ORIGINAL

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STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

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Witness

James Cunnigan,
Roganstown,
Swords,
Co. Dublin

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ORIGINAL

SECOND STATEMENT BY MR. JAMES CRENEGAN

Roganstown, Swords, Co. Dublin.

I was released from Lewes Jail, England, about March 1917 where I had been detained consequent on my activities in the 1916 Rebellion, and returned to my home at Roganstown. There was nothing doing in Volunteer circles then and the movement seemed to be dead. There were quite a number of men in the area who had participated in the Rebellion and it was evident that they were anxious to keep associated with the movement, so, in order to fill this desire in some way, we started a football team. This proved to be a success as it brought the lads together and gave them an opportunity of discussing Volunteer matters among themselves and with other individuals who were sympathetic to us. This went a long way towards filling a want which we all felt.

When the reorganisation of the Volunteers started early in 1918, practically all the old members rejoined the newly organised unit and we were happy again. When "A" Company was started again in the Swords area, I think it was Colm Lawless who was appointed Company Captain, and I was appointed to the rank of Lieutenant in the Company. We had about twenty-five members - all good, solid boys - most of whom had taken part in the Rebellion in 1916. Parades for training were held every Sunday at a place called Skidoo Castle. Here we did drills, including arms drill, bomb-throwing and rifle firing practice with .22 rifles, and skirmishing.

As most of the members of the Company had done a certain amount of training prior to the Rebellion, they were easy to handle and it was really only a matter of keeping them in practice. Our instructor was a man called Patrick Traynor who came out to us from the City. Our armament consisted of a few Howth rifles, Martini rifles and revolvers. This armament had been held by some of our original members who had not participated in the Rebellion or who had dumped them before surrender.

When the conscription crisis loomed upon the country, we were inundated with applications from prospective members, but we were very careful about the men we took into our Company and only increased our strength to about forty or so. Sorry to relate, most of those men ceased to be members as soon as the crisis abated. Beyond more intensive drilling and parading, nothing exceptional was done to meet the conscription scare. It was noticeable that amongst the Volunteers, particularly the old members, there was no fear of conscription. They were determined that they would never serve in the English army and that they would resist conscription even if it meant death for them, and they were confident in themselves. On the other hand, the young men outside the Volunteer ranks were suffering from a proper scare. The Volunteers carried out collections in the area for the anti-conscription fund, and got the people to sign the anti-conscription pledge. There were the usual anti-conscription meetings held in the area, of which we did not take much notice, and we believed that the only way to meet conscription was with a gun.

At the end of 1918 a general election was held

in the country, and the Sinn Fein organisation, which was allied to and integrated with the Volunteers, put up candidates for all seats. The Volunteers were kept busy working for the Sinn Féin candidate by canvassing voters, distributing election pamphlets, collecting for election funds, attending election meetings and protecting the Sinn Féin speakers from the hostile Nationalist elements or Redmond's supporters. The R.I.C., who attended all such meetings, adopted a very partisan attitude towards the Redmondites while they were openly hostile to Sinn Féin. On polling day, the Volunteers were on guard at the polling stations and conveyed voters to the booths and so forth. In fact, the Volunteers did the greater amount of the work in connection with the election, and, of course, they were personating as well - voting not only for dead people but for living ones who were known to be hostile.

When the Dáil came into being early in 1919 and set itself up as the government of the Irish Republic, all our members were required to subscribe to an oath of allegiance to that body, and this was loyally carried out by all our members.

The success of Sinn Féin at the elections gave a great fillip to that organisation and they quickly began to take over the administration of the country, particularly Local Government and Justice. Sinn Féin courts were organised in all areas. The Volunteers began to carry out police duty. They made arrests and had places of detention. They brought people before either the Sinn Féin courts or a military (Volunteer) court. There was now a growing void between the people and the R.I.C. Generally the

people avoided the police and would not co-operate with them with the result that they quickly lost their effectiveness as a police force, every day becoming more and more just an armed adjunct of the army of occupation, and a very nasty one at that. The Volunteers set up temporary prisons or places of detention to hold prisoners. These were generally unoccupied houses in remote, out-of-the-way districts, and were known only to a limited number of Volunteers and to practically none of the general public. These places were known to the Volunteers and to the public also as "unknown destinations", because the press when referring to these matters would state that such a person had been arrested and taken to an unknown destination. Guards were maintained on such places by the Volunteers who had also to provide bedding and food for the prisoners and their guards. The local people also assisted in this matter. The people now began to bring their troubles to the Sinn Féin Courts and abided loyally by their decisions. The British courts were boycotted and were almost idle. Unknown destinations were maintained by us in a house at Balheary, in a house near Finglas, in the old Martello tower near Portrane and in a few other places. The British forces never got on to any of them.

