

4.8.14  
DUPLICATE

No. W.S. 1449

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COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1449.

Witness

Commandant Patrick J. Whelan,  
86 Moibhi Road,  
Glasnevin,  
Dublin.

Identity.

Vice Commandant, 4th Battalion, Cork No. 1 Brigade.

Subject.

Activities of 4th Battalion, Irish Volunteers,  
Cork No. 1 Brigade, and  
4th Battalion Flying Column.  
1916-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

File No S. 2755.

Form B.S.M. 2

DUPLICATE

No. W.S. 1449

STATEMENT BY COMMANDANT PATRICK JOSEPH WHELAN,  
86 Moibhi Road, Glasnevin, Dublin.

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I was born in Wexford on 10th February, 1896. My father was employed by the Commissioners of Irish Lights, and, when I was about eight years old, he was transferred from a lightship off the Wexford coast to the Daunt Rock lightship, off Cork Harbour. Hence, at that early age, I took up residence at Cobh, Co. Cork.

Cobh was a lively, cosmopolitan town in those days. Due to the British naval dockyards at Haulbowline, the military base at Spike Island, and the constant presence of British naval vessels and sailing ships of many nations, there was full employment. Cobh could, therefore, be properly described at this period as being a very prosperous town indeed.

The dockyard at Haulbowline absorbed annually forty to fifty boys as apprentices to the various trades, boys between the ages of fourteen and sixteen having to pass a British Civil Service examination held in Cork. It was the ambition of boys (and their parents) to get this examination and qualify as naval dockyard apprentices. Hence, in due course, I found myself a boilermaker's apprentice at His Majesty's dockyard, Haulbowline, in September 1911, at the age of fifteen.

Cobh undoubtedly had a big pro British element; nevertheless it boasted a small but whole-hearted branch of the Gaelic League, of which I became a member in 1911. After classes, we had Irish dances in the

hall at Cobh, and in 1913 or early 1914, I well remember one of our teachers, a Mr. Murphy (who was a national teacher) calling for attention during a dance, to tell us about the organisation of a company of Irish Volunteers in Cobh. Enthusiastic attention was given, and the Cobh company was formed there and then.

In due course, nearly every man and boy in Cobh joined the Volunteers, and at one time the company was probably five hundred to six hundred strong. Wooden rifles were made locally, most of the material being surreptitiously obtained in the dockyard, Haulbowline. These dummy rifles were issued to the men of the company, and training was conducted with great enthusiasm.

All of our instructors were British navy or British army men, mostly old men - to me, at least, they appeared old. I can well recall one old British navy man, named John Garde, exhorting his squad, of which I was a member, to "mark time, lift them up, they'll fall down themselves". Many a good laugh he gave the squad.

Now, I suppose we of the Irish Volunteers were the answer to the Ulster Volunteers of Sir Edward Carson at that period, but, as history proved, we were never called upon to battle with our fellow countrymen of the North. Rifle drill with our wooden rifles, foot drill and route marches were the order of the day, together with occasional pep talks from Volunteer organisers, including one from Sir Maurice Moore. So we drilled and drilled, but never did we handle a real rifle, or see a rifle range. I used wonder whether the Ulster lads were in the same position. Then came September 1914, and World War Number One.

Almost overnight, the loyalty of the Volunteers suffered convulsions. Speakers and organisers, who had hitherto exhorted us to service in holy Ireland's cause, now proclaimed it to be our bounden duty to join the British army and rush to fight for the freedom of small nations.

I well remember a huge meeting in Cobh, attended by every "man jack" of the company, being addressed by speakers who were, in fact, nothing more or less than voluntary recruiting officers for the British army and navy. We were exhorted by one individual to join the British army and do what he intended to do, at the same time exposing a brawny blacksmith's arm which he proposed to steep in German blood, in the cause of freedom. He seemed to be terribly sincere, but, strange to relate, he never did join the British army or, for that matter, any other army.

At this meeting, members of the Gaelic League were here and there through the crowd and, before some of the speakers had begun to speak, we made it quite plain we did not approve, and left the meeting in protest. About seven of us, all Gaelic Leaguers, were all that were in open opposition to the demand made for recruits for the British army. That group of seven, the core of the Gaelic League in Cobh, were destined to be the nucleus of the Irish Volunteers (later the Irish Republican Army) in Cobh.

