

ORIGINAL

W.S. 1398

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1398

Witness

Michael Rock,  
North Main St.,  
Swords,  
Co. Dublin.

Identity.

Commandant,  
Haul Battalion,  
Fingal Brigade I.R.A.

Subject:

National Activities,  
1914 - 1921

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

nil

File No. S. 2711

Form B.S.M. 2

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STATEMENT BY MICHAEL ROCK

North Street, Swords, Co. Dublin.

I was born at The Naul, Co. Dublin, and received my education at the local school there. Our teacher was a Mr. Lehane who hailed from Kerry. This man was an enthusiast about the Irish language and he taught this to us, although it was not one of the subjects laid down by the Board of Education which was a British Government institution. Other than learning our own language, there was nothing taught which would lead one to become a separatist, or an out-and-out Irish patriot.

At this time there was a branch of the Gaelic League in The Naul and I joined this and this, together with what we had learned at school, helped to mould our minds in the right direction. The late Patrick Archer of Oldtown was responsible for having the Gaelic League branch started in The Naul. A hurling club was started also around 1909 and I was prominent in its activities.

Prior to the Rebellion there was no Irish Volunteer activities in the area. When the executions took place after the Rebellion in 1916 there was a surge of resentment amongst the people against such acts by the British Government, and when the prisoners were released at the end of 1916 and in the early part of 1917, we, the young men in the Naul area, looked forward to a renewal of activities by the men from the Fingal area. In this we were sadly disappointed, however, as no effort was made by those men to restart or resurrect the movement for independence. These men had seemed to have lost what fire or enthusiasm they had and things were just

allowed to drift as had been done after the Fenian Rising.

I was not satisfied with this position and I got in touch with a man called Archie Heron and he came out from the city and we set about organising units of the Volunteer force in our area. This was in the latter half of 1917. We started companies in The Naul, Balbriggan, Skerries, The Bog of the Ring, Rush, Lusk, Donabate, Swords, St. Margaret's and other places. There was a kind of loose battalion organisation and we were known as the Fingal Battalion, Dublin Brigade, and yet, rather curiously, we dealt direct with General Headquarters in Dublin. Michael Lynch of Dublin, a man who had taken part in the 1916 Rebellion, was the Battalion O/C. I cannot remember now who the other battalion staff officers were.

I was captain of The Naul Company in which we had about 30 men. Archie Heron was very keen and he came out regularly from the city and took charge of the training in the area and together we travelled around the various companies. We had no arms of any sort at this time. There may have been an odd small type revolver here and there amongst our members, but these were not under battalion control as yet. All the time we were increasing our strength very slowly, as we were very careful about the men we took in at this stage, as we all lived in dread of informers who had been the downfall of all previous attempts up to 1916 to attain independence.

Early in 1918, the threat of conscription loomed heavy over the country and now every young man in the countryside was clamouring to join the Volunteers. Our strength now increased enormously and there was little or no restriction imposed as regards the qualities of the men who were joining. Our authorities were anxious to demonstrate the determination

of the people to oppose conscription. The men who now joined were drawn from all classes including numbers from the upper strata of society who previously only sneered at us and would not be seen associating with us. Some of these individuals opposed us might and main during the subsequent General Election at the end of 1918.

There was nothing outstanding other than parading our strength and training to combat the conscription menace. The Volunteers were instrumental in having the anti-conscription pledge signed by practically everyone in the area and in collecting monies for the anti-conscription fund, and plans were made for the destruction of roads and all communications to obstruct enemy forces.

Cathal Brugha, who was then Chief of our General Staff at this time, put forward a plan to send a number of men over to London, their purpose being to shoot Lloyd George, the British Prime Minister, and the members of the British Cabinet in the House of Commons when it was announced that the King had signed the Conscription Act for Ireland. Cathal insisted on going over there himself and taking charge of this operation and this was agreed to by G.H.Q. or the Army Council, but with much misgivings. I volunteered to go on this expedition, but I would not be allowed to go. However, two men from our area were accepted as volunteers and they proceeded to London with Cathal Brugha. Happily, the occasion for shooting never arose, as the King never gave his consent to the Conscription Act. Our men returned from London all right, but they had aged considerably. They had undergone an awful ordeal - sitting in the Public Gallery of the House of Commons night after night, with revolvers in their pockets, waiting for the pronouncement

to be made by Lloyd George, and with a very, very remote chance of getting away should the shooting have come off. They were well aware of this fact when they volunteered for the job. (Jack Gaynor and William Corcoran of Balbriggan were the two men).