A Battalion organisation had now come into being in the area, and it was known as the 3rd Battalion, Fingal Brigade. Tom Markey of Finglas was the Battalion O/C. I cannot now remember who were the other members of the Battalion Staff. The Companies comprising the 3rd Battalion were St. Margaret's, Finglas, Kinsealy, Swords and one in Cloghran and Santry area. Our Brigade was known as the Fingal

Brigade. I think Leo Henderson was Brigade O/C at this time. He was followed by Michael Lynch at a later date - Henderson being taken back to Dublin for duty at General Headquarters. I do not know who the other members of the Brigade Staff were. The Battalions that comprised the Brigade were, territorially, Donabate, The Naul, Garristown and Swords. The O/C, Donabate Battalion, was the late James O'Connell; Kit Rooney was O/C of the Naul Battalion; Walter Brown was O/C, Garristown Battalion; and Tom Markey, O/C, Swords.

There was nothing of much importance in the military line taking place at this time, except an occasional raid on the mails, the usual Company parades for instruction and funerals, and suchlike.

The British aerodrome at Collinstown - now the Dublin Airport - was raided around this time by the Dublin Brigade, assisted by men from our Brigade. The guard on the aerodrome was surprised and disarmed, and quite a large number of rifles and a supply of ammunition for the guard, were captured The captured armament was taken to the Naul in cars by Michael Rock where it was hidden in prepared dumps. On that night the Swords Battalion guarded all roads leading to Collinstown from the North to prevent any enemy forces arriving there while the raid was in progress. We had parties of men, armed with what rifles we had, and shotguns, at selected points on all the roads north of the aerodrome.

At the end of 1919 and early in 1920, the R.I.C. began evacuating all their small outlying stations and concentrating their forces in the large ones, principally

in the towns. In the Fingal Brigade area, the enemy posts at Donabate, Santry, Garristown and the Naul were evacuated. They held on to and strengthened their stations at Swords, Rush, Balbriggan, Skerries and Malahide - and Finglas also, I think. On Easter Saturday night, 1920, all the evacuated posts were destroyed by our men, by burning them. I took part in the burning of Santry Barracks. When we arrived there, we found that one R.I.C. man was still in the barracks. He did not put up any resistance, however, and we took him out of it. We then set the place on fire after giving it a good sprinkling with petrol. It made a lovely fire and was completely burned out. This was a country-wide operation on that night. It was almost unbelieveable the change that had come over the people of Ireland in a few years. Not so long previously, the R.I.C. were monarchs of all they surveyed and everybody feared them. Now, we could burn their barracks with impunity and had great pleasure in doing so. The other evacuated barracks were also destroyed on that night.

In the autumn of 1919 a general raid for arms was carried out all over the country. We collected about one hundred shotguns in our area. Some of them were beautiful and valuable weapons but quite a lot were of no value or use. We got no service weapons of any type. These raids - or rather collections - were carried out without incident and, in nearly all cases, it was only a matter of asking the owners for them. The arms were distributed amongst our members who were responsible for their care and custody. Each man was given a gun, and the surplus guns were placed in selected dumps.

For the end of 1919 and the greater part of 1920

the Volunteers were engaged on intensive police work. The R.I.C. had no longer any aspiration in this respect and the Volunteers had to take over the complete administration of justice. Training and organisation were not neglected, however, but rather were intensified. Police work threw a great strain on all ranks as it could only be carried out as a part-time job, but the Volunteers entered into it with enthusiasm and made a great success of it. The reason for this success was that the people were behind the Volunteers, assisting them, whereas they gave no co-operation to the R.I.C. The Sinn Féin courts were operating freely now and the people abided loyally by their decisions. The British courts were almost idle. The withdrawal of the R.I.C. from all outlying stations gave a chance to certain unruly elements in the population to indulge in petty robberies and so forth, but the Volunteers quickly put their foot down on this behaviour and, up to the advent of the Black and Tans, the country was very free on the whole from crime.

About September, 1920, there was a series of petty robberies carried out in our area, and Charles Weston and I were investigating the case. We arrested one man in the Blandford Arms, Cloghran, and handed him over to some of our comrades. We then proceeded to the Boot Inn, near Collinstown, as we had received information that two other suspects were there. We spotted the two men in the bar, and we hung around outside until they came out. They must have suspected we were after them as, on coming out, they made a dash to get away. However, we succeeded in catching one of them, the

ringleader of the gang. Both Weston and I carried revolvers.

