron.

Prior to the release of Frank McGrath, G.H.Q. had ordered the destruction of all vacated R.I.C. barracks and also the raiding of income tax offices throughout the country on the night of 3rd April 1920. In the Nenagh area, I took charge of a party who raided the local income tax collector's office. About half a dozen men forced an entrance into this office and removed all the papers and records found there, to the yard of the creamery where they were burned. While the office was being searched, the street leading to it was held by a dozen of the local Volunteers, armed with revolvers, but there was no attempt at interference by enemy forces who apparently were taken by surprise. All the men concerned in the raid got away safely, and I cannot recall the arrest of anyone for having participated in it.

The Brigade O/C, Frank McGrath, owing to certain newly formed partnerships in business with a bitter enemy of Sinn Féin and the I.R.A. - a man called Frank R. Moloney, Nenagh - had incurred a good deal of unpopularity among his own men and Sinn Féin supporters generally. The manner in which he handled the Borrisokane barrack attack brought matters to a crisis. His decision to retreat prematurely and his desertion of the wounded men were regarded as inexcusable. Besides, it was the general opinion that his association

in prison with men who did not approve of physical force caused him to become so moderate in his view as to be unfit to lead the brigade at this critical juncture. I sent my resignation as Brigade Adjutant to G.H.Q., explaining that I could not see my way to hold the post any longer while Frank McGrath remained as Brigade Commandant. In this action, I was supported by practically all the younger officers in the brigade.

Instead of accepting my resignation, G.H.Q. sent down a representative, Peadar Bracken, with instructions to remove Frank McGrath and to appoint myself in his place. This was done, and I was succeeded as Brigade Adjutant by Ned O'Leary. The changes occurred about August, 1920, and as a result the staff of the North Tipperary Brigade then comprised:-

Commandant	-	Myself.
Vice Commandant	-	Liam Hoolan.
Adjutant	-	Ned O'Leary.
Quartermaster	-	Frank Flannery.

My first action after being appointed was to take stock of the men occupying posts as battalion officers, some of whom were rather old for their jobs. I made a number of changes, as described earlier, and, in replacing these men, I made the appointments myself rather than resorting to the previous method of election by the battalion council. When this was completed, I next formed a Brigade Active Service Unit.

The Active Service Unit comprised twenty men. The column might have been larger or two columns might have been formed, if sufficient rifles were available.

I might mention that the 3rd and 6th Battalions did not co-operate by giving men or rifles towards the personnel or equipment of the column. The column commander was Ned O'Leary, Brigade Adjutant, and the training officer was Sean Glennon, an ex Irish Guardsman. The deputy column commander was Sean Collison.

Immediately the personnel of the column was selected, the men were brought together in the townland of Gortagarry, Moneygall, for a few weeks training, being supplied with food by the local people. Washing and laundry were done by the Moneygall Cumann na mBan. Boots and cigarettes, paid for out of brigade funds, were sent to them from Nenagh. Incidentally, the funds for the brigade were obtained by means of lectures, concerts, dances and dramas and contributions from the battalions.

Before the establishment of the column, a number of armed attacks of a minor nature had taken place in the brigade area. Some of these operations had been carried out by the local units of the I.R.A. without consulting the brigade staff. The attack on the R.I.C. in Lorrha on 2nd September, 1919, in which one policeman was killed and one wounded, and the ambush of the police at Lackamore Wood in April, 1920, resulting in the deaths of two policemen, were both brought off in this way. An earlier incident took place in January, 1918, when a British soldier ~~home~~ on furlough brought home a rifle. His home in Silvermines was raided by a few of the local Volunteers, in the course of which the soldier's father, George Sheehan, who was alone in the house at the time, was shot dead.

He attempted to prevent his son's rifle from being seized and, in a struggle which ensued, the fatal shot was discharged. The rifle was taken, and it happened to be the gun which I used myself later as the guerilla campaign developed.

There was also an attack on the R.I.C. at Toomevara on 16th March, 1920, which was carried out by the local Volunteers under the control of Paddy ^{Whelan} ~~Whelan~~. Approval for this attack was sought from the brigade council by ^{Whelan} ~~Whelan~~ in person, but the council declined to give permission. I did not agree with the council's decision and, ^{and in a meeting with Whelan} ~~meeting Whelan~~ after the meeting, I advised him to proceed with the job. The Toomevara policemen were making themselves very obnoxious in the eyes of the local volunteers and were going out of their way to provoke trouble. I offered to take part in the attack myself, and about a fortnight later I actually was a member of a party of about ten who lay in wait for a patrol of four policemen who were expected to come along the Toomevara-Moneygall road. The police did not show up that night, and I gave the revolver which I had to Paddy ~~Whelan~~ and told him to keep it until the attack was carried out. He planned several ambushes of this patrol within the next two months, but the police had abandoned doing regular patrols, and all ^{Whelan's} ~~Whelan's~~ efforts were unavailing. Eventually, as two of the R.I.C. were coming out from evening devotions at Toomevara R.C. Church, they were shot dead.

