ORIGINAL

W.S. 1,447

ROINN COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913–21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1447.

Witness

John Gaynor,
8, St. Peter's Terrace,
Balbriggan,
Co. Dublin.

Identity.

Captain, Balbriggan Company, Irish Volunteers and I.R.A.

Subject.

Activities of Balbriggan Company, 1st Battalion, 1st Eastern Division, and of Brigade Active Service Unit.
1917 - 1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

File No S.2784

Form B.S.M. 2

STATEMENT BY JOHN GAYNOR,

8, St. Peter's Tce., Balbriggan. Co. ~~Meath~~ DUBLIN

I was born in Balbriggan and received my education at the local national school there. At school, one of the teachers, a Mr. William Butler, was very keen on Irish history. He taught us a great deal of Irish history and particularly about the different attempts by the Irish people throughout the ages to regain their freedom, with special emphasis on the Fenian movement and rebellion. In this way, we, the boys of that time, developed a love for our country and a longing, or, one might say, a dream to see it independent and free again.

The town of Balbriggan and surrounding countryside was not involved in the Rebellion of 1916. There was no unit of the Irish Volunteers organised there then that I know of. There were, I think, a number of men in the area who would be members of the I.R.B. prior to that, but I suppose, due to the muddle that took place, no definite action took place here. I don't think that there was even anyone arrested from here after the collapse of the rebellion. I was then only around sixteen years old and too young and immature to have taken any part.

Early in 1917, around the month of March, James Derham and I decided to start a branch of the Volunteers in Balbriggan. We succeeded in getting a number of young men to join us, and soon we had a strength of thirty-eight. This strength increased to eighty-six at a later date. We held parades for drill and training

in fields outside the town. I undertook to do the training. I had no previous experience of this work, but by carefully studying British Army training manuals and notes from Volunteer Headquarters I managed to get through fairly well. The R.I.C., who had a strong force in the local barracks - which is now the Young Men's Catholic Association Hall - chased us several times but never succeeded in catching any of us. It was not until early in 1918 that we were affiliated to Volunteer Headquarters in Dublin. By this time I had been elected captain of our company. I was aware that there were units of Volunteers organised in other places in North County Dublin, such as Skerries, Swords, Finglas and Oldtown, and knew, and sometimes met men from these places, but so far there was nothing of a concrete organisation in North County Dublin. North County Dublin was known to everyone and called Fingal.

Early in 1918 the British Government passed a Conscription Act through Parliament for Ireland. The war with Germany was not going too well for England at this time, and they were in a bad way to keep up the strength of their armies owing to the terrific casualties inflicted on them by the German armies. Ireland as a whole decided to oppose conscription, and there now developed a period of terrific activity. Anti-conscription meetings were held everywhere and were attended by huge crowds. The supporters of the Irish National Party and that of Sinn Féin united to oppose the application of conscription to Ireland. Even some of the Unionists joined in this opposition. Never before was there such unity of purpose in the county. Men now flocked in to join the Volunteers, and our

strength went up to over two hundred in a brief space of time. We now drilled and marched openly, watched by the R.I.C., who, I believe, were as much opposed to conscription as we were. The Volunteers were instrumental in having the anti-conscription pledge, a document drawn up by the National Executive of the anti-conscription organisation, signed by nearly every citizen, and also in collecting a large amount of money for the fund to fight conscription. We drilled and drilled our big influx of recruits, but other than this there was little in the way of preparation to meet the crisis done. We knew that the National Executive had drawn up plans which envisaged the cutting of all communications, such as roads, telephones, etc., and isolating the different areas and thus preventing the British forces from enforcing the act.

Some time about April, 1918, James Derham informed me that there was a special job on and asked me if I would volunteer for it. He informed me that it would be a very dangerous mission and that the Volunteer Headquarters were getting it very hard to get volunteers for it. I told Derham I would undertake the mission. Some days later he instructed me to report to Dick Mulcahy, who was, I think, then Chief of Staff of the Volunteers. I went to Dublin and was taken to a house in Henry St., where I met Mulcahy. It was only then that I realised the serious mission I had volunteered for. Mulcahy informed me that a party of Volunteers under the command of the late Cathal Brugha were going across to London, where they would be joined by some Volunteers who were already resident there. The duty of this party of Volunteers would be to shoot the British Prime Minister and the members of his cabinet when it was announced in

the House of Commons that the King had signed the Conscription Act for Ireland. The shootings might be done in the House of Commons or elsewhere. No definite plans had as yet been made, but would be made by Cathal Brugha when we got to London. Mulcahy gave me to understand that the chances of any of the party of Volunteers surviving subsequent to those executions would be one in a million. He also informed me that our dependants would be looked after and provided for by Volunteer Headquarters. Mulcahy, without saying so, gave me the impression that I had the option of withdrawing from the venture should I wish to do so. Needless to say, I was appalled by the task we were expected to undertake, but having volunteered I was not withdrawing now. Although only about nineteen years old at this time, I was old enough to realise that this would be where I would say good-bye to this world. Having cautioned me that I was not to mention the matter to anyone, no matter who they were, he told me he would send for me later when I would get full instructions. I returned home a much more thoughtful young man.

In all, I had three interviews with Dick Mulcahy. On the second interview he gave me about twenty-five pounds, which was to cover my travelling expenses and my board and lodging in London for some time. He said he had no idea when the event would come off or how long we would have to stay in London, but that further money would be given us while there. On the third interview he told me the date I would be travelling and the route which I was going, and supplied me with a fictitious passport. I was also given the address in London where I could put up. Mulcahy also informed me that another Volunteer for the job

would be travelling with me - Seamus McNamara, whom I would contact in O'Brien's of George's St., Kingstown, now Dunlaoghaire. On no account were we to carry guns or documents of any nature on us. Guns would be supplied to us by Brugha when we got there. We were supposed to be law-abiding citizens proceeding to London to look for work.