We took our prisoner to a side road and were awaiting transport to take him away to an unknown destination at the Naul when we were suprised by a military cycling patrol who came upon us quite unawares. They came from Swords and I am inclined to think that they had information and were sent out after us. Weston and I succeeded in dumping our guns in the ditch, so that no arms were got on us when we were made prisoners and were searched. It was only when the military officer took a number of papers from my pocket that I realised that, amongst these documents, was a receipt for a shotgun which I was to give to a man in the area and which I had forgotten about. This might be serious for me, so I said to the officer who was about to examine this document, "You are supposed to be a gentleman! If you were, you would not look at my private correspondence!" To my surprise, he pushed the documents back into my pocket.

We were marched to Collinstown aerodrome. En route, I was worried as to how I was going to get rid of the receipt. I was able to take it out of my pocket and put it down between my shirt and trousers without being observed by our captors. On arrival at Collinstown, we were taken to the guardroom where the military officer searched our pockets again. He perceived that the receipt was missing and could even remember to whom it was addressed but knew no further details about it. He demanded to know what I had done with it and I denied all knowledge of it. He then took a party back along the road to search for it, in the belief that I had dropped

it en route. Meanwhile, Weston and I were placed in separate cells in the guardroom. When locked in, I immediately took the document from inside my trousers, with the intention of swallowing it, but I found that this was impossible as it was too bulky. I was at a loss what to do. Somehow, my hand wandered to the seam of the lining at the bottom of the jacket and there I found what appeared to be a lone match stick, which apparently had worked its way through the lining of the pocket. The military officer had taken everything from the pocket. I got the match out through the lining and was delighted to see that it was a good one. I carefully lighted it and burned the receipt, scattering the light ashes over the cell floor. This was a great relief to me. The receipt had been made out to Boden's of the Broad Meadow.

We were taken to the Bridewell, Dublin, and spent one night in a cell there. We were then brought to Richmond Barracks, Dublin where we were court martialled, being charged with unlawfully arresting persons and so forth. We refused to recognise the court as lawful to try us, and put up no defence. After the court martial we were taken back to the Bridewell and thence to Mountjoy Prison, where we were informed what the sentences of the court martial were - two years hard labour.

Mountjoy jail was full of political prisoners and full of trouble too. Prisoners were refusing to work and were demanding various privileges, such as, cigarettes, visits and so forth. Every other day, we were brought before the Governor, but strange to relate we did not receive any punishment in the way of solitary confinement or the like. After a few days there, we were handcuffed

and taken to the Quays where we were put aboard a boat and shipped to Wormwood Scrubbs Jail in England, and then on to Hull Jail in Yorkshire.

Conditions in Hull Jail were not so bad at all. Weston and I were employed on painting and so forth around the jail. The question of our imprisonment was brought up in the English House of Commons by one of the members. It appears that this gentleman was a relative of the Craven family of Knocksedan, near Swords. This was one of the houses which had been robbed and for which we were making the arrests when we were captured. This member, I believe, stated that as the R.I.C. were incapable of performing the police work of the country, it was imperative that someone should do so, and that it was a disgrace that we had been arrested for trying to maintain order and protect the people from criminals. The upshot of this was that Weston and I were ordered to report to the Governor's office one morning where we were informed that we were being released from custody and were given travelling warrants to our homes. We were also given some money for expenses en route.

We intended to go to Liverpool and get in touch with some friends there, but learned from the press that this city had become a hot spot, as the I.R.A. were burning warehouses and the homes of Black and Tans and Auxiliaries in retaliation for the reprisals carried out by these forces in Ireland. Two strangers of Irish origin arriving in Liverpool would be immediately suspect, so we travelled to Dublin. At Dún Laoghaire - then Kingstown - we decided to separate and not go through the city together. Weston went by train to Donabate, and I travelled into the city by tram. When I got to the

city, I went to the home of Mr. McDunphy of Dorset Street. (Mr. McDunphy was until recently Secretary to the President of Ireland.) I was very hospitably received by Mr. McDunphy's mother and given a good meal, after which she provided me with a bicycle to get to my home at Skidoo, Swords.

No one was aware that I had been released, and my arrival created great surprise. I found that most of my comrades were now on the run. They were not staying at home and raiding for them by the enemy was a regular occurrence. A number of them were staying in a hay barn not very far from my home. Amongst this party were Colm Lawless and Barney Lawless, brothers of Colonel J. Lawless, now of the Irish Army. I threw in my lot with them and went on the run also. A number of my former comrades had been arrested, and I knew that it would only be a matter of hours until they would be looking for me. Unfortunately, it was generally some of our best men who had been arrested.

Peter White was now Captain of Swords Company, and I was unattached - holding no special appointment. Michael Lynch was now Brigade O/C, and Markey was still Battalion Commandant.

The military had established a permanent barracks in Swords, and there was a huge concentration of Black and Tans in Gormanston Camp, which was their Headquarters, and all the retained R.I.C. barracks were strengthened by large forces of Tans.