A number of rifles were procured from British soldiers home on furlough from France. I have no idea of what the figure was. I did take part in the purchase of one of these guns from a native of Nenagh, named

Sheridan. He sold us the gun for a pound.

As I have stated earlier, coincidental with the framing of plans for the attack on Borrisokane R.I.C. barracks, a certain amount of planning for an attack by our brigade on Rearcross R.I.C. barracks had been done. The failure of the Borrisokane operation, however, caused a delay in proceeding with the attack on Rearcross, but definitely the idea was not abandoned. A well known Volunteer belonging to the No. 1 Tipperary Brigade, but who had no rank and had on his own accord and without permission from his Brigade Commandant taken part in operations with the South and Mid Tipperary Brigades where he came into personal contact with Seán Treacy, Dan Breen and Ernie O'Malley, all prominent personalities in the I.R.A., urged these men to arrange an attack on Rearcross barracks. This Volunteer was Paddy Ryan (Lacken). Strange to say, he had declined to assist us on the attack in Borrisokane.

Under the command of Ernie O'Malley, then a G.H.Q. organiser in South Tipperary, a strong I.R.A. force composed of men from South and Mid Tipperary and also some elements of 5th & 6th Battalions of the ^{No 1} (North) Tipperary Brigade were mobilised in the vicinity of Rearcross to attack the barracks in that village.

At that period there were orders issued by G.H.Q. which strictly forbade men from one area carrying out an operation in another area without the prior consent of the officer in charge of the area in which the operation was to take place. In the case of Rearcross, no notification whatever was given to the Brigade Commandant of that area - No. 1 Tipperary Brigade - by O'Malley or anybody else. By an

accident, the Vice Commandant of the 5th Battalion, Patrick Doherty, heard of the impending attack on the Saturday - the night on which it was to occur. Doherty at once came to Nenagh to report what he had heard to Frank McGrath, his Brigade Commander. McGrath forthwith sent a despatch to either Seán Treacy or O'Malley, ordering the attack to be abandoned, and at the same time gave verbal instructions to Doherty that no man in the 5th Battalion area was to assist in the operation. Doherty's compliance with these instructions prevented the obstruction of certain roads which it was essential to block, in order to prevent reinforcements coming to the relief of the police in Rearcross. These roads included the main roads leading to Rearcross from Thurles and Templemore, both of which were heavily garrisoned by the enemy. O'Malley did not proceed with the attack on that Saturday night, but postponed it until the following night, taking advantage of the intervening day to make other arrangements to have road barricades erected on the roads referred to.

The attack took place on Sunday night, but the post was not captured, though the building was so badly destroyed that it had to be evacuated next day, and causing the R.I.C. to be withdrawn from the locality. As I did not participate in this attack, I can give no details regarding it.

At the time that I took over command of the No.1 Tipperary Brigade, the state of Intelligence in the brigade was very poor indeed. I had to look for a real live-wire to take control of this work and, for

that purpose, I selected Austin McCurtain, O/C of the 1st (Nenagh) Battalion, as Brigade Intelligence officer. Together we discussed the lines on which Intelligence should be built up. We decided that, in order to get this side of the military machine working effectively, we should start with the companies, as, ~~it was~~ over a very scattered area and, unless the local men helped in bringing to the notice of the brigade everything that occurred in each company area, the brigade staff would not be in a position to have a proper picture of what was occurring in the area under their control. We regarded it as imperative that we should have a day to day account of all movements of the enemy forces, whether it was the police out on patrol within the town or village, where the police and military went for drinks or any form of recreation, how they obtained supplies, how often outlying posts were served by convoys from supply depots, and if any particular member of the enemy garrison was making himself prominent because of truculent or aggressive behaviour. In addition, it was thought to be most important to have lists compiled of any of the civilian population who might be considered hostile, especially by giving information to the enemy.

McCurtain carried out the organisation of Intelligence himself, and started by appointing an Intelligence officer in each battalion and in each company area. Orders issued by him required each company intelligence officer to furnish a weekly report to his battalion intelligence officer, who, in turn, would condense these reports and submit a report to the brigade intelligence officer. In the event of any

item of unusual or special importance coming under notice, the company intelligence officer was instructed to report such an item instanter. All the intelligence officers were asked to make special efforts to try and make contact with members of the enemy forces who might be inclined to be friendly, with a view to getting whatever information they were prepared to impart.