When the conscription crisis had subsided, practically all our influx of that period faded out again and we were back in the same position as before the crisis. Sinn Fein Clubs had been extensively organised in the area by now, and a lot of the Volunteers were also members of this organisation also. In the end of 1918 a General Election was held throughout the country. The Sinn Fein candidate for North County Dublin was the late Frank Lawless of Saucerstown, Swords. Frank had taken part in the Rebellion under the late Tom Ashe in the Fingal area, being quartermaster to the Fingal Battalion at the time. The Redmond, or National Party, man was called Clancy who, I think, was from the city of Dublin. The Volunteers were busily engaged in canvassing voters for Lawless and in collecting money for the election funds and in getting voters to the polling booths and suchlike.

The election passed off without any serious incident in the area and Lawless was returned by a big majority. Opposed to us in this election were many of the people who had swarmed to us during the conscription crisis.

The First Dáil met early in January 1919, and one of their first acts was to float a Loan and here again the Volunteers contributed a major service in canvassing and collecting for the Loan. A large amount of money - I cannot say how much now - was collected for the Loan and every penny was satisfactorily accounted for and was ultimately paid back

to the subscribers when our own Government was safely established.

The Dáil now took over responsibility for the Volunteers who now became the army of the Irish Republic - the I.R.A. Each officer and man or Volunteer was now required to take an oath of allegiance to the Dáil as the Government of the Republic. This oath was subscribed to by all our members without fail. We still had practically no arms, just an odd revolver here and there and these were mostly all small calibre weapons and of little use for any type of active service.

On Wednesday, 20th March, the Dublin Brigade raided the aerodrome at Collinstown and captured a large amount of arms and equipment. I had been detailed while this was being planned to have a place ready to receive the booty. I was to take part in the raid and then accompany the material which was to be taken in a car to a spot in my area where it was to be dumped. Three times I travelled in by train to the city and contacted the Dublin Brigade, but each time the attempt was called off for the reason that something was wrong at the aerodrome and things were not just right for a raid there. Finally, I was excused coming to the city and they made arrangements to pick me up at a pre-arranged point when they had collected the booty. The aerodrome was raided and I met the Volunteers with the spoils at a point near The Nag's Head. All the stuff was in a big car and how they got it out in a car like that I don't know. There were 110 rifles and an amount of web equipment and there must have been nearly a ton of ammunition. The car broke down where I and a couple of other selected men met it and, although we tried to get it going again and even to push it, it was of no avail. It was too weighty and we had to unload the contents

and put them into an old empty house by the roadside. This was a hurried job as the British forces might come upon us at any moment.

When the car was unloaded, they got it going again and I instructed them to drive in a westward direction for at least ten miles so that they would get well outside the area of any searching force before heading for the city. Unfortunately, they only went a few miles westward and then turned into a road which took them northwards again and almost back to where the rifles were dumped. The car finally gave out here and the lads with it had to abandon it. This was a bad blow as the military or raiding forces that we expected would find it and would then know that the rifles were somewhere in that area.

I now got a very strong horse yoked to a cart and loaded all the material into the cart and took it around to Knockbrack Hill to the place I had originally selected. Although this was an exceptionally good horse with a good local reputation, it took him all his strength to pull the cart with the load up. We now put the stuff into another old disused house - a house off the road that was known only to the local inhabitants. This house had been a thatched one, but the thatch had now been covered over with galvanised iron. We put the rifles into the thatch underneath the iron and on the collar ties of the roofing. There was what was known as a cockloft in the house and on this we put the ammunition and equipment. When we had all the ammunition on the cockloft, it collapsed on to the ground floor, taking me with it, but I was not hurt and we finally stored the stuff neatly away.

I learned that no check of the stuff had been made before

I received it and, although there was 110 rifles, I returned only 96. I meant to hold on to the remainder for our own battalion. I did likewise with the ammunition.

Meanwhile, the police and British forces had found the abandoned car which was a commandeered one and this brought on an intensive search of the area, but they failed to find our dump.

The rifles were eventually brought back to Dublin in small consignments of ten or so at a time and from there made their way to various parts of the country, including Cork. They were brought to Dublin on a motor cycle by a man named McDonald. There were only a few of us knew about the dump. The local Volunteers had no knowledge of where they were concealed. As the supply began to run out, G.H.Q. became suspicious that we had more rifles than I returned and there was a bit of a row about it. Mick Collins and others came out and I was accused of refusing to give up the rifles. I denied this and said I was quite willing to hand over the rifles but that I thought we were entitled to have some of them for the part we played in keeping them safely. Collins agreed that I should retain fifteen and this with ten I had already put away gave us twenty five rifles. I also had kept a good supply of ammunition.