The R.I.C. and Tans from Swords barracks were in the habit of frequenting a certain public house in that town to get drink at night time, and it was planned by

the I.R.A. to attack this house and shoot them up. The Finglas men were to do this job as it was usual in Volunteer circles to bring in men from outside areas to do jobs like this. They would not be so easily identified by the R.I.C. men who were identification agents for the British forces. The Finglas men came into Swords on two or three nights, but, for some unaccountable reason, failed to carry out the operation.

We were annoyed at this failure, so Jimmy Kelly, Bill Rickard, Peter White, the Company Captain, Mick Farnon of Kinsealy and I planned to carry out the job on our own. On a specific night, we went into Swords, well armed with revolvers and bombs. White had gone into the public house earlier to scout for us and give us the information if the R.I.C. and Tans were there. We remained in hiding until well after closing time, but none of the enemy came near the public house. The following morning, we learned that Balbriggan town had been burned by the Tans consequent on the shooting of one of their members on the previous night, and apparently the local R.I.C. and Tans had been confined to barracks. They never came near the public house in Swords again. We kept a good watch on the house.

Occasionally, a few of us used go over to the main road for what we called a hit and run ambush. This was a case of firing a few shots at them and then making our escape. The main road led to Balbriggan, Gormanston and to Belfast and the north of Ireland, and, as such, was much frequented by enemy forces in tenders and lorries. It was only a matter of remaining there long enough and we would be sure to get something. The few times we did this, it was always the enemy forces who did the

escaping. When fired at, they increased their speed and got away as quickly as the vehicle would take them. I don't know the results of our pot-shots but, on one occasion, we were told that a few of the enemy, travelling in a Crossley tender, were hit. These operations were carried out at Hedgestown on the Balrothery straight, as it is known locally.

About April, 1921, it was planned to attack a troop train near Skerries. We mobilised a good number of men for this operation, but when we were half-way across country to Skerries, the job was called off - I don't know why.

An R.I.C. party was in the habit of travelling to the Naul and Finglas and other places in a motor car. It was believed that this party brought the pay of the Tans, if not the R.I.C., who were quartered in the local stations. It was decided to ambush the car and capture the arms and money. Information was received from Balbriggan, which was a good source for information and nearly always reliable, that the car would be proceeding to the Naul via Garristown on a certain day. We got a party together consisting of twelve men, armed with rifles, and spent a day in ambush position at the Yellow Furze, which was a good position and gave a good field of fire on to the road, the ground affording facilities for a quick retirement if necessary. The rifles we had in this operation and in the previous one, on the troop train, were those that had been captured in Collinstown aerodrome. On this occasion, the enemy did not oblige us either.

On another occasion, we received information from Balbriggan again that the same car would be travelling

to the Naul from Balbriggan, and we mobilised a party for the purpose of ambushing it at Ballyboughal. We had about twelve men from our area and a few men from the Naul to assist us, all armed with rifles and some revolvers and bombs. While still in position at Ballyboughal, word came that the car was not travelling, and we were disbanded again.

At about ten or eleven o'clock that morning, I travelled back to my own house at Skidoo to ascertain if there were any dispatches there. It was usual at this time for dispatches to be left at my home, which was a half-way house, or collecting link from Dublin. I stayed at my home for most of the day. At about five o'clock that evening, Paddy Hamilton arrived and informed me that there had been a shooting affair in Ballyboughal and that Peter White was wounded.

I immediately proceeded to Ballyboughal, but could not contact any of our men. I remained on the bridge, on the south side of the village, for some time, keeping the village under observation. After some time, Jack Shield, Vice Commandant of 2nd Fingal Battalion, and Thomas Murphy of Oldtown, and a Mrs. O'Neill arrived. They informed me that White had gone into a public house in the village after we had demobilised that morning, and while he was there, a carload of R.I.C. - the one we had been waiting for - pulled up at the door of the public house. An R.I.C. Sergeant, who had been stationed in Garristown and would recognise White, jumped down and rushed into the public house. White immediately pulled his gun, or revolver, from his pocket and shot the Sergeant dead. In making his escape with two other Volunteers subsequently, the remainder of the police

opened fire on them, and White was badly wounded. The R.I.C. dragged the body of the Sergeant out to the car and, having put it aboard, left the village immediately without finding White. White was now lying, badly wounded, in the Post Office where some of the local folk had taken him when the police departed.