McCurtain, as I.O. for the brigade, was in direct contact with the Director of Intelligence, Michael Collins, by rail, through a railway guard, Pat O'Shea, Nenagh, and also with the commander of the brigade active service unit.

Generally speaking, I would say that very little information was obtained in the brigade area through members of the enemy forces. In Toomevara, an R.I.C. man named O'Brien, and another man in Cloughjordan called Feeney, did give news of impending raids in their own localities. In Nenagh town the Intelligence Officer of the 1st Battalion, William Flannery, was a personal friend of the postmaster, Mr. Manning, who, though a civil servant, was a sound supporter of the I.R.A. Mr. Manning passed over to Flannery every possible item of news which he gleaned in his official capacity, such as, copies of telegrams and details of phone conversations between one enemy post and the other. The information obtained through this postmaster apprised us in advance on at least half a dozen occasions of big round-ups which the enemy had planned.

In order to facilitate the work of the intelligence staff, systematic raids were made on the mails. Between October 1920 and the Truce, scarcely a week passed without such a raid taking place in some part of the

brigade area. The battalion I.O. in Roscrea made seizures at the local railway station very frequently while the mail car between Nenagh and Thurles was so often held up that it used to be said that, in the end, the horse would stop on seeing an armed I.R.A. man on the road. Despite all the attention which was devoted to the searching of the mails, I cannot remember anything of importance having been discovered.

My efforts to reorganise the brigade and to establish the active service unit occupied most of my time between August 1920 ^{and} ~~to~~ the end of October 1920. By then, I had also established a recognised headquarters for the brigade in Fawnlough, one and a half miles from Nenagh, in the house of Thomas O'Brien. His sitting room became our office. In it we had a typewriter which myself and most of the brigade staff were able to use. The house was situated about a quarter of a mile from a by-road that connected, after half a mile or so, with the Nenagh-Dolla main road. Though all the Volunteers within a radius of a couple of miles were aware of the location of brigade headquarters, it was never raided by the enemy. One of the O'Brien girls had married an ex head constable of the R.I.C., named Denis Horgan, who in 1920 was occupying the post of Petty Sessions clerk in Nenagh. The Petty Sessions was the Court of Summary Jurisdiction under British rule. Mr. Horgan visited his people-in-law almost every evening and, though he became aware of the fact that we were using their home as brigade headquarters, he kept this knowledge to himself, and also was probably the cause of diverting the suspicion of the enemy from the place. The brigade

staff rarely slept in O'Brien's place, but used a couple of empty houses in the neighbourhood for this purpose, beds and bedclothes having been obtained through seizures of Belfast goods.

There was a boycott of all goods coming into the area from Belfast firms, under a decree of Dáil Éireann. The staff at Nenagh railway station were nearly all members of the I.R.A. or supporters of Sinn Féin. Whenever a consignment of such goods arrived, the railway officials passed on word to the officers of the Nenagh company who promptly arranged for the seizure of these goods. Ultimately, because of the repeated seizures, the Belfast firms ceased to send any more consignments into the district. Similar action was taken by the I.R.A. in all the other districts in North Tipperary and with like results.

The shooting of an R.I.C. constable named McCarthy outside the Nenagh post office on 2nd November 1920 by members of the Nenagh company - my brother, Michael, Eddie Quigley and George Gleeson - gave rise to a lively period of military activity in the town of Nenagh. Though the policeman was only wounded, the R.I.C. and military burned the houses of Jim Nolan and John D. Flannery in Pearse Street. On the next day, a British military officer, Lieutenant Hambleton, threatened to shoot one of the local curates, Father O'Halloran, an outspoken critic of British rule even from the ^{parish} ~~parish~~.

On the 4th November 1920, a member of the Nenagh company, Joseph Starr, recognised Lieutenant Hambleton going to Templemore on a motor bike and notified the commander of the active service unit, Ned O'Leary, who

with his men was in the Knockalton area at the time. O'Leary took three or four men and waited near Cleary's house in Lisstunny, one mile from Nenagh. Between three and four o'clock in the evening, Hambleton was on his way back to Nenagh when he was shot dead by O'Leary and his party. This officer was only wounded by the first volley of shots which knocked him on the ground off the bike. He returned the fire, but another volley from the attackers put an end to his resistance. Two members of the Nenagh company, named John and Thomas O'Brien, not relations, who went to stay in Rody Cleary's, Knigh, three miles from Nenagh, for safety on the night of 2nd November, were taken from that house by a party of military and done to death in a most brutal manner.