After that meeting, the Volunteer company in Cobh dwindled to a fraction of its former strength, and, from that date, there existed two distinct groups of Volunteers.

one owing allegiance to John Redmond, the Irish Party leader in the British House of Commons, the other, the Gaelic League groups, of which I was a member and which was, numerically, the smaller. Our group consisted of Michael Leahy, O/C, James Aherne (later killed at Clonmult in February 1921), Jack Stack, Edward Stack, David O'Brien, Daniel Cashman, Seumas Fitzgerald, Jim O'Connell, Jack O'Connell and a few others, whose names I cannot now recall.

We continued our training, and managed to possess some .22 miniature rifles of which we made great use. Every Sunday morning, we had target practice in a disused quarry, about a mile outside Cobh. Eventually, James Aherne managed to secure a Lee Enfield rifle and ammunition. It was probably the first .303 rifle any of us had ever handled, and we got a tremendous thrill when it was produced.

Michael Leahy was a whole-hearted O/C. He devoted all his spare time studying manuals on small arms, training and infantry tactics. He instructed us accordingly. We had shooting competitions every Sunday, and all of us became very proficient on the range. I remember David O'Brien proving himself the most consistent rifle shot. After range practice, we indulged in infantry tactics, and enjoyed advancing in ragged rushes from the right or left, as the fancy took Mick Leahy. Mick, at that period, was employed as a fitter in Haulbowline dockyard.

Time marched on, and we continued our training. In due course, the local R.I.C. became interested, and, one Sunday, when at range practice, a Sergeant and a

Constable appeared on the scene. We made ourselves scarce, and no arrests were made. A few Sundays later, we were engaged on tactics in the fields. A certain ditch was occupied by an imaginary enemy. We were divided into two sections. I was in charge of one. We advanced alternatively, as per Mick Leahy's orders, and eventually arrived at a position from which the final charge was to be made. On the order, "fix bayonets, charge", we roared like madmen and made for the ditch, hell for leather. Imagine our consternation when, right in front of my section, two R.I.C. men jumped up on the ditch! They made no attempt to catch any of us, nor did we molest them. We were all well known to them, of course, and the aftermath was the arrest of Mick Leahy and Jack Stack who found themselves in Frongoch prison. On Mick Leahy's arrest, I was appointed O/C of the company until his release some months later. We were now in the latter half of the year 1915. The strength of our company at that period was about twenty.

That memorable and glorious year 1916 arrived, and found us still a small company of Volunteers, but, by now, we also had a small, enthusiastic, active group of Fianna Eireann, together with a real live wire branch of Cumann na mBan. Quite a few of the respected citizens of the town were also in open sympathy with us.

On his release from Frongoch, Mick Leahy devoted considerable time organising Volunteer companies in East Cork, and I had the honour of helping him to organise the company in Ballymacoda.

#### Easter Week 1916:

Easter Week 1916 found us ready to answer the call

to arms. We now had six .32 revolvers and a small amount of ammunition, and one service rifle. We, from Cobh, together with Volunteers from various parts of Co. Cork, were ordered to report to Volunteer headquarters, Sheares' Street, Cork, on Good Friday 1916. Our little Cobh group of seven Volunteers and about five Fianna, with what we considered full kit, marched the fifteen miles from Cobh to Cork, arriving at Sheares Street about 5 p.m. Mick Leahy was in charge of our party.

The Volunteer headquarters was packed with men from Cork city and county, and the streets adjoining Sheares Street were packed with patrolling R.I.C. men. Notwithstanding the fact that we had marched the long journey from Cobh, we were put on duty soon after arrival. I well remember being put on sentry duty on the stairs in headquarters, in a position to cover the front door in case of attack. I was armed with a Mauser rifle, about which I knew absolutely nothing. Whilst on duty, I can vividly recall that noble martyr, Terence MacSwiney, visiting my post and asking me for the Mauser. He wanted to check for himself if I could be effective in the position I occupied. He knelt on the stairs and satisfied himself that I could really cover the hall door.

Later that evening, several of us were sent on duty in the streets surrounding headquarters. A consignment of petrol was expected, and our job was to see it arrived safely. I was in Sheares' Street by myself, except for about two dozen R.I.C. men. I remember hoping the petrol would not arrive via my position. I wondered what chance I would have with so many R.I.C. men around. They walked up and down in pairs, and I walked and stood amongst them,

wondering when I was going to be accosted. I remember asking one of them for a match to light a cigarette. He gave it to me, and I thanked him. After about an hour, I was recalled to headquarters. Thank God! The petrol had arrived safely by another route.