Our immediate concern was to get White away before a large force of Tans and R.I.C. would return, as we expected. Mrs. O'Neill, who lived only a short distance away, volunteered to get a pony and trap and bring him to her father's place at Wyanstown, near Oldtown. White had been attended by a doctor and priest. I said that this method would be too slow, that we would have to get a car and that we would commandeer Mr. Counihan's car for the job. The late Mr. Counihan - afterwards a Senator in the Irish Government - lived only a short distance away. My suggestion was agreed to, and we set out for Counihan's. On the way, we met Mr. Counihan - he was on foot - and told him that we wanted his car. He said that he thought we were too late and that the R.I.C. and Tans would be back in the village before we would be back with the car. He stated that he had volunteered to give the car earlier in the day but could not get anyone to take it. He advised us to get out of the area with all speed. We had other ideas, however. Shields, who had no coat on him, said he would go home for it, and would decide in the meantime what to do. I accompanied him. We dumped our bicycles where we were, and proceeded on foot to Shield's house. When we arrived there, the place was locked up, as Shield's mother was in the village attending to the wounded White. We went around to the back of the house to try and get in through a window, when

we heard footsteps on the road outside. Next thing, we heard the noise of rifle butts battering down the door, and we immediately drew our guns and took to the fields.

The fields around here are fairly big and open, and we had not gone very far when the enemy spotted us and opened fire on us. Shields, who knew the place well, headed one way while Murphy, who was also with us, and I headed in the other direction. The enemy kept firing at us all the time, but their aim at running men was not good enough to hit us. Murphy and I jumped over a small stream and bank, and we lay down behind the bank. We observed that the Tans were following Shields and seemed to be ignoring us. Shields had no coat on, and was more easily kept in view. I had a parabellum pistol and Murphy a .45 revolver. We opened fire on them, which stopped them momentarily and gave Shields a better chance of escaping. When we stopped firing, the enemy took up the chase of Shields again. Between walking and crawling, we managed to get across the main road north of the village. The village and road were swarming with Tans, and it was miraculous how we got through. We got safely away across country towards the east.

Shields kept running until he became exhausted and could go no further. He threw himself into a dike which was heavily covered with briers. The Tans searched this dike up and down several times and fired volleys of shots into it, but Shields was not hit. The Tans did not find him in the dike.

Murphy and I proceeded to Oldtown where we contacted the Brigade Intelligence officer, Tom Peppard - now living at Tallagh. We went to Miss Mollie Adrian and asked her, if she did not get word from us in the meantime, to

go to Ballyboughal in the morning and find out what had happened there, and to Shields especially. We had given up hope of White escaping as he was incapable of moving owing to his wounds. Miss Adrian wanted to go there and then, but we restrained her from doing so. She had been with us, or rather the Fingal Brigade, under the late Tom Ashe during the 1916 Rebellion when she had acted as despatch rider and had kept communications between the Brigade and the G.P.O. in Dublin as long as it was humanly possible to do so. She loved taking risks, doing what seemed impossible and was always game for any adventure. About an hour after we had been with Miss Adrian, Shields arrived in the village of Oldtown - and were we glad to see him! He had remained concealed in the dyke until the Tans took their departure. White was captured by the Tans, but only lived until the following morning.

There were so many of us on the run that it was decided to stick together and form an active service unit or flying column. We went into occupation of a hay barn owned by Mr. Smith, and used his house, which was occupied by his family, for cooking. Smith, who was from Oldcastle, Co. Meath, and was a rare good sort, was delighted to have us and assisted us in every way possible. At first, we had about eight men, and Jack Shields took charge. We procured supplies of food from Taylor's of Swords and from Jim Hughes of Oldtown, which we cooked in Smith's house. All this food was paid for later on.

In the course of a couple of weeks, our party had reached a strength of about twenty men. Every man was armed with a Lee Enfield service rifle and one hundred

and fifty rounds of ammunition. As our party was too big to remain in the hay barn and we constituted a great menace to the Smith family - if the British forces discovered us there, the least they would do would be to burn Smith's place - we moved to new quarters a short distance away, known as the Green Lanes. Here we had two bell tents to sleep in - small accommodation for over twenty men but we were never all in the tents together as guards had to be provided. We still continued to do our cooking at Smith's house. Jack Shields acted as O/C of the column, and I was Camp Adjutant, and Vincent Purfield, Quartermaster.

By this time, I had been appointed Brigade Adjutant, following the arrest of Michael Farnon who had been Adjutant. Vincent Purfield was also Brigade Quartermaster. Training was on the commando style, with skirmishing, guerilla tactics, rifle marksmanship, judging distance and suchlike being all important. We supplied our own guards for the camp, but in this we were ably assisted by the men of Oldtown Company who helped at night time. Paddy Mooney from Trim, who was also on the run, was sent to us by the Divisional O/C, Sean Boylan of Dunboyne, and he acted as Training Officer. We were a very happy family, and complete co-operation existed amongst us. Here I must pay a tribute to the people of Oldtown parish. We mixed freely with the people around us and on Sundays attended Mass at the chapel in Oldtown. Yet, although there was a military garrison and Tans and R.I.C. in Swords, only a few miles away, and garrisons in other centres quite convenient, they never suspected that we were there.