The man who looked after the rifles for me was a travelling man, or tinker, known as Martin Donovan. He kind of lived around that neighbourhood and, although not a Volunteer, he was absolutely trustworthy. He cleaned them and looked after them as if he owned them and, although the British forces searched and searched for them, they never got one of them.



One night James Derham, who was afterwards a T.D., came to my house and informed me that enemy forces were coming to raid for the rifles. He used to drink with the R.I.C. in Balbriggan and had gathered from their conversation that they had an idea where they were. We took the rifles and ammunition and equipment away from the place and concealed them in the middle of a field of hay. When the hay was removed from the field we had to shift them to safety again. The enemy raided the area all right but did not go near the house where we had them concealed. The securing of the web equipment was a greater nuisance than the rifles. On one occasion we actually had them buried in an outoffice in the Bog of the Ring and under farm machinery which was in the shed. When moving them to this place we were nearly caught by a party of military. This was the last place one would expect to meet a party of military. We afterwards found out that this was a party of military who had gone astray. Eventually, when the column was started, I handed over all the rifles except a few which I kept for my own battalion to equip that unit.

By now, a brigade organisation had come into being in the Fingal area and was known as the Fingal Brigade. Michael Lynch was the O/C. of the brigade. The battalions comprising the brigade were: Donabate, The Naul, Garristown and Swords. I was appointed O/C. The Naul Battalion which cover the area: Naul, Gormanston, Balbriggan, Skerries, Lusk, the Bog of the Ring and Donabate.

At the end of the summer time of 1919, or early harvest period, G.H.Q. ordered that all arms in possession of the people were to be collected by the I.R.A. I understand that H.Q. had information that the British forces were about to

collect such arms and this was an effort to forestall them and in this the Volunteers were very successful. Every house where there were shotguns, or which was suspected of having arms, was visited by our men. We collected a large number of shotguns of all descriptions - some of them valuable weapons and others of little value. We also got a few sporting rifles, but no Service weapons. I don't think we got any revolvers. We also collected a lot of shotgun ammunition.

In nearly all cases it was only a matter of asking for the guns or in showing to the owners that we were going to take them anyway, and they were handed up. In a couple of instances, however, we had some trouble. In the Naul area a man called Reid fired through the door when our men approached the house. One of our men was slightly wounded - not seriously. Another man named Murphy also fired on some of the Balbriggan Volunteers, hitting one of them in the heel and wounding him seriously. Both of these men were arrested by the Volunteers and courtmartialled. Reid, who was an ex-policeman and a Protestant, was fined £50 which he promptly paid up the following morning. Murphy was a farmer and a Catholic. He was an ignorant sort of man and incapable of realising his position. We tried to frighten him by threatening him with revolvers, but, to our dismay, in the middle of this act he asked us for something to eat as he felt hungry. This man was fined £40, but it was impossible to get the money out of him. The Balbriggan Volunteers were responsible for collecting this money. I was in Balbriggan one night and learned that they had failed to get the money. I bet Jimmy Derham a £1 that I would get it. Murphy had a sister living near him who was married and was now Mrs. Brown. I went to this woman and told her that unless her brother paid

up immediately he would be shot. I impressed on her that the matter was urgent as a party of men were at that moment waiting to shoot him and that I had great trouble in restraining them from doing so immediately in order that I should see her first. There were no men waiting, but Mrs. Brown fell for my tale and went to her brother and he paid up and I collected my £1 bet.

In the end of 1919, or early 1920, the R.I.C. had realised that they could not possibly hold on to their small stations scattered throughout the countryside and they withdrew the police from them and reinforced the larger centres principally in the towns. Attacks had been made on such barracks by the Volunteers in different parts of the country and some were captured. In our area, however, none of the barracks were evacuated: Balbriggan, Lusk, Rush, Garristown and Donabate were still held by the R.I.C. and the garrison strengthened, and steel sheets and so forth placed on the barrack windows. North Co. Dublin differed in this respect from other areas. Those barracks or stations were all important in that they covered the rail and road communications with the North of Ireland and were within easy distances of Dublin city where large forces of military were stationed and quickly available, if required.

The R.I.C. had now become very badly depleted in strength through resignations and normal retirements and very few recruits were forthcoming for that force. In order to make up this deficiency, the British Government recruited men in England, Scotland and Wales and amongst the Unionist element in Northern Ireland. These recruits were drawn from the lowest strata of society in those places and in many cases men who were doing jail sentences in prisons for even murder and

were released to join this force. The greater portion of them had served in the British army during the previous World War. With few exceptions, they were a very bad lot and it was evident that the Irish people were in for a very bad time. They had no pretensions to be policemen and were just an auxiliary military force, badly disciplined, badly led and generally drunk and rowdy. This force would have been useless against the Volunteers were it not that our own Irishmen - the R.I.C. - acted as guides and intelligence agents for them and associated with them. A camp for the training of these men was started at the Aerodrome in Gormanston in our area and the countryside literally swarmed with them.