On Easter Saturday, all of us went to Confession, and on Easter Sunday (or Monday - I am not quite sure of the day), all Volunteers who had been mobilised in Cork proceeded to Macroom. I recall Carriganima (outside Macroom) being mentioned as our ultimate destination, but we did not go beyond Macroom, and were eventually recalled to Cork, on, I think, Easter Monday. I understood that the general mobilisation order was cancelled, and I found myself back in Cobh the following Wednesday of Easter Week. As far as I can recall, one did not know then that the insurrection had actually started in Dublin.

I have always thought that there were about four hundred Volunteers mobilised in Macroom that memorable Easter, but I do not recall ever having heard the actual number present. We were fully armed, however, and ready for any emergency. We, of the Cobh company, returned to Cobh, bringing our arms with us.

The remainder of 1916 and all 1917 was uneventful in Cobh. We held together, and continued our training. Those of us who were apprentices at the dockyard, Haulbowline were not trusted by the authorities, and I was practically idle for the last twelve months of my apprenticeship. In September 1917 my apprenticeship finished, and at Christmas of that year I went to live in Belfast where my parents then resided, my father having been transferred to a lightship off the Co. Down coast.



Mick Leahy was still O/C of the Cobh Company, and although it could ill be spared, it was agreed to let me retain my .32 revolver and twenty-four rounds of ammunition. I was also given a note of introduction to the Volunteer leaders in Belfast.

I joined C. company of the Volunteers in Belfast, the O/C. of which was Roger McCorley, now a retired major of the National Army. Roger was a real live wire who believed in plenty of tactical training. This was carried out on the Cave Hill, Belfast.

During the general election of 1918, C. company acted as bodyguard for Sinn Féin election speakers. The speakers went by brake from meeting to meeting in the Falls Road division, and rather rowdy meetings were held. The opposition was provided mostly by mill workers - and not the Orange mobs. These mill workers were enthusiastic supporters of Joseph Devlin, the Nationalist M.P. for West Belfast. At one of the meetings which was held in King Street, Belfast, I was struck on the head by a brick and rendered unconscious. When I recovered, I was brought to a first-aid station on the Falls Road, and had my injury attended to by local Cumann na mBan.

At this time, I was working in Harland and Wolfe's shipyard, Belfast. The conscription campaign was on then, and I well remember having arguments with other shipyard workers on the subject of conscription and recruiting for the British army. I remember betting that, even though the Conscription Act was passed in the British House of Commons, it would never be enforced in Ireland. I also remember an argument on recruiting in which I said that the four provinces gave far too many recruits to the British army.

At this time, I had the pleasure of meeting Joe McKelvey, a prominent Belfast Volunteer leader. I also contacted Diarmuid Hurley, a Bandon (Co. Cork) man, later to be O/C of the 4th Battalion, Cork No. 1 Brigade (my own Battalion), and O/C of the East Cork Flying Column. Another County Cork man, Sean O'Sullivan of Bantry, was also a Volunteer in Belfast. During my stay in Belfast, I remember two proposed arms raids, both of which were called off.

About the same period, Michael Leahy of Cobh and Martin Corry, now Fianna Fáil T.D. for East Cork, were prisoners in Crumlin Road gaol, Belfast. I visited them on a few occasions.

I returned to Cobh in 1919 still with my .32 revolver and ammunition. I tried for a job in Haulbowline dockyard, but did not get it. Michael Leahy was released in the meantime, and was then working for Mr. Pat Hallinan, a motor engineer and mill owner in Midleton, Co. Cork. Mick suggested I should try there for a job. I did so, and got it. Hence I found myself a member of Midleton Volunteer company.

The East Cork area had, by this, been organised. Our battalion, known as the 4th battalion, Cork No. 1 brigade, comprised upwards of thirteen companies, numbering, approximately, four hundred men. Mick Leahy was O/C of this battalion.

On the day of my arrival in Midleton, I had the good luck to be reunited with Diarmuid Hurley who had left Belfast before me and who now had a job with a distillery in Midleton, Co. Cork. He was then O/C, B. (Midleton) company. In the comparatively short time he was there (he was killed by British forces on 28th

May 1921), he was tremendously popular, and had a wonderful company of Volunteers which included the best elements in the town. Tadhg Manley, N.T. (now the Fine Gael T.D.), Tomás O'Hourihane, N.T., Joseph Aherne (later O/C, B. company, and O/C, 4th battalion, after Diarmuid Hurley) were officers who were very popular, both with the men of the company and the people in general. These men were ever on the alert to strike a blow at the enemy when opportunity offered. There was excellent co-operation between A. (Cobh) Company and B. (Midleton), but, as elsewhere, arms were woefully scarce.