Our first operation after the column was started

was to raid the British Remount at Lusk, Co. Dublin, where horses were broken and trained as remounts for the British Cavalry stationed in this country. They always had a big amount of horses quartered there but, strange to say, the British had no guard on the place. The employees were all civilians, and a retired Captain of the British Army was in charge. An armoured car came out weekly from Dublin with the pay money for the men, and this was what we were after.

I took charge of five men of the column, armed with revolvers, and proceeded to Lusk on the day that the pay bag was due to arrive. We concealed ourselves beside the place until the armoured car had departed. We then cut the telephone wires leading into the place and proceeded to the office, where we held up Captain Beamish and took the pay bag from him. He made no effort to put up any resistance, and we left the place without incident and returned to the rest of the column at the Green Lanes. I cannot recollect how much money we got, but it amounted to a few hundred pounds. We were none the better off, as it was all forwarded to General Headquarters in Dublin.

A couple of men from the column were detailed to proceed to Balbriggan and to shoot a Tan who was in the habit of making himself particularly obnoxious there. On their way into Balbriggan town, the men met another Tan who challenged them to halt. They opened fire on this Tan, shot him dead and procured his gun. This incident prevented them from going into the town to carry out their mission, and they returned to the column.

Our next operation was the destruction of the

Remount Depot at Lusk. The greater part of the column took part, under the command of Brigade O/C Michael Lynch. Fully armed with rifles this time and a number of revolvers, we travelled across country and had no difficulty getting into the place which still had no guard on it. Having first cut all the telephone wires, we held up all the employees who were present, and released all the horses from the stables. We then sprayed the whole place with paraffin, which the local Volunteers had ready for us close by, and set the place alight at several points. It made a terrific fire and was completely destroyed. We met no resistance of any kind, and arrived back, across country, at our camp safely.

We were instructed by Divisional Headquarters that the column was to proceed to the Dunboyne area. Leaving some men behind to guard the camp, we set off about mid-day, with Paddy Mooney in charge. We had twelve or fourteen men, all armed with rifles and one hundred and fifty rounds of ammunition each. We were met by guides from the local Companies en route, who took us mostly across country via Kilbride to Dunboyne. It was quite a long march, particularly awkward across country, and we had to cross a few of the main north-south highways from Dublin and such points were dangerous. We arrived in Dunboyne - Murtagh's house, about 9 p.m., just as it was getting dark.

At Murtagh's we were provided with a good meal. There was a priest in a room in the house, and all our men went to Confession there. Murtagh's house at this time was being used as Divisional Headquarters, and all the Murtagh family were up to their eyes in the struggle.

We were joined there by parties of men from some of the other Brigades in the Division, and it was apparent that something big was afoot. After some delay, we fell in and started off across country, again led by a local guide. We were followed by the other parties in their own formations.

After travelling across country for some time in the semi-darkness of a summer night, we got on to a road and marched via the Moor of Meath, Leixlip, to a place called Stackumney, where we entered a gentleman's house named Wardell. Immediately we routed the Wardell family from their beds and locked them in an outoffice under guard. It was apparent to us, from the number of pictures and paintings of the English royal family hanging on the walls, that the Wardell's were a loyalist family. Some of the other parties now arrived. While some of our men found nice soft beds for themselves, the rest of us spent our time singing to the accompaniment of Wardell's piano which was being loudly thumped by one of our men known as the "Bock" Maguire. The other parties of I.R.A. men were also armed with rifles but of a different pattern. They had R.I.C. or Cavalry carbines. During the morning, a number of men were brought in as prisoners, such as, the local postman and Wardell's employees.

We soon learned that the object of our concentration was to ambush, on the railway close by, a troop train conveying a large party of troops back from the opening of the Belfast Parliament to the Curragh, Co. Kildare. We were served with breakfast at Wardell's, consisting of tea and a large cut of bread, with a fried rasher on top. At about 9 a.m. we were ordered to fall

in by our leader, Paddy Mooney, and given our final instructions. We were told that the troop train would be preceded by a pilot engine with which we would not interfere, and that seven mines had been laid in the down track, to be blown up under the troop train. The railway runs through a slight cutting at this point and under a bridge carrying the road which led to Wardell's place. We were to take up position on the railway embankment overlooking the railway on the west side near the bridge, and to keep well down under cover of the embankment until the mines went off, when we were to come up and rake the carriages with rifle fire, aiming at the level of the seats. This was not a cheerful prospect and I remember asking myself would there be any carriages there when the mines went off. I had visions of carriages and pieces of soldiers flying through the air and descending on us, who would be so close to the explosions. What the effects of concussion on us by the explosions would be, I often wondered afterwards. However, ours was but to obey, and we had complete confidence in our leaders.