I contacted McNamara, as arranged, in O'Brien's of Kingstown, and together we crossed on the mail boat to Holyhead and travelled down to London and got to the address given us for lodgings. This was the home of an Irish family living in London, and we were made very welcome there and well looked after. On the night of our arrival in London, a Miss Good, who was a sister of Joe Good, came to our digs. Joe Good was also a volunteer for the job. He knew London well as he had lived there prior to the Rebellion, but we had not met him yet as he was not staying at our digs. There were only the two of us there. Miss Good told us that we would meet the remainder of our party at the Irish Club House convenient to the Smithfield Market. This place was greatly frequented by the Irish colony in London and was continually watched by the London police and detectives. Cathal Brugha did not come near this place. It was a week or more before we made the acquaintance of the remainder of our party. They were staying in twos and threes in different houses all over the London area. Some of them were actually twenty miles resident from us. We met Cathal Brugha at Hampstead Heath, which was then a large park. We could not get all together here, as we would be too conspicuous, so we used to loll around in small groups of two or three at different points

and Cathal would come round each group and have a chat and give us the latest information or surmise of what was going to happen. Several times we were stopped by the police and interrogated, but our alibi was always the same - over in London looking for a job. There were so many Irishmen working in London at this time that this was nothing unusual, and the police were a soft lot and easily enough fooled. The police there were an extremely nice lot of fellows.

The hanging around with nothing definite to do and the tension of waiting for the affair was terrible. We seldom went out much during the daytime and were usually accompanied by one of the people with whom we were staying and who knew London well. We did a lot of dancing and walking and other exercises to keep ourselves fit and to try and keep our minds off the job that was before us. Despite this, the time was terribly monotonous and trying. Day after day and week after week without anything definite. You could see some of the lads beginning to look old and haggard under the strain, and I am sure many of them looked years older by the time they got back to Dublin. I lived up to the strain well - probably my youth was an advantage. I was about ten or twelve years younger than the rest of the party. What annoyed me most was the want of something definite in the nature of work or something that would keep my mind occupied.

One day when we met Brugha at Hampstead Heath he had an assignment draw. We were each required to draw a coloured bead from a hat, and each bead indicated the Minister or person who was to be shot. I was last,

except Cathal himself, to draw, and the only two Ministers left then were Lloyd George himself and Lord Milne. I drew my bead, but Cathal did not then decide which was my man and said he would instruct me later. In the meantime, he told me to travel down to Wales, where Lloyd George's home was, and to make myself thoroughly acquainted with the house and surroundings, which I did. We also had to make ourselves acquainted with the House of Commons, the exterior, not interior, and Downing St. and so forth, and the residence or place of residence of the particular Minister to whom one was allotted. I believe a few of the party, including Brugha, were inside in the House of Commons. I was not. We were given photographs of the different Ministers to study. I would have known Lloyd George anywhere from all the different photos of him I had seen in the papers. We were also now given guns by Cathal. Some got .38 revolvers, while others got automatic pistols. I got a revolver.

We still had no definite idea of how we were going to do the job. The ideal way would be to shoot them all in the House of Commons, but whereas one or two of us might get into the public gallery in the house, it would not be possible, I think, for a party of fourteen Irishmen with their Irish brogues to do so. Cathal indicated to us that no plans could be made until the last few hours, and I think he had some agent inside the Government service who would tip him off in sufficient time when Lloyd George was going to make the announcement. When we asked about escape plans, we were told it was every man for himself. Although Cathal had sent me to Wales, he said that he did not think it would be necessary for me to go there as Lloyd George would hardly be leaving London after making the announcement.

It was about the middle of August, I think, that we were issued with our guns and told to hold ourselves in readiness to strike any evening then. We were never called upon to do the shooting, as Lloyd George never made the announcement. The King had refused to sign the Conscription Act. We were finally told that the job was off for good and to make our way back to Ireland in our own time, but not to travel together or at the same time and not more than two together. We handed our guns and ammunition back to Brugha, who complimented us on our courage and steadfastness. McNamara and I took the train to Liverpool in the hope of getting back to Dublin from there. We could not look for a travel permit back to Dublin, as that would give rise to questions as to how we got to London and what we were doing there. McNamara knew some of the members of the crews on the B.& I. boats plying from there to Dublin, and we hoped they would smuggle us back to the North Wall. We stayed in Liverpool for three days with a woman who was either Irish or of Irish descent and who was very hostile in her outlook to the British Government. She lived in Marmaduke St. We got in touch with members of the crew of one of the boats and they took on to smuggle us aboard. When we went down to the docks to get on the boat, who should be there but Delia Larkin, also trying to get aboard and talking, I think, to the 1st Mate, so we had to postpone our venture until the following night. We got aboard the following night at a very late hour when everything was quiet around the docks. Two of the crew, who were Dublinmen, took us aboard and put us in their own bunks. On arrival at the North Wall, although the boat got in at six in the morning, we could not go

ashore until after eight when everything was clear. We had to stay concealed until the place was clear of Customs men and so forth. McNamara and I now parted company. I returned to Balbriggan. Shortly after this, I believe, McNamara cleared off to America.

It was a great relief to get away from London and the horrible tension of that place. The heat there, being mid-summer, was very trying, and the monotony of walking the streets with nothing to do was terrible. The Irish element in London were wonderfully good and they never spared themselves in looking after our comfort. There were some wonderful Irish girls there then. Our party in London was fourteen strong, amongst whom was Matt Furlong, who was afterwards killed by an exploding mortar gun he had made while carrying out tests at Dunboyne, Co. Meath. While we were in London we were paid about ten pounds per week ourside our lodgings money, and our people at home also received some sums of money.

On my return to Balbriggan I rejoined the local company of Volunteers and again took over the post of captain. Another man had acted in my absence. Everyone was anxious to know where I had been, but I just kept them guessing and in time they forgot about it. When I was leaving for London the company was about two hundred strong. This was under the threat of conscription; now that this was over, it soon had dwindled down to about twenty active men. There were three revolvers and a half dozen hand grenades for armament for the company now. I think Derham had got them from the Battalion Quartermaster, Joseph Kelly of Lusk. There was a battalion organisation in Fingal now. Michael Lynch was the Battalion O/C, Jack McDonnell of Skerries, Battalion Adjutant; and Joe

Kelly of Lusk was Battalion Quartermaster. There were companies of Volunteers in Balbriggan, Skerries, Swords, Lusk, St. Margarets, Finglas, Oldtown and other places, and meetings of the Battalion Council, which comprised the Battalion Staff Officers and the captains of each company, were held regularly. The Dublin Brigade had been reorganised and we were the 5th Battalion of that Brigade.