#### Attack on Carrigtwohill R.I.C. Barracks:

During the month of December 1920, Commandant Michael Leahy, very ably assisted by the officers of Cobh and Midleton companies, planned an attack on Carrigtwohill R.I.C. barracks. Saturday night, 3rd January 1920, was fixed for the attack.

I, together with other members of the Midleton company, was instructed to be at the road junction at the Midleton end of Carrigtwohill village at 10 p.m. that night. Although I was working in Midleton, I was at home in Cobh every week-end. Hence I cycled to the assembly point from Cobh.

Prior to the attack, the village was completely isolated, telephone and telegraph wire being cut, and road blocks set up. Apparently, the R.I.C. in Carrigtwohill became aware of this fact, as, when I was cycling through the village, two R.I.C. men rushed from the footpath and grabbed a man on a bike, cycling about twenty yards in front of me. The R.I.C. took no notice of me, and I continued on my way. I was shocked to

discover that the man whom the police had arrested was Jackie Higgins of Cobh who was also assembling for the barrack attack. As the police grabbed Higgins, his bike fell, and he managed to wriggle out of his overcoat and escape, leaving the coat in the hands of the R.I.C. I went 'hell for leather' to the assembly point while the police proceeded to their barracks. This incident happened opposite the barracks, and probably confirmed whatever suspicions the police may have had that something was afoot. They probably did not, however, anticipate an attack on the barracks, as such attacks had not at that time become 'popular'. As a matter of fact, I think I am correct in saying that Carrigtwohill was the first barracks in Ireland to be attacked with a view to its capture. I am sure it was one of the first, if not the first to be taken by assault.

On arrival at the assembly point, I was given charge of five or six Midleton lads, with instructions to detain all civilians and prevent them leaving the village when the attack began. I was to trust no one, and detain, without distinction, any person, man or woman, who wanted to leave the village after the attack on the barracks had begun. I was armed with my .32 revolver. "I hope you realise the importance of your job, Paddy", said Diarmuid Hurley, "Any one of those you let through could report the attack to the R.I.C. in Midleton, with disastrous results to us". I fully realised how important my job was, and I remember feeling a bit important myself. It helped to compensate me a little, as I was very disappointed at not being at the actual point of attack.

At about midnight, the peace of the village was

rudely disturbed by outbursts of rifle and revolver fire. The attack was on. For the first half-hour, I was all on edge. There we were, listening to the continuous rifle rife, with no knowledge of how the attack was progressing. After the first half-hour, I remember being satisfied that all was well; the firing was steady and continuous, and there was no retreat. I began to feel happy and confident of success. So far as I can remember, we had to detain only three men that night. They lived only a few hundred yards from the village, and they took their enforced detention without giving any trouble, so my task was an easy one.

About an hour had elapsed from the time the attack began, when we heard an explosion. Our lads were after blowing a hole in the side walls of the barrack with gelignite. Then came a silence. This lasted so long that I guessed the attack was finished. So, instructing one of the men with me to take over, I proceeded to the barracks. The attack was indeed over, and a complete success. The first two men I met when I entered the barracks were Paddy O'Sullivan and Maurice Moore, both of Cobh, who were later to join the 4th battalion flying column, were captured at Clonmult in February 1921 and executed by the British in Cork gaol. I knew both well - we were at school together in Cobh - and brave lads they were. Paddy had two half-crowns in his hand. "I found them in the dayroom", said he to me, adding, "What would you do with them, Paddy?". "The same as you're going to do, Paddy", said I - and he did.

About forty men - evenly divided - between the Cobh and Midleton companies took part in the Carrigtwohill

attack; this number includes two other parties, like mine, who were detailed to detain any people leaving the village towards Cobh or Cork. The British, as they did after all engagements, subsequently announced that the attackers numbered hundreds.

The men who distinguished themselves in the attack included the O/C, Michael Leahy, David O'Brien, Thomas O'Shea, Paddy O'Sullivan and Maurice Moore, all of Cobh, Diarmuid Hurley, Joseph Aherne and Tadhg Manley of Midleton.