Having received our instructions, we marched off and took up our allotted position on the railway embankment, near the bridge. We were in the act of settling down in our position when firing broke out from Wardell's house, which was on our flank now and slightly to the rear of us, and from the road entrance gate to Wardell's which was about one hundred and fifty or two hundred yards to our rear. We quickly learned that an enemy force had come in on our rear and were being engaged by a party from the 2nd Brigade who were still around Wardell's house. We could not see the enemy party but

realised that any attempt on the troop train, which was nearly due, was now out of the question. We were in an awkward position. If the enemy force came on to the bridge, they would have firing control over the immediate neighbourhood, including Wardell's premises. After a quick consultation by our leader with some of the Divisional officers, a retreat was ordered.

In order to retire from our position, we had to move along the west side of the railway. While thus engaged, the pilot engine passed down the line and, to add to our difficulties, an aeroplane appeared, flying up and down the line at low altitude. Having succeeded in getting along the railway alright, we were now confronted with the problem of crossing the canal. One of our men, Bock Maguire, went into the canal to see how deep it was. In the meantime, we observed some girls and they were calling to us. We approached them and they led us along to where there was a bridge over the canal, which we crossed. They informed us that the British military had erected a road block across the road, a short distance away. Strangely enough, there was no attempt made by them to hold the canal bridge. It was now apparent that the British forces had been informed that we were at Wardell's, perceived our intention to attack the troop train and were in the act of hemming us in.

We made our way to Lord Carew's place at Celbridge Demesne and crossed the River Liffey there. We went on to a place called Ravensdale where there was a fine big house. We were very hungry and thirsty, so we placed a guard outside and entered the house. When we requested a meal and a drink, the owner at first was inclined to be

hostile, but soon changed his attitude and provided us with a meal. The men on guard were relieved, and they had a meal also. Thus refreshed, we made our way to Dunboyne where we put up in Dunboyne Castle for the night. As far as I remember, there were only the staff in the castle at the time. We stayed there until the following evening, being provided with a few good meals by the staff, and then started off, across country again, for our own camp at Green Hills, Oldtown, via Kilbride again. In a house in Kilbride we were given a meal of bread and milk, and eventually arrived safely at our camp. We had no casualties, but had a long tramp and some hungry periods all for nothing.

Our next job was to raid the mails in Balbriggan. The mails from the Tans' camp at Gormanston were usually delivered at the railway by a party of Tans in a Crossley tender, to await the city bound train. A small party of Volunteers under the command of the Brigade Intelligence Officer Peppard proceeded by car to Balbriggan railway station and collected the sacks of mails after the Tans had deposited them. On their return journey, they were pursued by a tender full of Tans who failed to contact them. The mails arrived safely at the Yellow Hills or Yellow Furze where they were gone through by our men. Apart from items of intelligence that might be in them, our General Headquarters were very anxious at this time to obtain the names and addresses of members of the British forces who were operating here, so that their houses and property could be destroyed in Britain as a counter reprisal for the reprisals they carried out here. Having extracted the required information, the mails, including a large amount of postal orders and money orders, were burned.

Orders were received from General Headquarters that all coastguard stations between Donabate and Laytown, Co. Meath, were to be destroyed or burned down. These buildings were occupied by men of the British coast-watching service and their families. They were generally retired British Navy men, and it was believed that they were armed. The capture of such arms was not, however, the object of our operation. I understand that our General Headquarters had made plans to land a consignment of Thompson sub machine guns and ammunition, which had been procured in the United States, on the east coast north of Dublin. Loughshinny, a few miles south of Skerries, was, I believe, the place selected. As the coastguard stations were strategically situated along the coast, all in visible signalling distance of each other, it was necessary to destroy them on a wide front, both north and south of the selected point.

The complete column was used for this operation, and was divided into sections - one section for each coastguard station. All men were armed with rifles, revolvers and bombs, as far as they went. The local Volunteer Companies were assisting by acting as guides, scouts, covering parties and also reinforcing our small sections.