In the end of the year 1918 a general election took place throughout the country, and Sinn Féin, which was getting well on its feet by now, contested all the seats against the Irish National Party, which was led by John Redmond. The period prior to the election meant a busy time for the Volunteers. There were still in Balbriggan at this time a big number of supporters of Redmond and his party and, in addition, the town had supplied a big contingent of men to the British army during the war. The dependants of these men and their relatives, and the followers of Redmond were openly hostile to Sinn Féin and the Volunteers. The R.I.C., of course, were also hostile and they only made a feint to control the anti Sinn Féin elements. Sergeant Finnerty from the local barracks was particularly bad in this respect. When Sinn Féin held meetings in the area, the Volunteers had to attend to keep order and to protect the speakers from hostile elements in the crowd. There were several clashes between the Sinn Féin supporters and the R.I.C., who used their batons freely, but no one was seriously hurt. In addition, the Volunteers, who were supporting the Sinn Féin nominee wholeheartedly, were busily engaged in checking registers and canvassing voters and so forth, and again in collecting for the Sinn Féin election fund. On the day of the polling, the Volunteers were

required to have a party on duty at each polling station to ensure that their supporters would be allowed to vote freely. In addition, they did a huge amount of personation on behalf of Sinn Féin, Frank Lawless, the Sinn Féin candidate, was returned by a big majority. Everything went off quietly enough on polling day, and that night a Volunteer guard was placed on the ballot boxes to ensure that they were not interfered with. The R.I.C. also had men on duty on the boxes, but they did not interfere with our men there.

The National Aid Society, which had been formed to assist the relatives and dependants of men executed after the Rebellion in 1916 and of those imprisoned afterwards, were collecting and organising functions to obtain money for their funds. Here again the Volunteers were very active in collecting and organising dances and so forth for this organisation.

Early in 1919 - in January of that year - the 1st Dáil met in Dublin and set themselves up as the first elected Irish government since the Act of Union. One of the first acts of the Dáil was to float a public loan to finance its undertakings, and here again the organisation of the Volunteers was availed of to collect money for this object. It was remarkable how well the people subscribed to this loan; even the people who had opposed us in the election the previous December now subscribed. Quite a big sum, I know, was collected in this area. Each person subscribing was given a receipt and every penny so given was accounted for. I am sure most of the people looked upon it as just another collection, which were nearly every day affairs now. James Derham acted as local agent for the loan and received all monies collected.

Later on in the year the Dáil, who had now taken on the Volunteers as the Army of the Republic, decreed that all members of this force should take an oath of allegiance to that body as the Government of the Republic. All our company, which was now about thirty strong, took this oath, and from thence onward we were the I.R.A. A Brigade organisation was now in operation in the Fingal area, with Michael Lynch as Brigade O/C. I don't remember who the other officers of the Brigade Staff were then. The battalions comprising the Brigade were: the 1st, which covered generally the area Balbriggan, Skerries, the Naul, Gormanstown. Michael Rock was O/C of this battalion. The 2nd Battalion took in the area Rush, Lusk and Swords. James O'Connell was the O/C. The 3rd Battalion was the area Finglas, St. Margarets, Coolock, Kinsealy, and Thomas Markey of Finglas was O/C of this battalion. The 4th Battalion was organised in the area Garristown, Oldtown, Ardcath, and Walter Brown was O/C of this. The companies making up our battalion were Balbriggan, Skerries, Bog of the Ring, the Naul, and Gormanston-Balscadden. Peter Whelan was Captain of Gormanston; Christopher Rooney, the Naul; William Rooney, the Bog of the Ring; Jack McGowan, Skerries; and I was Captain, Balbriggan.

So far, none of our men was 'on the run' and there had been no arrests in the area as yet. We still carried on our training, in secret, of course. We had no rifles as yet, and still only our few revolvers and grenades. In September, 1919, the R.I.C. barracks in Rush was attacked. Rush was not in our battalion area and our job was the blocking of roads and the cutting of communications. Gormanston Camp at this time held a big

garrison of military and Royal Air Force personnel, and it was expected that it was from there that reinforcement would come from to the relief of Lusk. I was given the task of blocking all the roads between Balbriggan and Rush and of cutting the telephone and telegraph wires. We felled trees across all the roads for quite a depth south of Balbriggan, including the main Dublin-Belfast road, and cut all the telephone and telegraph wires in the area. We were later complimented by the Brigade O/C for the fine job we had done that night. For some reason the barracks was not captured. After a brief exchange of shots the attackers withdrew.

Subsequent to the attack on Rush Barracks, the R.I.C. barracks at Gormanston village was evacuated by that force and the local company were detailed to have the place destroyed. This barracks was only situated about half a mile from the aerodrome, which was a military encampment. The local company made an attempt to destroy it, but only damaged it slightly, leaving it still habitable. When I learned of this, I took a few other men with me from Balbriggan and went down there and set about making a proper job of it. We hacked the walls open with pickaxes and then, using old waste material, saturated the premises with paraffin oil and set it alight. The place was completely burned out. Our party, which consisted of three men and myself, did not carry any arms on this operation. This event took place much earlier than the general burning or destruction of evacuated barracks. No other barracks was evacuated in our area. In the early part of 1920 the R.I.C. began evacuating all their small posts in the country and concentrating their men in larger stations. By now the strength of the R.I.C. had been well depleted through resignations and normal

wastage and very few recruits were forthcoming for the force, so they could not keep those stations up to their normal strength when they should have been reinforcing them. The withdrawal of the R.I.C. gave, as they thought, a free hand to the less law-abiding elements in the community, and the Volunteers now had to take on the job of policing the countryside and even the towns. This was a big job for a limited number of men, who could only devote their spare time to the task, but they were well assisted by the general public, who co-operated with them to a high degree. The R.I.C. had never been particularly successful in this respect for want of that lack of co-operation, and particularly so since the advent of Sinn Féin. The Volunteers soon had a complete mastery of the situation. In this area, apart from a few very minor incidents, there was no trouble in this respect. We had to establish temporary places of detention, commonly called "unknown destinations", in our area, and take in and hold prisoners from other areas in the Brigade. One of those detention centres was at Knockbrack in an old house there. Amongst the prisoners we held there were the men arrested over the sovereigns case at Mulhuddart. It would appear that some young fellows, while hunting rabbits in the Mulhuddart area, came across a bag of sovereigns hidden in a rabbit hole, which they appropriated to themselves. The money, I believe, belonged to a postman, who was afraid he might be robbed and had hidden it there. I understand there was about eight hundred pounds in the bag. They had spent some of the money and given more of it away before they were arrested. We held them for about three weeks, when they were taken from us and, I think, released. The keeping of prisoners was a bit of a nuisance, as it meant a continual guard on the place

as well as providing food and other necessities for both guards and prisoners. All this police work had one great advantage in that it broke the monotony of parades and drilling without any immediate object in view or the hope of getting serviceable arms, and it worked up a spirit of pride in the Volunteers.