Following the shooting of Lieutenant Hambleton, it was expected that crown forces would destroy Nenagh creamery and other houses in the town. To counteract such enemy activity, I gave orders to the Commandant of the Nenagh Battalion, Con Spain, to mobilise fifty men from his unit, and to the commander of the active service unit to bring his force to the back of the creamery. The A.S.U. were armed with rifles and the others had shotguns. These men assembled about ten o'clock on the night of the 4th November 1920, and were still waiting for the enemy at midnight. Then, by accident, a shotgun was discharged. After this happened, I decided that the enemy would be warned of our presence and would not venture out. I then dismissed the men. Three nights later, the creamery was burned to the ground by a combined force of police and military. Of course, it was not possible to have the I.R.A. mobilised every night to watch out for incendiaries,

and, as well, we got the idea that when the creamery was not burned on the night after the shooting of Lieutenant Hambleton, the enemy had no intention of destroying that building.

At this stage - about November 1920 - the enemy held posts in North Tipperary as follows:-

Nenagh	- R.I.C. post - about 40 men.
	Military post in local military barracks at Summerhill - about 60 men.
Toomevara	- R.I.C. post - about 12 men.
Cloughjordan	- " " " 20 "
Borrisokane	- " " " 20 "
Templederry	- " " " 20 "
Silvermines	- " " " 20 "
Kilcommon	- " " " 26 "
Newport	- " " " 20 "
Portroe	- " " " 20 "
Ballina	- Auxiliary post - about 50 men.
Roscrea	- R.I.C. post - about 25 men
Templemore	- " " " 25 " Military post, battalion headquarters.
Birr	- R.I.C. post - about 30 men. Military post and a battalion headquarters.

After the shooting in Nenagh, the enemy conducted widespread raids, mostly at night-time, around the district. From thence onwards, my own home was visited by these raiders at least once a week. In all this activity, I cannot remember that a wanted man was ever captured except one night about 25th November 1920 when, during a raid on the home of the McCurtain brothers, Austin and Sean, in Pearse Street, the Tans found a very

good Volunteer, Denis Carey, in bed. Poor Carey at the time was managing the hardware business owned by the McCurtain family. He was taken to Wolfe Tone Terrace on the outskirts of the town and there riddled with bullets.

It had been observed that a military lorry began to run fairly regularly between Templemore and Nenagh towards the end of November 1920. The Column O/C decided to attack this lorry, and selected a position at Letteragh, eight statute miles from Nenagh and about twelve miles from Templemore. The column provided about fifteen riflemen and they were reinforced by six or eight men from the Letteragh section of the Templederry company. The position which they occupied was on the left hand side of the road travelling from Nenagh, and the men were placed at the top of a steep and wooded eminence roughly two hundred yards from the road. On the other side, the road was skirted by the Nenagh river beyond which the country was flat and did not afford any suitable attacking position. The lorry, containing nine or ten soldiers, came along, between eleven and twelve o'clock, and was fired on by the riflemen. The driver accelerated speed, and brought his vehicle out of shooting range without loss except the wounding of one soldier. I was with the column in this engagement but did not interfere with the O/C's arrangements. The column retired into Gortagarry outside Toomevara, and rested for about a fortnight before again coming into action at Kilcommon on 16th December 1920.

At that time the R.I.C. in Kilcommon patrolled the road between Kilcommon Cross and Kilcommon village, a

distance of about a mile. The site chosen for this attack was about three hundred yards from Kilcommon Cross, but I did not participate in the operation and therefore cannot supply very much details. The enemy had four men killed and three wounded, and there were no losses on our side. The enemy also lost some rifles.

A few days before Christmas, the column was disbanded for a fortnight, and each man returned to his own locality. On its reassembly about the second week in January, it met under new leadership. I felt that, as it had not been sufficiently active, it was better to remove ^{the O.C.} Ned O'Leary to his old post as Brigade Adjutant and replace him by Jack Collison, the Vice O/C of the column. It is only fair to Collison, I think, to say that he experienced a good deal of ill-luck in his new role. He had the column awaiting the enemy several times, but on each occasion no attack took place as the enemy did not show up. I believe it was towards the end of January 1921 that he had occupied a position at Castle Otway, between Templederry and Latteragh, to meet an R.I.C. patrol from Templederry. On that day, as one of the officers of the Templederry company, Sam. O'Brien, was scouting in the village, the local R.I.C. sergeant, John Igoe, called him and told him to "go out and tell them lads who were lying in ambush out the road to go away". On O'Brien delivering the message, Collison withdrew his men.