By this time our strength had increased somewhat, but not a lot. Quite a number of our men had been arrested and a number were also 'on the run'. In order to get some funds for the Volunteers, we organised a flapper sports meeting which was held in a field at Gormanston Railway Station quite near Gormanston Camp. We could not publicly state that the sports was for Volunteer funds, so we left the object of the sports a blank one. Our greatest supporters at this event were the Tans from the camp - nearly every Tan in the camp must have attended the sports, with the result that we collected a nice sum of money. There must have been a few thousand Tans in the camp at the time. James Derham of Balbriggan acted as treasurer.

On 20th September 1920, I went into Balbriggan to meet Derham to fix up the details of paying expenses and so forth in connection with the sports meeting. Derham and I were in a publichouse opposite Derham's. William Corcoran came in and informed me that there was a crowd of Black and Tans in another publichouse in the town who were acting in a very

rowdy manner. I had no gun, but Corcoran got me one and also one for himself, and he came with me. We went to the back door of the publichouse where the Tans were and, with the guns in our hands, entered and ordered them to clear out. Amongst the party of Tans who were seemingly unarmed, but who we knew always carried some type of small arms, were two Head Constables - two brothers named Burke from Kerry. As we entered we could see that the Tans had hold of a man named Monks, and some other civilians who had been drinking in the pub. When I ordered them to clear out, instead of doing so, they made a rush at me and I had no option but to fire. I shot one of the Head Constables dead and wounded the other, who later recovered, and then my pal and I cleared out the back door and got safely away. The Derhams, Lawless, Gibbons and others were warned not to stay at home that night.

The Tans came back in force to Balbriggan that night and looted and burned the town. They burned some thirty houses including a woollen factory. They took out Lawless and Gibbons who had remained in their homes despite the warning they had got, and shot the two dead. An ex-British army soldier, who went by the name of Jack Straw - which was not his real name, guided the Tans around the town and pointed out to them the houses to burn. Straw was not a native of the area. He was subsequently arrested by us for the part he played that night, and was duly executed. Dr. Fulham of Balbriggan was able to dissuade the Tans from burning several other houses in the town.

The British learned that I was the principal person concerned in the shooting affair in the publichouse, and they searched far and wide for me. I was truly on the run

now. They had raided my house several times before that incident, but now the murder gang, which had been organised inside the camp, visited my home several times.

Subsequent to the burning of Balbriggan, the Black and Tans went to Skerries and took two Volunteers from their homes and shot them dead. One was Volunteer John Sherlock and the other was Volunteer Hand. This was purely an act of black-guardism and provocation on the part of the Tans. There was no incident whatsoever in Skerries that would have given the Tans any excuse for this outrage.

The day after the shooting incident in Balbriggan I went to Dublin and made a report on the whole affair to Dick Mulcahy who was then Chief of Staff of the I.R.A. It should be known that, previous to this, we had received orders to shoot on sight from G.H.Q. Mulcahy received me very nicely and presented me with a lovely automatic pistol. The holocaust of Balbriggan had a serious effect on the people of Fingal. It frightened and cowed them as it was meant to do, and I noticed several times subsequently that individuals who formerly were glad to see me were now afraid to do so and made away when they saw me approaching.

A few months after this, an active service unit or column was organised in the brigade area. This column consisted of men who were on the run and wanted by the British forces. The column was made up of about twenty permanent members, but was always stronger, as we took in men from all the battalions for short periods of training. The column first went into quarters in a hay barn of Mr. Sheridan of Mooretown, near Oldtown. All the cooking was done in Mr. Sheridan's house whose family took great risks, but were delighted to have us.

When our numbers increased and the weather got better we procured a few tents and moved into a new position at Green Lanes, a short distance from Sheridan's. We still continued to cook at Sheridan's house. I armed the column with the rifles I had held over after the Collinstown raid, and each man had a rifle, bayonet and 150 rounds of ammunition. Most of the men also had revolvers. We bought food in Swords and Oldtown which was paid for out of brigade funds. Paddy Mooney from Trim, Co. Meath, was the O/C. of the column and training officer. Training was strenuous and something like the commando type which was carried out during the last World War. I did not join the column as I had to look after the battalion of which I was O/C. Incidentally, I held on to a few rifles in my battalion still. The local Oldtown company of Volunteers gave invaluable assistance in helping us out by supplying guards and in other ways.