In May, 1920, a large number of Irish prisoners were released from Irish and English jails consequent on hunger-strikes in those places. This was looked upon by all as a big victory and was celebrated accordingly. A mixed procession of Volunteers and general public marched from Balbriggan to Clonard Hill, where a bonfire was lighted. This procession carried a tricolour or national flag, and was, of course, as usual at such events, accompanied by Sergeant Finnerty and three other R.I.C. men to observe events. While at the bonfire, I was informed that Sergeant Finnerty had told some friends of his that he would take the flag off us before we entered the town on our way back. I told J. Derham about this and he said: "If he does we will plug him", meaning we would shoot him. We had just reached Clonard St., which is the entrance to the town on that side, when Sergeant Finnerty made a dash to seize the flag, which was in the centre of the procession. I immediately pulled a revolver from my pocket and dropped him. Immediately there was consternation. The three R.I.C. who accompanied the Sergeant ran for their barracks, while the leading half of the procession, which was in front of the flag, proceeded on into town with melodeons playing, unaware of what had happened, and dispersed quietly. The R.I.C. suspected a group of us as being responsible for the shooting, and I and some others were taken to the

barracks and subjected to a terrific interrogation, but were later released. We were satisfied they had no evidence against us. We were interrogated at intervals, both night and day, for over a week, but all to no avail. The Sergeant was taken to hospital, where he died the following day. From the start of events after the Rebellion he had been making himself unpopular and was alway: looking for trouble.

In August, 1920, a general raid for arms was ordered throughout the country in an attempt to forestall a collection of those weapons by the British forces. In the Balbriggan area we collected one hunded and ten shotguns of various types and a fair supply of cartridges, also four .22 sporting rifles, one of them a Winchester type. We got no service weapons or any revolvers of any type. The guns were dumped in an underground passage in an old brickyard at Clonard. This place was none too dry and they got into a bad condition. Later on when we tested some of them to fire buckshot, the barrels burst. The guns were collected quietly and there was no need to resort to shooting anywhere. Most of the people were only too willing to get shut of the weapons.

The Black and Tans were now in force in the country. They had established a depot at the aerodrome in Gormanston, which lies, just north of Balbriggan. They were reputed to have about two thousand men in the camp, amongst whom were a good sprinkling of R.I.C. who acted as instructors and administrators. Balbriggan now became a lively place, as the Tans flocked into the town to drink in the publichouses there. They were a motley crowd, looking anything except what they were supposed to be - policemen. They were dressed in all

sorts of uniforms. Some had khaki tunics and police trousers, while others were dressed in reverse pattern. To add to the comic effect, the uniforms were badly fitting and their caps were worn at all angles. They were a boisterous, badly disciplined crowd, and while some of them were fine, decent-looking men, a big portion were plainly of a bad type. They had been recruited from the riff-raff of the English, Scottish and Welsh towns. Quite a lot of them were believed to have long term prison records, and some of them were actually released from English prisons, where they were doing life sentences, on undertaking to join the force. On account of their comic uniforms, the people nicknamed them Black and Tans after the famous pack of fox hounds in the south of Ireland - the Scarteen Black and Tans - whose markings were of the same colour as the uniforms of our new police force. Their official title was the Royal Irish Constabulary, as they were meant to reinforce that force, and it shows to what a low standard the once proud R.I.C. had sunk to when they accepted such men as comrades. The morals and morale of the Tans were of a very low standard. In Gormanston Camp there was an R.I.C. man named McNamara, who, I think, came from Kerry. I think he was a Sergeant and seemed to be the Provost Sergeant. At any rate, it appeared that he was responsible for the behaviour of the Tans when they came into Balbriggan. Were it not for the activities of this man, no girl or man could appear on the streets when they arrived. In fact, it would have been impossible to stay in the town. His methods of dealing with the Tans were not of the kid glove type. His boots and his fists were his weapons. It was quite a usual sight to see this man kick members

of our new police force out of publichouses on to the street and then, with his fists and boots, put them out of town. The Tans, I think, were not used to consuming liquor as strong as Irish liquor was then and they soon got into a drunken state and, being the type they were, started looking for trouble. In addition, when they came into town they often stole things from shops and houses, and McNamara was particularly keen on getting them for this behaviour. They did not carry arms when on local leave in the town, but when in camp they were well armed with rifles, bayonets, revolvers and Lewis guns. Such was life in Balbriggan then, and such was the police force which England had sent over to proteet us. They soon had a few bands organised in the camp. One was a pipe band, equipped with the drums and pipes of the Lusk Band, and the flag of that band, with the black raven depicted thereon, as the emblem of Fingal. The instruments were stolen by the Tans when they raided the Lusk area. They also had a couple of brass bands, the instruments of which were similarly appropriated in other areas visited by them.

On a Sunday near the end of September, 1920, a sports meeting was held in Balbriggan to raise funds, supposedly for the Catholic Church but really for Volunteer funds. The Volunteers did duty at the sports in keeping the people off the roads and tracks and suchlike. The Tans from the camp - unarmed - were the biggest supporters of this event and turned up in their hundreds. They resented being pushed around by the Volunteers, who, of course, wore no distinctive markings and to the Tans were ordinary civilians, and several times during the afternoon clashes with the Tans were narrowly

averted. Amongst the events at the sports was a trotting match on the road, and here the Volunteers had great trouble in keeping the road clear of Tans. A sum of ninety-eight pounds profit was made at the sports, a lot of which was Tans money.