Just a month or so before Christmas 1920, a Captain Michael McCormack was sent down to Tipperary from Headquarters, Dublin with a view to forming the 3rd Southern Division. This man was a first-class organiser

and a fine drill instructor. Having sized up the local situation, one of the first jobs he undertook was the establishment of training camps for the officers of the brigade. The first of such camps was set up in Ballymacegan, Lorrha, where the classes were held in a gentleman's residence, vacant at the time. This camp lasted about a fortnight, and the training consisted of a thorough course on the rifle and the revolver, squad and company drill, skirmishing, visual training and semaphore. Each officer was required to take a class for instruction and, by the time the course finished, I think there was a big improvement in the military knowledge of all those who attended. Other such camps were held in Ballywilliam and Glenculloo. During the period of each camp, which altogether totalled about seven weeks, the brigade column did guard duty and any spare time which the members of the column had was devoted to training in semaphore.

In March 1921, in response to a message from Liam Forde of the Mid Limerick brigade staff, I went to Castleconnell, Co. Limerick, where I met Sean Carroll who rowed ^{me} across the Shannon and took me to a house in the Clare side where I met Forde and Austin Brennan, then in charge of the East Clare brigade. Forde disclosed that his purpose in inviting me to the meeting was to get me to send a number of men from the North Tipperary brigade into Limerick city to shoot a number of R.I.C. and "Tans" who were making themselves very objectionable by beating up the civilian population in that city. I could not see my way to agree to his request, as I considered there should be at least a dozen men in the Mid Limerick brigade who would have enough courage to carry out this job without bringing in absolute strangers

for the purpose. On learning from Forde that they had more rifles than they needed, I asked for and got the loan of six long Lee Enfield rifles. On the night following my return, I sent Austin McCurtain and five men from the Nenagh company for these rifles. This party walked to and from Castleconnell in one night, a total distance of about thirty-six miles, and brought back the guns with them. We kept these weapons until the Truce, and I may say that, when we received them, they were in such an extremely neglected condition that it took a considerable amount of time and trouble to get the dirt and corrosion out of them. Even then, they were only fit for training purposes in the camps.

In April 1921, Captain Michael McCormack and myself were summoned to Dublin to attend a meeting of brigade officers with representatives of G.H.Q. staff who included Dick Mulcahy, Chief of Staff, Gearoid O'Sullivan, Adjutant General, Sean McMahon, Quartermaster General, J.J. O'Connell and a few others. There were brigade officers present from all over the country. As I now remember it, the two principal items discussed at that meeting were the formation of divisions and a "pep talk" to the officers from brigades that were not regarded as pulling their weight in the fight, with a view to relieving enemy pressure on some of the southern brigades. The meeting was held in ^a ~~some~~ hall in Parnell Square, Dublin, and McCormack and myself travelled by train to and from Dublin.

In the Newport area, the I.R.A. organisation was very poor, and the police in that village were under the control of a vicious type of Black and Tan officer named Biggs, an Englishman. He had the countryside terrorised,

burning the houses of I.R.A. men, shooting Volunteers and civilians, beating up men, and on one occasion at Silvermines after Mass on a Sunday, he rounded up the congregation and ordered the people to sing "God Save The King", which they made an effort to do after volleys being fired over their heads. A favourite practice of this officer was to bring well known I.R.A. supporters in lorries as hostages through the country. Old Matt Ryan, father of the prominent I.R.A. man, Paddy Ryan (Lacken), was kept a prisoner in Newport for two or three months and was used frequently as a hostage. In addition, old Ryan, while imprisoned, was threatened almost every day by Biggs particularly, in regard to the fate that awaited his son, Paddy, should he ever be captured.

With the twofold purpose in mind of putting the Newport area into a properly organised state and of shooting D.I. Biggs, I went to the Newport district on the 15th May 1921. I stayed that night outside the village of Newport, and was thinking of going to bed when Paddy Ryan (Lacken), Tom McGrath and Dinny Hayes arrived in the house after having come back from a period of service with the East Limerick Brigade, during which another colleague of their's, Paddy Starr, Nenagh, had lost his life fighting in the Lackelly ambush. In a discussion which I had with these three men, they agreed to come with me to a meeting of the 6th (Newport) Battalion which I had convened for the following night in the Ballinahinch country. Next day, on our way to Ballinahinch, we called at Tom McGrath's home at the Turnpike road for our dinner. While we were partaking of this meal, McGrath's sister went outside to do some outing. She noticed a private car passing the

house and recognised in it D.I. Biggs, two other men in civilian attire, and two females.