Here I would like to pay tribute to the people of Oldtown Parish. The column was quartered there until the Truce and mixed freely amongst the people and went to Mass in the local church and yet, although there was a military garrison and a large force of R.I.C. and Tans in Swords only a few miles away, they were never made aware of the fact that the column was there.

The column made several attempts to bring off ambushes on the main Dublin-Belfast road, but never had any luck. Occasionally, they succeeded in getting a few shots at enemy forces who always made away in great haste and did not look for fight. It was not good country for guerilla warfare and one could not stay for any lengthy period or else you ran the danger of being surrounded by enemy forces. The column, or rather, portion of it, raided the Remount Depot at Lusk

and took away the Pay Bag which contained a large sum of money. An armoured car used to come from Dublin with the money to pay the staff who were all civilians. Our men waited until the armoured car had departed and then went in and took it from the manager's office. The manager was an ex-officer of the British army. The Depot was a place which broke and trained remounts (horses) for the British cavalry regiments. This money was forwarded to G.H.Q.

Michael Collins, who was Director of Intelligence on the General Staff, required the names and home addresses of officers and men of the Black and Tan and Auxiliary forces, so that counter-reprisals could be taken against them by the I.R.A. in Britain, by burning their houses and so forth. To get this information, it was necessary to capture the outgoing enemy mails. A peculiar thing was that the mails from the Black and Tan Camp in Gormanston were brought from there under strong escort and handed over to the officials in the Post Office in Balbriggan, the escort then returning to the camp. When the mails were sorted in the Post Office they were then placed on a handcart and left at the railway station by a lone postman to await the up-going mail train.

I had got a full report on this procedure and decided to take the mails when they were being delivered at the station in Balbriggan. Pepper, who was the I.O. of the brigade, took charge of this operation. He procured a car and a few men and proceeded via the Man of War to the station yard. When the postman came with the cart, he was seized and bound and the mails put in the car which now sped off in all haste. I had arranged to take the bag at a certain point on the road. The Tans in Balbriggan had spotted the mails being taken and now gave chase in another car. As our car came to the spot



where I was waiting, they flung out the bag without stopping and sped on. I had only time to drag the bag, which was a heavy one weighing about a hundredweight, under cover when the Tans in their car passed by. The Tans followed our car as far as Ballamadun, which is many miles more west, and then lost it and gave up the chase, and our men got back safely. It was near my own home at The Naul that I picked up the bag. That night, some of our men took some more mail which was being brought from the Post Office to the station in Balbriggan by two girls. This incensed the Tans and they scoured the countryside in quest of the captured mails, but did not locate them. They staged hold-ups and searches and Balbriggan people got a particularly rough time of it.

We censored the mails in a field and took the information we required from the letters therein. The letters in many cases contained postal orders and money orders. Some of these which were not crossed were cashed by our men who were in a bad way for money at some of the smaller Post Offices around the countryside. The remainder together with the letters were burned. The letters which those men were writing home to their wives were horrible and filled with sex and sensuality which clearly indicated the type of men they were and the lives they led.

Sean MacEoin had been arrested in Mullingar and was sentenced to death. He was a prisoner in Mountjoy Jail in Dublin. Mick Collins had planned to capture an enemy armoured car and with this to rescue McEoin from Mountjoy. I was instructed to find a place in the Fingal area in which to hide this armoured car. I travelled extensively over the area to try and find a safe spot to store it. I had an idea that the buildings at Fairyhouse Racecourse would be a good spot, but

on going there, I decided against it as there were too many men working there whom we knew nothing about as it was outside my area. I finally decided on a place on a very back road between Roll~~e~~estown and Oldtown, known as the Wotton. This was an old farm place, well in in the fields, and would never be spotted except by someone who knew the area. This place is now owned by Mr. Thomas Griffin, and was then the property of his father, the late Mr. Griffin of Rolestown.

We had been supplied with the measurements of the car and found that the roof of the shed we had selected was too low to take it in, so we had to raise the roof. Unfortunately, the car never came, as it seized up around Raheny after it had got away from Mountjoy. We were very disappointed at the failure of the car to arrive, as we had ambitions to drive it into Gormanston Camp some day when the Tans would be on parade there and shoot up the place. Incidentally, one of our men had been detailed to act as second driver for the car. His duty was to start the engine and raise the radiator cover when the car was captured. He went into Dublin each morning for several days for this, but each day the effort was called off for various reasons. The morning that the capture was made he did not turn up, as his house had been raided that morning and he was lying out in the fields without any clothes. The radiator cover was not lifted by anyone when the car was started and it overheated as a result and the engine seized. It was abandoned and burned by its Volunteer crew after the guns had been removed.

Orders were now received from General Headquarters that all the coastguard stations between Donabate and Laytown inclusive, along the east coast, were to be destroyed.