On the Monday following the sports two R.I.C. men, brothers, named Burke, serving in Gormanston Camp with the Tans, reported to Dublin and one was promoted to the rank of District Inspector, and the brother to the rank of Sergeant. They took a taxi back to Balbriggan and pulled up at Smith's publichouse, which was already full of Black and Tans. They started drinking with the Tans there. The taxi man was apparently anxious to get back to the city and he asked his passengers to pay him his fare. They refused to do so. The taxi driver left the publichouse and complained to some civilians, who in turn told us about the affair. Mick Rock, who was our Battalion O/C, was at this time in another house in the town where he was dealing with the accounts after the sports. I reported the matter to Rock, and he asked if we could get him a gun. Corcoran, who was with me, went off and quickly returned with revolvers for us. Rock and Corcoran and I then proceeded to the publichouse where the Tans were, with our guns in our pockets. We entered the publichouse and Rock spoke to the new District Inspector about not paying the taxi man his fare and then drew his gun and fired a few shots rapidly. The place was quickly in bedlam and, in the confusion, we three made our getaway safely. Rock had shot the District Inspector dead and wounded the Sergeant seriously.

All the Volunteers were now given instructions that they were not to sleep in their homes that night.

Some of them disregarded this instruction and paid the penalty for it. The British forces up to now had not commenced their reign of reprisals, although there had been a few cases down the country where they had done so. They seemed isolated cases. We feared, however, that they might take reprisals on Balbriggan and would at least carry out wholesale raids and arrests. We had no time to make arrangements to meet reprisals that night and there were no arms of any much value locally. I stayed in town that night but not at home.

The Tans from Gormanston came back that night and burned a big portion of the town, including the local woollen mills. When they arrived in the town they were, I think, or seemed to be all drunk and were in a frenzy. They went around like savages, screaming and shouting and firing shots in the air. They looted the publichouses and shops, and Tans could be seen with bottle of whiskey in one hand and rifle in the other and letting off shots in the air. It was quite apparent they were out to institute a complete reign of terror, and this they did. Everywhere there were fires and shooting, and it was impossible to know what was happening. Now the Auxiliary police who were stationed in Collinstown Aerodrome arrived from there to assist the Tans in their devilish work. The Auxies caught Seán Gibbons and Jim Lawless, two of our Volunteers who, although warned, had stayed at their homes, and took them out of their houses and beat them unmercifully. Having ill-treated these two men to their satisfaction, they then took them to the local R.I.C. barracks, where they got a doctor to attend to their wounds and a priest to attend to them also. They then took the two men across the street into a lane

almost opposite the barracks and shot both of them dead. I had a look at both their bodies the following morning and they were an awful sight to see. Their killers had literally hacked their bodies to pieces. That day I went "on the run", as the R.I.C. and Tans started looking for me.

There was at this time living in Balbriggan a man named Hemstraw, commonly known as Jack Straw. This man had been born in Glasgow and had served in the British Navy. He lived with an aunt of his in Balbriggan. Local gossip had it that he had led the Tans and Auxies around the town and pointed out to them the houses to be burned and the homes of Volunteers on that fateful night. I don't know if this is correct or not, but I do know that on the morning following the burning I saw him standing looking at one of the houses which were still smouldering, and laughing as if he was obtaining great satisfaction from the fact. A broken gas main was alight in the ruins of this house and sending up a long flame still. I went over to him and asked him what he was laughing at, and he replied "at the fire". At this time he certainly looked like a man who had been up all night and was covered with grime from the fires and a bit of burned material was attached to his clothes. He disappeared after this and was not seen in Balbriggan again. He next turned up one night in Skerries and was promptly put out of town by the Volunteers. That night the Tans took Volunteers John (Terry) Sherlock and Tom Hand from their homes and shot them dead. Sherlock had been instrumental in putting Hemstraw out of the town. The Tans also burned some houses in the town that night. The search for Hemstraw was now intensified and he was

picked up a few days later, taken to a priest and then shot by our men, who buried the body, but not too well, in a field. The Tans now started searching for him. They had either been informed of his death or had lost contact with him. They eventually discovered where he was buried and exhumed the body and took it away with them.

When I went "on the run" I was accompanied by Jack Corcoran. We stayed for some time around the Bog of the Ring, Knockbrack and Walshestown. We ate in neighbouring houses and slept in haybarns and outoffices. We then went on to the residence of Frank Lawless at Saucerstown, near Swords, who was then, I think, in jail and all his sons "on the run". We were fed in the Lawless house and at night slept in a haybarn. One day while here, Colm Lawless, Corcoran and I went for a walk towards Collinstown Aerodrome. We wanted to see what was going on there. The military at Collinstown used to send out patrols on cycles and we met one such patrol when near the Boot Inn. The patrol passed on and did not molest us. Further on and just beside Snead's place we met two young soldiers on bicycles, armed with rifles and bayonets. One of them appeared to be drunk. They had apparently lagged behind the patrol. We upended them off their bicycles and took the cycles and rifles and bayonets and ammunition off them. We took the captured articles to Brackenstown, where we concealed them in an old heap of straw. A few nights later we returned and collected the rifles and ammunition and took them to Saucerstown, where they were again concealed. Those rifles eventually helped to equip the column. I don't know what happened to the bicycles. They were of no use to us, as they were a special military bicycle and it would be suicide to be

caught with one of them.

From Saucerstown we moved to Rooney's of Wyamstown, near Oldtown, and we were there for a few weeks. The Tans began raiding around there extensively and we shifted to Pat Farrell's of Drishogue. We also stayed for a time at Hunstown House, near Finglas, which was one of the Brigade detention centres, and we did guard on prisoners there. We also stayed for a while in Mick Byrne's of Arcath, sleeping in O'Brien's of Bryanstown.

The Brigade now planned to ambush the Tans at Gormanston Station. Large numbers of the Tans were wont to return to camp at night on the last train from Balbriggan and Skerries after their carousing there. They alighted from the train at Gormanston Station and then walked to the camp. The station premises is joined to the main Dublin-Belfast road by a by-road a few hundred yards long, and it was on this by-road that we intended to ambush them. They would be unarmed except for what small arms they might have concealed in their pockets. It may not seem altogether compatible with the rules of warfare to shoot unarmed men returning off local leave, but then one must remember that the Tans had no compunction whatsoever in taking our men from their beds while unarmed and shooting them, and also in shooting our people on the streets and in their fields at their work as they flew past on their lorries.