Miss McGrath came back to tell us this news, and suggested that the car was probably on its way to the house of a Major Gabbitt, a well-known loyalist who frequently entertained D.I. Biggs and his friends. Our reaction to this news was to rise from the dinner and make preparations to ambush the car on its return journey. As there were two roads running between Killoscully (Major Gabbitt's residence) and Newport, we decided to collect about a dozen of the local Volunteers who had shotguns to ensure that both roads would be watched and the car attacked in either road. Myself, Paddy Ryan (Lacken), Tom McGrath, Dinny Hayes and four of the Newport Volunteers took up positions at Coolboreen, four miles from Newport, while the other men went to the Rossaguile road.

At Coolboreen there is a bridge on the bend of the road coming from Killoscully. Inside the fence, on the right-hand side of the road and on the Newport side of the bridge, myself, with revolver, Paddy Ryan (Lacken) and Tom McGrath, both with rifles, and one of the local Volunteers with a shotgun were waiting. Forty yards or so further on towards Newport but on the opposite side of the road, Dinny Hayes, with a rifle, was in charge of three local Volunteers, equipped with shotguns. Two hundred yards to my left, we had a scout posted in a prominent position to warn us when the motor car would be coming back.

The car returned about three o'clock in the evening, and the scout gave us the signal that our

quarry was approaching, and when the car had passed the bridge, all my party opened fire. The car went on for about twenty yards, and then came to a halt on the left-hand side of the road. Three people alighted from it. The local Volunteer who was with us, and who knew the District Inspector, shouted, "That's the D.I.!" We re-opened fire on these three people. One of them ran off towards Newport and escaped, one fell in the centre of the road, and the third fell into the ditch. After a few minutes, another man emerged from the car with his hands up, and he came walking towards us. He turned out to be Major Cabbitt. He informed us that Miss Barrington had been shot. She was the person who fell into the ditch but, being dressed in mannish fashion, she was mistaken for a man. McGrath, Ryan and myself then went up to the car, where we found, unharmed, an English woman named Rivers. She was by no means frightened, and proceeded to give us "dogs' abuse" for having shot Miss Barrington. Miss Rivers' language upset me somewhat, but Ryan quickly silenced her when he said, "Only for the bitch being in bad company, she would not be shot!" The car was searched, but it contained nothing of interest to us. The man who had fallen in the centre of the road turned out to be District Inspector Biggs, and he was dead. Miss Barrington was badly wounded, having been shot through the lung. We got the women in nearby houses to take her in and render whatever aid they could. She died in a few hours. She was the only daughter of a big landowner in Glenstal, County Limerick.

Expecting a big round-up in the area, I called off the battalion council meeting, and, with Ryan,

McGrath and Hayes, I went to Toor, between Newport and Knockfune. There, Ryan and McGrath left us, and Hayes and I went on, the former going to his own place in Ballywilliam, and I proceeding to brigade headquarters. Before I separated from these men, they promised me that they would join the North Tipperary active service unit as soon as they got a few days rest. Subsequently, only Hayes kept his word, and I think that illness was the cause of the other two not doing so.

At brigade headquarters, I had some business which kept me engaged for a few weeks, at the end of which I decided to spend a while with the active service unit, then located in Ferryglass outside Portumna. Reaching there, I found the unit had left for Eglish, about six miles away, and I went on to that area where I overtook the men in their billets. Incidentally, a man from the Nenagh company, armed with a shotgun, Pat Nolan, Cunnahert, accompanied me on this journey. (There was already a brother of his with the active service unit, but he insisted in taking part too.)

In Eglish I met the commandant of the 4th battalion, Felix Cronin, whom I questioned about the possibility of engaging the enemy in his area. He told me that, on the previous day, a great chance had been lost in Ballinderry. The Volunteers had cut the telegraph wires in that townland and, on hearing about it, a dozen police on bikes came out there from Borrisokane. The police proceeded to get drunk in the local pub, and threw their rifles carelessly around the bar and its precincts, and did not return to Borrisokane for several hours. While all this was happening, the active

service unit was in the 4th battalion area, a few miles away, and no steps were taken to notify them. I gave Cronin some of my mind for his neglect in this matter, but our conversation gave me the idea that, by cutting the wires again, there was a possibility that we could lure the police into an ambush.

On my orders, Cronin arranged to cut the telegraph wires next day at Ballinderry, and I took the active service unit during the night into the neighbourhood of that village. Scouts were also posted in Borrisokane to watch the movements of the police and report to me as soon as a patrol was observed to be setting out. At four o'clock in the evening, one of these scouts on a bike came out to me with the news that one of the police in Borrisokane had called him, in the street, and told him that they knew in the barracks that we were in Ballinderry and that military were on their way from Birr to round us up. The policeman also added that a party of thirteen policemen on bikes would be going from Borrisokane to Cloughjordan on the following Friday morning to attend a court.