It was the intention of G.H.Q. to land a consignment of Thompson sub-machine guns from the United States at Loughshinny, north of Skerries. Loughshinny is a small fishing harbour lying between Rush and Skerries. Before this could be done, the coastguard stations on this particular part of the coast would have to be destroyed. Coastguard stations were strategically situated, each station being in view of the other for signalling purposes and connected by telephone. All the stations <sup>WERE</sup> inside the Fingal Brigade area, with the exception of Laytown, which was in the South Louth Brigade and which was destroyed by men from that unit. It was imperative that all the stations be destroyed at the same hour to prevent any one of them giving the alarm.

The stations were manned by ex-British naval men and their families and, as far as was known, they had no armament and generally comprised a row of dwelling houses and a stores. A Brigade Council meeting was held to plan this operation. At this meeting it was decided that Balbriggan could not be done as it was situated close to the barracks which had a large garrison of R.I.C. and Tans and was also close to Gormanston Camp. Skerries was also ruled out as being an impossible undertaking, as it was situated on a promontory where you could be easily hemmed in. The column was divided up into sections of two or three men - a section for each station to be destroyed. The column sections would be augmented by local Volunteers who would also provide the necessary paraffin supplies and other materials such as bars to smash doors, ceilings, etc. The column men would be armed with rifles, and the other Volunteers with shotguns and revolvers or whatever was available. I undertook to do the Skerries station with men from my own battalion, and was

given permission to do so. Twelve o'clock midnight was the hour fixed for the operation, which was to take place on 18th June 1921.

I organised a party to do the Skerries Station from the Skerries, Naul and Bog of the Ring companies of my battalion. We had six rifles which I had held in my battalion. Working parties were carefully organised and a large number of our men equipped themselves with buckets to hold paraffin oil. We mobilised at a certain point and proceeded into Skerries which also had a garrison of R.I.C. and Tans, but we were satisfied that our riflemen would give us sufficient protection to prevent us being surprised. In Skerries, we commandeered supplies of paraffin - we must have filled nearly a hundred buckets - from a store there, and then marched down to the coastguard station. Our men immediately set to to smash in doors, windows and so forth, to give the flames ventilation. We had all the families removed from the houses to a place of safety and as much as possible also of their furniture and household effects and then gave the place a drenching with paraffin and set it alight. We met no resistance from the occupants and found no arms there of any kind. The stores contained only food and equipment for the maintaining of the Irish Lights. The only thing we took away with us were some blankets from the stores which were badly wanted in the camp for the column. We also got a few good telescopes. The whole operation took only about twenty minutes or less and we withdrew, satisfied that the station would not operate for a long time. It was completely burned out as were all the other stations planned also. We all got away safely.

We now received orders that the main road between

Gormanston and Dublin was to be trenched. With more or less the same party as burned the Skerries coastguard station I had the road cut near the Bog of Ring. We made a substantial cutting across the road and stowed away all the spoil from the cutting well under cover. We even brushed the road to make the cutting invisible from a distance. Enemy lorries always travelled at very high speeds and we hoped that one such vehicle would go into the cutting and, actually, one of them did, but I do not know with what results. The British forces commandeered all the local people and made them fill in the trench again and threatened to shoot a couple of our Volunteers who were amongst the people commandeered. We were very anxious to destroy the bridge over the Delvin River near Gormanston Camp. This was a very substantial bridge and could not be destroyed without explosives, which were never forthcoming.

A tender load of Tans and R.I.C. were in the habit of proceeding to Garristown from Balbriggan with the pay for the men in that station and we decided to ambush and capture this enemy force at a place called the Yellow Furze. It was the only place on the route which was anyway suitable for an ambush. I mobilised a party of men from our battalion and also got a number of men from the column and occupied a position at the Yellow Furze at 2 a.m. in the morning. We stayed in that position until late in the day, but no police car turned up. One of our men came out from The Naul and informed us that the police car had passed through all right, but had taken a byroad, and had thus not come near our position, and they had also returned by that route. We were compelled to withdraw without achieving anything. It was curious that the police did go that way on that

particular morning as they had never done so previously. I do not believe they had been tipped off about us and that what happened was that they suspected that the Yellow Furze as a likely ambush area and avoided it. We intended to have another go at them here, later, but never got a chance, as the Truce intervened before we could do so.