About fifty Volunteers were mobilised at Balscadden convenient to Gormanston Station for this affair. Some few were armed with rifles, others had shotguns and some had revolvers. Mick Lynch, the Brigade O/C, was in charge. I and eight other men were detailed

to take up a position behind the bank and hedge on the side of the by-road. We were armed with shotguns and buckshot. We were in position about an hour before the train was due. After some time in the position we were instructed to get out, that the affair was off, which we did. On enquiring afterwards the reason for this, I was told that one of the men at Balscadden had let off a shot accidentally and the Brigade O/C had called off the attempt as a result, fearing that the garrison in the Tans camp at the aerodrome would have heard the shot and would be alarmed accordingly. We were much nearer to that camp and we did not hear any shot.

The Fingal Brigade had now been incorporated in the 1st Eastern Division which had been organised, with headquarters at Dunboyne, Co. Meath. Seán Boylan of Dunboyne was O/C of the Division. A column or active service unit was now started in the Brigade, and Corcoran and I joined this. We were billeted in a haybarn at Smith's on the Oldtown-Dublin road near Oldtown. We got our food supplies from Taylor's of Swords, which was delivered by their van to one of the local houses, where we picked it up. It was cooked for us in Smith's kitchen, and Miss Smith, who afterwards married Tom Peppard, the Brigade Intelligence Officer, did the major amount of this work. She is now dead, R.I.P. The column was at first about fifteen strong, but this at times went up to twenty-five or more as men from the different battalions were taken in for training for short periods. Each man was armed with a service rifle and fifty rounds of .303 ammunition. The rifles were those that remained in the Brigade area from the raid on Collinstown Aerodrome. We did our own guard, and in this we were assisted by the

local Oldtown Company of Volunteers. Later on, when our strength somewhat increased, we moved from Smith's and took up our abode in tents in an old lane at Mooretown a short distance down the road. We still did the cooking in Smith's kitchen. The Division Headquarters sent Paddy Mooney from Trim to take charge of the column, and at any time when he was away Tommy Kelly of Corduff took charge. Our food was still supplied by Taylor's of Swords, and this was augmented by the commandeering of an odd sheep from the local farmers. The farmers did not object and were given a receipt for each animal so taken and were paid in full afterwards.

Paddy Mooney took charge of the training, which was intensive and included all the usual subjects - drill, musketry, bayonet fighting and minor tactics and suchlike. We were kept going at a fast rate all the time during the day. At night I and some others were detailed to visit companies of Volunteers in the Brigade area and put them through their paces also. I did three nights per week with the Gormanston Company and two nights with Oldtown. Some of our men were free in the evenings and spent such spare time with the local people in their houses or in Oldtown. It was a remarkable thing that, despite all this activity and goings and coming of Divisional officers and Brigade Staff officers who were staying in the camp, the British military or Tans in Swords, which was only a few miles away, were never aware of our whereabouts. The people of Oldtown area certainly knew how to keep their mouths shut. On Sundays we went to Mass in Oldtown chapel and those of us remaining on duty in the camp went to Mass in the Naul or Ballyboughal.

The first offensive operation attempted by the column was an attempt an an ambush at Santry demesne on the main Belfast-Dublin road. There was nothing particular in view, but it was only a matter of staying there long enough and some enemy force would come along the road. I was detailed to take charge of this attempt. I had six men armed with rifles, two with revolvers and one man with hand grenades. We moved across country from Mooretown in the early morning, quite a considerable journey, and took up position behind the demesne wall along the main road and waited. When some considerable time in this position, we saw a woman coming towards us through the woods. We did not want anyone to know we were there, as this was strange country to us and we did not know how we stood with the local people. To avoid being seen by this woman, we moved away from our position under cover and proceeded to Charter House Schools, which are on the by-road linking the Belfast road with the Ballymun-Ballyboughal road. We had only just got to that point when some lorries filled with military pulled up on the road in front of the schools. The soldiers dismounted and deployed into the grounds of the demesne, and it looked as if they were trying to encircle us or get in on the rear of the position we had left. There was a good covered way of retreat from the back of the schools, and availing of this we got away without being observed. We crossed the Ballymun road and proceeded across country to the north of St. Margaret's village. From there we made our way back to Mooretown - to our comrades - without any further trouble. It appeared to us that someone had spotted us in our ambush position or going into the demesne in the morning

and had informed the military at Collinstown Aerodrome, which was closeby, and we were very lucky that they did not come in on our rear while we were in ambush position.

Our next big operation was the burning of the Coastguard stations along the east coast between Dublin and Drogheda. This was an operation which called for careful timing, as each Coastguard station was visible to the one on either flank of it, and any default in destroying one might be the cause of that station giving the alarm and bringing down large enemy forces on us. This was an operation for the whole column, assisted by the Volunteers. The column was divided into small groups corresponding to the stations to be destroyed. Some groups were stronger than others, according to the type of station or the possible resistance or trouble it was estimated might be encountered. I was one of the party detailed for the destruction of Rogerstown Station. For this we had nine of the column, of which Paddy Mooney took charge himself. We left Mooretown in the late evening and travelled across country, mostly in daylight. We had to cross a number of roads, including the Belfast road, which were danger points. The Rush and Corduff Volunteers assisted by scouting for us. We arrived at the station on schedule and had no trouble in getting admission to the premises, which consisted of married quarters for the guards and their families and some stores. No resistance was offered to us and we could find no arms in the place. The Coastguards had previously been an armed force, but I understand the arms had been collected off them some time previous to this.

We gave the occupants of the houses the opportunity of saving any articles from the houses that they required, but, with the exception of some bedding and suchlike, they were not very interested in doing so. They informed us that they would be compensated adequately for what they lost. One man asked us to save his piano for him, as he said he would not be compensated for that, so we took it out and put it in a safe place. Paraffin oil had been collected and dumped near the place by the local Volunteers, and this was liberally sprinkled over the houses and their contents and the place then set alight. Having satisfied ourselves that the place would be totally burned out, we started our return journey to Mooretown, to which place we got back alright, as did all the other sections also. A peculiar thing about this affair was the fact that the Coastguards told us they had been expecting us for some time previously.