I was detailed to take charge of the section allotted the destruction of Rogerstown coastguard station. I had fifteen or sixteen men, all told, three or four of whom were column men, armed with rifles, and the remainder being local Company Volunteers, armed with shotguns. All stations were to be destroyed at the same time, zero hour being twelve midnight. I proceeded across country with my few column men, and

was joined at Rogerstown by the local party of Volunteers. Having placed the necessary number of men for security purposes, I proceeded with the remainder to the station which we entered without trouble. There was nothing in the nature of a barracks in such places, just married quarters and stores. There was no attempt at resistance by the occupants whom we removed from the houses, having first destroyed the telephone lines. We removed the coastguards' furniture from the houses, and having saturated the houses with paraffin, which had been dumped in readiness by the local Volunteers, we set them alight. They made a great blaze. The only arms we found were a few old duck guns which had been used by the coastguards for shooting wild duck along the coast. When the operation was over, the local Volunteers were dismissed and the rest of us made our way back across country to Woodstown, which was our assembly point for the whole column. Very soon, the other sections reported to this point, and each had the same report as ourselves - no resistance, the places destroyed and a few shotguns procured, and no casualties of any sort. When all was assembled, we returned to our camp at Mooretown, very satisfied with out night's work. Incidentally, the Thompson guns never arrived as they had been seized on board ship by the American Customs officials in the United States.

A short time later, Mick Rock was proceeding to the Naul by road when he was suddenly confronted by a lorry of Tans and R.I.C. They immediately fired on him, and he was badly wounded and captured. He was well known to many of the R.I.C. He would have been executed, had not the Truce intervened and saved his life.

We received information - I don't know the source - that our camp was about to be attacked by the British forces. We broke camp and billeted our men around the Palmerstown area, a short distance away, from which position we would be able to attack the attackers. It proved to be a false alarm, however, and we returned to our camp again.

When the Truce came into force, we were all disappointed as we were at the peak of condition and had arms and ammunition. There was a great spirit of comradeship and good humour amongst our men, and we were confident that we could meet the enemy and beat them, even though we might be well outnumbered. Our experience was that the enemy were not good fighters and that they were not anxious to stand and fight except when everything was one hundred per cent. in their favour. They were good in dealing with, and ill-treating, individuals. They also had bad leadership. Despite their acts of terrorism, we had no real spite towards the Black and Tans or Auxiliaries, whose position we understood. They were an alien force, holding a country for their people. The R.I.C. were in a different category. They were Irish, in the enemy's uniform, and were really uniformed spies. Without them, the other forces of the enemy would have been worthless. We had no love for them.

It took some time to assimilate ourselves to the new conditions. It was strange to go home and sleep there in peace again. In fact, it was difficult to sleep well for a while as one was wont to wake up, thinking there was a raid on. It was likewise STRANGE to walk on the street or road and pass Tans and R.I.C.

without being stuck up, or putting one's hand to one's gun. However, in time, we got used to all this, and soon most of us went into our own training camp which was now being established, and we felt happier there.

Prior to the Truce, the only attempt to make munitions in our area was the filling of cartridges with buckshot and the repairing of arms, which was carried out at a place known as the Murrogh, Ballyboughill. This work was mostly done by the local Company, but others of us used to go there and assist.

For transport in the Brigade area, we had three cars and a van. One was a British army car which was captured by our men in Finglas from three soldiers. Another car was taken from the Plunkett family of Portmarnock. One car belonged to Mr. Kettle of the Leas Cross and, just before the Truce, we commandeered one from a Mr. Rooney who lived in our area.

When the capture of the armoured car in connection with the rescue of Sean McEoin from Mountjoy jail was being planned, it was arranged that the captured car would be taken to our area and brought to a place called the Killion, situated between Rolestown and Oldtown, where we had prepared a shed in which to conceal it. To do this, we had to raise the roof of the shed, so that the car could be got in. We had been supplied with the measurements of the car by General Headquarters. The car did not arrive, which is another story.

Communications within the Brigade were maintained by dispatch riders on cycles or on foot. Our line of communication was via Kilbride to Divisional Headquarters at Dunboyne, which was less risky than having to go into

the city, which system operated before the Brigade was incorporated in the 1st Eastern Division.

Balbriggan, being close to the Tans' camp at Gormanston, Co. Meath, was our best centre for intelligence. The Tans were frequently in the public houses in that town and, of course, talking. The post offices in the area were not tapped as far as I know, and with the exception of Balbriggan would, I think, have been of little value. A man named Straw was shot in the area for spying. He was not a native of North County Dublin. On the night the Tans burned Balbriggan, this man led them around, pointing out the houses of Volunteers and Sinn Féiners. We were a long time on the look-out for him but eventually got him. He was shot and the usual label put on him.

During the time we were in the camp at the Green Lanes, we purchased our supplies of foodstuffs from traders. We occasionally commandeered a sheep or a lamb from the local farmers, who were given receipts for the animals taken, and when the Truce came into effect, they were paid.

SIGNED: James Brennan

DATE: 23 April 1956

WITNESS Michael Barry Ward