I decided to keep the latter part of the scout's message to myself and, for safety sake, decided to remove the active service unit to Ardcroney, between Nenagh and Borrisokane. My reason for not mentioning the full message I had received to anyone else was because I began to feel a bit perturbed over the fact that the enemy had failed to turn up when ambushes had been prepared for him, and I thought of the possibility of this being due to information having reached him, through loose talk even among the Volunteers themselves. The active service unit remained in Ardcroney from

Tuesday to Thursday morning, and in that time I put them through an intensive course of training in occupying ambush positions and the use of cover.

On Thursday morning we moved from Ardcroney to Bantiss, four miles from Cloughjordan, and in the vicinity of the Cloughjordan-Borrisokane road. We billeted in Bantiss for the night, joined by Bill Dwyer, 1st Lieutenant of the Cloughjordan company, and seven of his unit equipped with shotguns. Leaving billets at four in the morning of 3rd June, 1921, the party marched along the road to a point in the townland of Modreeny, about midway between Borrisokane and Cloughjordan. As we were coming to the end of this march, I disclosed to the commander of the active service unit the full information I had received in Ballinderry from the scout.

Our total force now amounted to seventeen men, equipped with rifles, seven more with shotguns, and one with a revolver, and we deemed this to be good enough to cope with the police patrol of thirteen cyclists. In Modreeny we ~~formed~~^{found} a position which we regarded as suitable for the operation. The position is illustrated in the sketch shown in Appendix "A" to this statement.

The main party, described as section ^A, occupied a position at the bend of the road where it is joined by a laneway. At another bend on the road and right behind the fence was section ^B no. 2, comprised of six riflemen under Sean Glennon. Section ^C no. 3 included the seven local Volunteers, armed with shotguns, under one of their own officers. Five men in scattered

points were detailed to act as snipers and to cover up the other parties, should the necessity arise. Their positions are also indicated in sketch. Bill Dwyer and another of his own unit were posted on top of a height, three hundred yards to the right of the main party, to act as scouts.

The sections were about to go into the different positions at six o'clock in the morning when a man came along the road, carrying an ass's winkers. The Cloughjordan men recognised him as an ex British soldier who was regarded as hostile to us. I and a few of the officers held him up and interrogated him. He took us to be British forces - Auxiliaries - because of our attire, trench-coats, breeches and leggings, and caps worn in the reverse way. We questioned him about the local Sinn Féiners. He described them as a dangerous crowd, and told us the names of three of the prominent Volunteers in the area, Bill Dwyer, Jim O'Heara and Sean Kenny, the latter being the company captain. We decided to hold him as a precaution, advising him to remain with us for his own safety, since we expected that the Sinn Féiners might be coming at any time and he might be caught in the cross-firing. He agreed without demur to this course, and he stayed with us - section A - during most of the ambush.

Around nine o'clock in the morning, Dwyer, in a semaphore message, read by Jack Collison, signalled the approach of the enemy and gave details of their formation. This consisted of two police cyclists in front as scouts, then four motor cars, followed by four cyclists, two abreast, and in the rear a military lorry. Collison and myself had a quick discussion as to

whether the enemy force, estimated at forty men instead of thirteen as we expected, was too big a handful to tackle, but he was extremely keen on testing the active service unit in action, and so we agreed to go ahead with the attack. At his request, I took over charge of the operation, and took his whistle from him, one blast from which was to be the signal to open fire, and three blasts for a withdrawal.

The leading cyclists were allowed to go about two hundred yards beyond section A., and the first of the motor cars was just approaching the bend at which section A were placed when I blew a single blast of the whistle. Section A started firing, and all the others, except section B, followed suit. The military lorry was really outside the ambush position, and the occupants, on dismounting, tried to get into the field on their right, in the hope of developing an encircling movement. They were prevented from doing this by the accurate fire of the two snipers, Jack Collison and Tim Gleeson, who kept them pinned to the road. The lorry itself left the scene of the ambush soon after the attack had opened and, with the driver as its only passenger, went off in the direction of Borrisokane. I knew that the driver had been despatched for reinforcements, but made up my mind to persevere with the attack, as we might be able to overpower the enemy before the reinforcements arrived.