Next the column was ordered to Leixlip-Celbridge area for an attack on a troop train coming back from Belfast with troops for the Curragh. They had been in Belfast for the opening of the Northern Parliament. This was in the first week of July, 1921. About twenty-two men of the column, each equipped with a rifle and fifty rounds and under the command of Paddy Mooney, left the camp in the evening in full light and proceeded across country in a westerly direction. A small party were left behind to guard the camp. I went with the main body. Robert Battersby of Ashbourne scouted in front of us, and the roads we had to cross, which included the Dublin-Ashbourne road and the Dublin-Navan road, both of which were main arteries. The going was across country all the way and it was very tough, as those parts

of County Dublin and Meath have desperate fences. Battersby scouted for us as far as Kilbride and after that we looked after ourselves, but I think Mooney knew that part of the country very well. We arrived at Murtagh's farm, north west of Dunboyne, just as it was getting on to dark or twilight, as there was practically no dark at this time of year. We were given a meal in Murtagh's house and then went to Confession in a room in the house where a priest was in attendance. There were a big number of Volunteers assembled there also, none of whom was known to us. There was a great air of excitement around the place, with people coming and going all the time - apparently staff officers and messengers.

After spending a couple of hours hanging around there we were all "fell in" again and we started off across country, still travelling westward or south west. We all wondered what was up or where we were going, and dame rumour was rampant with all sorts of versions. Someone said we were going to attack the Curragh Camp; others said we were going to Cork. Although it was nightime, the visibility was fairly good and one could cross hedges and dikes not as easily as daylight but nearly so. Eventually we came out on to the road and were finished with cross country. Our column was leading and there were numerous halts and taking cover on the sides of the road, apparently waiting for scouts out in front to report roads clear or not. After tramping many miles we came down a steep decline into a village, which turned out to be Leixlip, on the Dublin-Mullingar road. We passed through this village, where everyone was apparently asleep and none bothered to see who we were. Yet I am sure there were many eyes

peeping out of the darkened windows at us. After passing the village we turned off to the south, and having tramped for another hour or so we eventually turned in to the entrance gate to a short avenue leading to what appeared to be a medium sized gentleman's residence. The extrance was quite close to what appeared to be a railway bridge with the road overheard.

We soon had the residents of the place routed out of their beds and locked up in the harness rooms in the yard. It was apparently the home of a loyal British subject, as it had pictures of the Royal Family and so forth on the walls. Here we were only too glad to get down to rest, as we were very tired after a long, rough tramp. Some of the boys, however, played the piano and sang. Men from other units entered the house also. It was well daylight now and must have been about six o'clock in the morning. As yet we did not know or have any idea of what we were going to do. Here, as in Dunboyne, there were comings and goings of staff officers. We were lying alongside the railway, which, we soon discovered, was the Great Southern Railway, and were warned to keep under cover, as trains were running to and fro pretty frequently. A number of men, who looked like workmen, and a postman were brought in under escort and locked up as prisoners under guard.

We were served with breakfast, consisting of a hunk of loaf bread on which was a fried rasher, and a mug of tea. The day was becoming exceptionally warm. A lot of cars had apparently been commandeered and brought into the yard of the house, which, we learned, belonged to Mr. Wardell. This assembly and its object was a great source of curiosity and speculation to us all

and gave plenty of scope to the wise crackers with their jokes. We seemed to have an abundance of humorists in our outfit.

Some time after midday we were all 'fell in" and now we were told our mission and our duties. It would appear that a train carrying, I think, nearly a thousand soldiers was due to pass down the line about 1 p.m. on its way back from Belfast to the Curragh, and we were to ambush this train. Either five, seven or nine mines were laid or dug in between the railway tracks, and these would be exploded simultaneously under the train. Meanwhile, before the train was due we would take up position on the embankment. The railway runs through a slight cutting and under the road bridge mentioned previously. We were to keep low down and behind the embankment until the explosions or mines went off, and then come up and rake the carriages with rifle fire. We were told to aim low at where the seats normally were. When the job was over we would load into the cars and be driven out of the area.

We loaded our rifles and marched out of Wardell's yard and took up our position on the railway embankment. We were just settling into our positions when rifle fire broke out from the yard of the house and from around the entrance gate at the road. On looking around we perceived that a party of military with lorries had halted at the entrance gate and were engaging some Volunteers who were still in Wardell's yard. The military were short of a hundred yards in our rear and apparently had not spotted us. This seemed to be the end of our ambush ideas, as we were now the surprised

ones and not the enemy. We were now ordered by Mooney to leave our positions, and we moved southwards along the railway and extricated ourselves without being seriously engaged. We had with us at the time a man from Dublin who was armed with a Thompson machine-gun, and I had also seen another man with one that morning.

After travelling some distance we wheeled westward across country. We had seen the pilot engine proceeding down the railway and we were now harassed by an aeroplane of which we had not been warned previously. The aircraft apparently was not armed, as he made no attempt to fire on us and contented himself with diving down at us occasionally. He was probably indicating our whereabouts to his own side. We did not fire at him either, as that would pin-point our whereabouts to them. After travelling across country for some time and crossing a swamp, we got into the woods at Celbridge and then the aircraft worried us no more. We waded through the Liffey under cover of the woods of Celbridge demesne. The river was quite shallow here. We then proceeded towards Dunboyne. There were only the men of our column now and no sign of the Volunteers who had been with us that morning. We procured some food in a big house en route and then trekked on to Dunboyne. At Dunboyne we billeted that night in the castle. The owners of this place were, I think, away from it at this time. At least, I did not see them and only the servants were there. We were well treated by them and given good food and beautiful beds, a luxury we had not enjoyed for quite a while.

We remained in the castle until the following evening, when we again set out across country for our camp at Mooretown, which we reached sometime during the night in a very tired condition but without any casualties. We had accomplished an enormous cross-country hike all for nothing. I would say that, as far as I could see, there were over a hundred men, all armed, assembled for this ambush. There were a lot more of our men in another house a short distance away from Wardell's.