We also made an attempt to shoot up the Black and Tans at Gormanston Station. Large numbers of Tans - some hundreds - usually alighted from the late train at Gormanston Station on their way back from local leave in Balbriggan and Dublin. The station is a few hundred yards back from the main road which was the road back to the camp, and the camp was only about three quarters of a mile from the station. We had procured a Lewis gun from G.H.Q. and this was mounted on the dashboard of a touring car. I had taken this car, which belonged to the Count Plunkett family, and took it and the gun through Dublin to Balcadden area. A second car was also available. The first car carrying the gun was to proceed to the road junction and sweep the road which would be crowded with Tans with fire. The second car, in which I and the Brigade O/C. were, was to follow this one close up and cover its withdrawal from the road junction when the job was done.

On the night selected the two cars were waiting at the Delvin Bridge and all was ready. When the train stopped at the station we set out for the road junction. The time taken to get there would be just sufficient to allow the Tans to flock on to the road from the station. Vincent Purfield was in charge of the first car. As we approached the road junction we were amazed to see our leading car suddenly go into reverse and pass out back by us along the road we had

come. It was fairly darkish at the time. We had no option now but to follow suit. Our gun car made off with all speed and we followed and it was some time before we caught up with it and learned what had happened. The story we were told was that when they neared the road junction, they had spotted an armoured car or tender at the junction as if it was protecting the Tans coming from the station. We were amazed at this as it had never happened before and looked as if the Tans had information about our attempt. We soon learned that there was no armoured car or tender at the junction. There was a car there, but it was only a hackney car owned by a man in Balbriggan who had gone there in the hope of collecting a few Black and Tan fares to the camp; and so ended our endeavour in that direction.

On another occasion a party of us went into Balbriggan in an attempt to shoot up the Tans who frequented the place at night time. In this case we used a car also, but were out of luck, as we only located one Tan whom we shot. One of our Volunteers from the Stamullen area was courting a girl who worked in the house of the people who owned Smith's factory. This girl told her boy friend that a number of the higher officers from Gormanston Camp were being entertained in the house on a certain night in the near future. Amongst the party of Tan officers was the O/C. of the camp. We decided to shoot up this party. A small number of Volunteers were mobilised and armed with revolvers and proceeded into Balbriggan by separate roads so as not to arouse any suspicion. The 'Bok' Maguire with another man was proceeding into the town via the Skerries road and close to the town met a Black and Tan. The 'Bok' shot this man and took his revolver. This put an end to our shooting plans as it did to the

entertainment. The 'Bok' claimed he had no option but to shoot the Tan who had challenged him. The Tan was a member of the band (musical) in the camp.

On another occasion, in order to entice the Tans out of Balbriggan or the camp, we decided to shoot a couple of the local Tans in a publichouse in Stamullen and The Naul. The Tans were in the habit of frequenting this publichouse. It was hoped that the Tans would come out for the purpose of reprisals and we could ambush them. Two of our men were detailed to proceed to the publichouse and do the shooting. One of our men was armed with an automatic pistol. As this man entered the publichouse he unfortunately somehow pressed the trigger of the weapon and accidentally let off a round into the floor. The Tans bolted out the back door of the place and made back to barracks. So that attempt failed also. We now decided that we would dope all the drink in the publichouse with croton oil. The owner was a Volunteer and he consented to this, but the Tans never came back after the abortive shooting affair.

The water ~~from~~<sup>for</sup> the camp at Gormanston Camp was pumped from a reservoir at Stamullen, some few miles away, and we considered polluting this water by placing Typhus germs in it; our G.H.Q. would not allow it. We made another attempt to get the O/C. of Gormanston Camp. We found out that he was in the habit of driving to Dublin by car on certain nights and returning pretty late. We laid an ambush for him at the Five Roads at Hedgestown. We had the Lewis gun for this operation, and the plan was to place a wire rope across the road which would bring the car to a halt, and then riddle it with the Lewis gun. I placed some men along the roadside bank and hedge armed with shotguns and grenades, and six men with



rifles further back on the incline to cover the shotgun and grenade men. Those men detailed to fix the wire rope had only one end of it made fast on one side of the road when the car arrived. One of our men fired a shot at the car and the lights on it were immediately switched off and it sped on past our position. The rest, or some, of our men now opened fire on it also. Having passed our position by some distance, the lights were switched on again and it made off at full speed. Our men continued to fire at it until it was out of range. We afterwards learned that the car was holed all right, but that none of the occupants was injured. The Brigade O/C. - Michael Lynch - was with us for this affair and we always seemed to have bad luck when he was around.