All the police in the first car - five men - were either killed or wounded except the D.I., Fitzpatrick, who threw himself out of the car and got cover at the roadside. The rest of the police at once got into

positions along the road fences. They attempted to advance towards section A and a number of them were hit in the attempt. The military also started to move towards us up the road, but did not come as far as the bend where section ^B Q had been posted. Thus they were outside our field of fire but should have come right under the fire of section ^B Q. They soon began to worry us by the use of rifle grenades, which all fortunately fell harmlessly well to our rear. After ten or fifteen minutes of intensive firing, a lull ensued, and it then struck me that ~~no. 2~~ section ^B A was not in action. From my own position, I was now not able to get a sure shot at any of the enemy who were hidden in cover along the roadside, so I jumped over the wall on to the road where I lay down in the middle of the carriage way. I was releasing a spent cartridge when I found the rifle had jammed. There was then nothing left for me but to get inside the fence again where I discovered one of the members of the A.S.U., praying with his beads in his hands and his rifle over his shoulder. I exchanged rifles with this man. I next made an attempt to ascertain what had happened to ~~no. 2~~ section ^B A, making a detour through the fields and across the road, on the Borrisokane side, to a point where I could clearly see that ~~no. 2~~ section ^B A had gone. I then returned to my original position with section no. A.

The ambush was now in progress for about half an hour, and it was soon time for the reinforcements, for which the military lorry had been sent, to be coming on the scene. In view of the loss of ~~no. 2~~ section ^B A I came to the conclusion that it would be too risky to keep up the engagement any longer. Before doing this, we tried

to collect as many of the guns of the dead enemy forces as possible, but we only got two rifles which were still on the bikes of the police who had been leading the party. We also collected a hundred rounds of .303 ammunition. I sent word to the snipers and section ~~3C~~ to retire to the point "X" on sketch, where section ~~A~~ was awaiting them, and then retreated along route marked also on sketch. Before the party crossed the main road, I instructed the local men to disperse. ^{what remained of} With ~~A~~ the A.S.U. I went through the fields and bogs to Knockshegowna where billets for the night were procured.

On our way through a bog, there were a number of men working at turf, including some Volunteers. I learned from them that Glennon, with ~~no~~ ^B 2 section ~~A~~ had passed that way half an hour earlier. When we reached Knockshegowna, that section were there before us. Glennon's explanation of his early flight was that he was obliged to do so as the military had made his position untenable. Though I had my own views about his action, I made it appear that I was satisfied. As we were making our way from Modreeny to Knockshegowna, we came in view of the Birr-Borrisokane road and saw seven or eight lorries of soldiers being rushed to the scene of the ambush.

On the whole, I was pleased with the result of the Modreeny engagement. We suffered no casualties and, fighting with depleted forces against very big odds, we inflicted heavy losses on the enemy, which we learned from good authority were four killed and fourteen wounded, and, besides, captured two rifles and some ammunition. The I.R.A. Chief of Staff, Dick

Mulcahy, sent a letter of congratulation to myself "and all engaged".

On the day after Hodreeny, I attended our usual monthly meeting of the brigade council held at Kilruane. This was the last time before the Truce that I presided over this council. Next day, I went to brigade headquarters where I started preparations to relinquish my post as brigade commandant, to take up duty as adjutant of the newly created 3rd Southern Division. I was replaced by Liam Hoolan, and his place as Vice Brigadier was given to Felix Cronin, Commandant of the 4th Battalion. Austin McCurtain, Chief Intelligence Officer of the Brigade, was made Divisional Quartermaster, and he was replaced by William O'Brien.

The 3rd Southern Division was made up of No. 1 Tipperary Brigade, Nos. 1 and 2 Offaly Brigades, and Nos. 1 and 2 Leix Brigades, and covered the whole of the counties Leix and Offaly and the portion of Tipperary roughly ^{north} west of a line drawn from Castleconnell in Limerick to Borris-in-Ossory. The staff appointed were:-

Divisional Commandant	-	Michael McCormack.
Divisional Adjutant	-	Myself.
Divisional Quartermaster	-	Austin McCurtain.

None of the other posts were filled before the Truce. Temporary divisional headquarters were set up a few weeks before the Truce at Dooley's of Camross, Leix, a good-sized farmer's house, in which the sitting room was placed at our disposal as an office. McCurtain and I were engaged in work of an organisational nature in the remaining fortnight of the Black and Tan war. ^{only} My Job of consequence before the cessation of hostilities was

to go in person back to my old brigade headquarters to bring news to them of the cease fire order which was to come into operation on 11th July, 1921.

It may appear strange that no effort was made to enrol me in the I.R.B. until I was about to be appointed to the Divisional staff in July, 1921. I was then approached in the matter by the Divisional Commandant, but I declined to be associated with that body, pointing out that the Irish Republican Army was good enough for me.

My connection with the political side of the Sinn Féin was of very little importance. It had not much of an appeal for me, and at least from 1918 onwards the Irish Volunteer movement and later the I.R.A. occupied all my time.

SIGNED: Sean Gammor
(Sean Gammor)

DATE: 30⁵ March, 1956.

30th March, 1956.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1389

WITNESS D. Griffin
(D. Griffin)