The mails for the Tans camp at Gormanston were delivered to the post office in Balbriggan on a Crossley tender with an escort. Strange as it may seem, they were then taken from the post office to the station in Balbriggan by a girl, without any escort. The mails were in an ordinary post office mail bag. It was decided to seize the bag and contents. Our G.H.Q. at this time were very anxious to get the names and home addresses of the members of the British forces serving in Ireland so that reprisals could be carried out against them in England, which usually took the form of burning their houses. We got a car and waited in the station yard until the girl came along with the mails, and then took them from her and threw them into the car. We then mounted the car and drove off back to Mooretown. The Tans from Balbriggan were quickly on our track with a Crossley tender, but the by-roads of North County Dublin are very numerous and very crooked and we knew them well. They, the Tans, had not a hope of catching up with us. The mails were handed to the Brigade Intelligence Officer, who dealt with them.

It was now decided to burn, or otherwise destroy, the Remount Depot at Lusk. This was a place where horses were broken and trained as remounts for the British Army and a big number of horses were kept there. The depot was commanded by a Major Beamish, who was retired from the British Army, and was completely staffed by civilians. There were no military there, not even a guard. The whole column were detailed for this operation and the Brigade O/C took charge. Every man carried a rifle and ammunition. We left camp late in the evening and tramped across country, having to cross the main Dublin-Belfast road and other main roads en route. We encountered no trouble during our approach march and had no difficulty in getting into the depot. The phone was put out of action and Major Beamish and the few of the staff on the premises were detained. Paraffin supplies had been dumped near the depot by local Volunteers and there was a large supply of oil in the depot itself. The horses, or nearly all of them, were released from their stables and turned loose into the paddocks, and the whole place, which, of course, contained hay and straw, was then given a liberal dosing of paraffin and crude oil. Unfortunately, one of our men lighted a match before the all clear was given and started one of the fires, and it was only with great difficulty that some of the horses were saved from burning. I believe one or two had to be shot in their stables.

We had a couple of cars standing by and we loaded the provisions out of the canteen into them, which we took to Mooretown to help to feed the column. Major Beamish behaved in a thorough gentlemanly way and invited us to take anything we wanted from his house

before we destroyed it. He insisted on my taking a brand new bicycle of his, saying he would be compensated and could buy another one. We burned Major Beamish's house. He had no family, only his wife was living with him. We also burned the house occupied by Major Mills. What Mill's job was in the place I do not know. When the place was well afire and we were assured of it being totally burned, we departed and tramped back to Mooretown, all getting there safely.

A Black and Tan was shot dead on the Balbriggan-Skerries road one night while we were in Mooretown. Information had reached the Brigade that this Tan was courting a girl from the Skerries side and was wont to walk from Balbriggan with her to her home. He was reported to be carrying or armed with a revolver. The "Bock" Maguire and two other men were detailed to get to the Skerries road and disarm this Tan. They got to the road as allotted and waited until the Tan was coming back when the girl was not with him. I do not know what kind of a fracas ensued then, but they shot the Tan and took his revolver and ammunition. I understand that he was a Bandsman or Band Sergeant.

Reports reached us also that the publichouses in Balbriggan were crowded with Tans every night, and Corcoran and I and two of the Portrane men who were with the column were detailed to go into Balbriggan and shoot them up in one of the pubs. I was in charge of the party. We got a car in Oldtown and drove by by-roads to Balbriggan. Each of us was armed with a revolver and ammunition. We parked the car in a back street in Balbriggan and proceeded to Smith's publichouse, which we entered with our guns in our hands. There were a

number of civilians in the publichouse but only two Tans. One of the Tans immediately dived underneath the counter and made his escape through the back door. We shot the other one, whose name was, I believe, Green, and then returned to our car and got back to Mooretown. We had made a mistake in going into the town on that night. Friday would have been pay day for the Tans and they would have been there in big numbers on that night. I was told afterwards that the local R.I.C. and Tans went to Smith's house after our departure and carried the wounded man to the barracks. They threw him into a cell, apparently under the impression that he was only drunk. In the morning they found he was dead. Whether this be true or not I cannot say, but they certainly made no attempt to get medical aid for him.

That generally covered all the activities of the column up to the Truce. From the start of the unit the initial plan was to train as many men in the Brigade area as possible rather than carry out active operation against the enemy. Active operations would come at a later date, although I could not see much of this being done in the Fingal area. The area already had very strong garrisons of military and Tans and there was also a huge concentration of enemy forces in the city. The enemy would have large forces to throw against us in the Fingal area which were well placed for round-up operations. The Fingal country is very flat and with a great network of roads. Our hopes of survival in that area for very long would be small. We would probably be diverted to other Brigade areas for active operations. At the advent of the Truce we were all in good form and our morale was of a very high standard, and we were

all looking forward with confidence to a clash with the enemy. None of us thought the Truce would last for long, and it was a very curious experience to be able to go home again and eat and sleep in peace and not be living on one's nerves as heretofore. It took some time to get used to the situation and realise it was real and not a dream.

Other than the making of buckshot and the filling of shotgun cartridges, there was no attempt to make munitions in the area. Buckshot was very hard to keep, as the compressed paper took the damp, even from the air, and became swollen and would not fit the guns and was impossible to extract.

The only spy or informer executed was Jack Hemstraw, already referred to. I do not think that the enemy had any agents of any value in the area, if there were such people at all. They were, of course, bound to pick up some information in publichouses and from their men who were keeping company with girls, and suchlike.

Balbriggan was an important centre for Intelligence from our point of view, but I am not very well informed of how it worked. The late James Derham looked after that end of the business mostly. The post office in Balbriggan was, as far as I know, of no value to us and was not even sympathetic to us. One of the porters at the railway station, Peter Whelan, was very good. The Tans were always going there to pick up supplies and parcels sent by rail, and from conversations with them he was able to pick up, I understand, some useful items. There was another man who was a clerk in the Labour Exchange, Michael O'Rourke, who was also

able to supply our side with useful information. I do not know how he managed to get this information or who his contacts were. What the value of the information was I do not know, but I know that the Brigade looked upon him as a very important man. There was also a Constable Sexton in the local barracks who, I understand, was useful. This man was always very friendly with James Derham, and when possible he always warned Derham about intending raids and rounds-up, thus saving many of our men from being picked up in the middle of the night in their homes. Volunteer Intelligence sections were organised in the different units, but these were only purely of local value in keeping watch on suspected persons and acted more in the nature of detectives in tracking down local criminals.

I was never a member of the I.R.B. prior to the Truce.

Signed: John Gaynor

Date: 24/6/56

Witness: Matthew Lacey Cadell

(Investigator).