Much earlier on in the period we made an attempt to capture Rush Barracks. This was before the advent of the Tans and before the barracks were heavily fortified. Joseph Kelly planned this attack and I and six men armed with rifles travelled to Rush to support the attack. I had arranged to meet Kelly outside Rush at a specific hour, but when we got there, Kelly was not there and did not turn up for an hour afterwards. When he did arrive, he made some excuse and suggested postponing the attempt, but I said 'No' we would go on with it. Patrick Purfield, Kelly and a few others went to one side of the barracks, while I and my six men took up a firing position in front. We were to fire on the barracks from the front to keep the police engaged. The barracks contained five or six men and a sergeant. Meanwhile, Kelly and the others were to get on to the roof of the barracks and set it alight. We opened fire on the barracks just sufficient to keep the inmates interested

and then, after some time, stopped to allow our men to get on the roof. Although we waited a considerable time, nothing seemed to be happening and eventually a whistle was blown and we now discovered that our men, who were supposed to be on the roof, were well down the road away from the barracks and apparently had made no attempt to get on the roof, so we had to withdraw. I was disgusted at the affair and never even inquired what had really happened.

The following day, I was in Balbriggan and met some of the policemen from Rush there. They told me that they would have surrendered the barracks had they been asked to do so, as they had no intention to undergo a siege. The sergeant was killed by our fire while going up the staircase. As far as I know, he was a harmless man.

Some time in the year 1918, I joined the I.R.B. I joined the Lusk circle and it was Joe Keppy who swore me in. Subsequently there were also a few of the Naul men in this circle. While it was possible to do so, we attended meetings of the circle, but all we ever did was to talk. I am still at a loss to know what purpose the organisation served except, perhaps, if the Volunteers or I.R.A. failed to gain the independence of the country, it would continue ~~the~~ the Fenian tradition.

On Monday morning, 2nd July 1921, I was proceeding from The Naul to the camp of the column at Mooretown, Oldtown, on a cycle. The Council workers on the roads were well known to me and one of them informed me that two lorries of Tans had gone in the direction of the Nag's Head. I waited for about two hours in order to give them plenty of time to get out of the area and then started on my journey again. I had just reached the West Curragh area and rounded a bend in the

road when I ran into two tender loads of Tans. I was not carrying a gun, which was lucky for me. I had actually passed by the first tender when they fired on me, hitting me in the left hip and also in the arm and knocking me off my bicycle. The bullet that entered my hip hit the socket joint, smashing it. The one in my arm was not so serious. The Tans pulled up and jumped from the lorries into one of which they threw me and took me to the coastguard station in Balbriggan, which was now occupied by the Tans. They got Dr. Fulham of Balbriggan to attend to me and also got me a priest. I was not unconscious. Some of the girls from Balbriggan brought me in some whiskey. That night, I was taken to George V Military Hospital, Dublin, which is now St. Bricin's Hospital.

I had an escort of two armoured cars from Balbriggan to Dublin. Dr. Fulham insisted on travelling with me and also in staying in the hospital until I was operated on. I was in great pain while en route from Balbriggan and it was agonising when one of the armoured cars broke down on the road and we were held up for a couple of hours. When we came to Swords they pulled up at the military post there and delayed for half an hour. At our first halt Dr. Fulham appealed to the officer i/c. to proceed with one armoured car, but to no avail. On the whole, I was well treated in the hospital, well nursed and looked after. The staff, with the exception of one nurse, were quite nice. This girl was very hostile and bitter towards the I.R.A. and to me as one of them. There were four other I.R.A. prisoners as well as me. One of them was Sweeny Newell from Galway. While in this hospital I was visited several times by British Intelligence officers who interrogated me regarding the I.R.A. and particularly about the shooting and incidents around

Balbriggan. They got no satisfaction and usually ended up by telling me that it would be too bad for me if the Truce broke, as I was sure to be hanged.

I was released from hospital just before Christmas 1921, and the late Colonel Higgins came to the hospital in a car and took me to my home. I believe that I would not have been molested by the Tans and that they would have passed on, on the morning I was wounded, were it not that there was an R.I.C. man on the first tender and he recognised me.

The only effort made in the area to produce war munitions was the filling of shotgun cartridges with home made slugs after the ordinary shot had been removed. There was really no necessity to try to construct bombs or suchlike material in our area as we were close to the city where they had bomb factories set up and where the facilities were available for such work.

I am not in a position to give any details of how Intelligence Services operated in the area. This work was in the hands of Mr. Pepper and he seemed to have made a success of it.

There were no spies shot in the area and if any such persons did exist, which I doubt very much, they were not of much value to the British authorities. A proof of this was that the column existed for some months at Mooretown, within a few miles of Swords which was heavily garrisoned by military and Tans. The man 'Straw' who was shot was really executed for his activities on the night of the burning of Balbriggan.

Communications within the Brigade and to G.H.Q., Dublin, and afterwards to Divisional Headquarters at Dunboyne were maintained by cyclist dispatch riders. In this respect, the ladies were often very helpful.

Signed: Michael P. Brock

Date: 26 April 1956

Witness: Madden Dandy comdt.