The R.I.C. garrison consisted, so far as I can remember, of a sergeant and nine constables. All their arms were captured, together with a quantity of ammunition. After their surrender, they were marched, under Volunteer escort, some distance outside Carrigtwohill and left there. Our men suffered no casualties in the fight.

By the time I got to the barracks, the surrender of the garrison had taken place, and the captured arms and ammunition taken away by Joseph Aherne and Tadhg Manley. When all was over, we dispersed to our respective homes.

Arrests and questioning of Volunteers in both Cobh and Midleton took place the following week, but the R.I.C. did not identify any of the attackers, although nearly all of these questioned took part. Needless to say, we were all elated and proud of our success. We were now the richer by nine or ten rifles, revolvers and ammunition, and the co-operation - and regard for each other - between the Cobh and Midleton companies was considerably strengthened.

Michael Leahy and I were back at our jobs in

Midleton on Monday morning, as usual, and, whilst we congratulated each other, we tried to appear in public as if the last thing in the world we would do would be to attack a police barracks.

Attack on Castlemartyr R.I.C. Barracks:

As previously stated, our officers were ever on the alert for any opportunity to strike at the enemy, and we were little over a month resting on our laurels after Carrigtwohill, when Diarmuid Hurley decided there was a chance to capture Castlemartyr R.I.C. barracks. This was definitely a job of quick thinking and quick decision.

It was fair day in Midleton; the date was 9th February 1920; and two R.I.C. men from Castlemartyr were seen on duty in Midleton by some Volunteers. This fact was reported to Diarmuid Hurley, who immediately made arrangements for their capture on their return journey to Castlemartyr later in the evening; with the garrison reduced by these two men, he decided the time was opportune to attack the remainder of the R.I.C. in Castlemartyr barracks and force their surrender. It was Hurley's intention to use the two captured R.I.C. to effect an entry into the barracks rather than take it by assault. The capture of the two policemen, Sergeant O'Brien and Constable Collins, was successfully accomplished by Tadgh Hanley, Michael Kearney and a few others from the Midleton company.

In the meantime, Hurley sent word to all available men of the Midleton company - myself included - to report to Churchtown, which is about midway between Midleton and Castlemartyr; the latter is approximately nine miles east of Midleton. I duly got my .32 revolver, and

proceeded on my way. When I got to Churchtown, Hurley had already arrived and had tried, unsuccessfully, to persuade the two R.I.C. prisoners to accompany him to the door of the barracks at Castlemartyr. The time was about 8 p.m. The two prisoners were then detained under guard. Our party, about eight in number, then proceeded to Castlemartyr village.

As already stated, Hurley intended to take the barracks by a ruse, using the two captured R.I.C. men to effect admittance. Their failure to co-operate threw a spanner into the work, so Hurley decided on a desperate gamble - he would impersonate Sergeant O'Brien in an attempt to gain an entry.

Accompanied by Tomás Hourihane and Joseph Aherne, with myself in the rear, Hurley knocked at the barrack door. In answer to his knock, a voice inside called out, "Who is there?" Hurley replied, "Sergeant O'Brien". The door was opened, but only a few inches, as there was a chain on the inside. Hurley placed his foot in the opening and started to shove. The R.I.C. man on the inside - Constable Lee - now realising what was afoot, fired with his revolver through the opening. Hurley replied with his revolver but, owing to the angle at which both men were firing, neither could hit the other. Hurley then commenced hacking the chain holding the door, with the butt of his revolver, and eventually, with the help of Joseph Aherne and Tomás Hourihane, succeeded in firing open the door and effecting an entry.

While this was going on, I was on the opposite side of the street, and when I saw the door wide open, I dashed across and into the barracks. In the dayroom



on the left of the hall, Constable Lee was pacing up and down, moaning with pain from what appeared to be a serious injury to one of his eyes. In the struggle with Hurley, the latter had hit Constable Lee with his (Hurley's) revolver butt. As I entered the hallway, Jos. Aherne was coming out of the dayroom - he carried a revolver - and mounted the stairs whilst I went into the dayroom. Constable Lee was a big, powerful man, and, wounded though he was, I remember being careful to keep a safe distance from him, in case he would take a kick at me. However, all he did was to moan with pain and murmur, "Oh! My eye, my eye!". He seemed to take no notice of me whatsoever.

After a few minutes, I too ascended the stairs and, on opening a door, discovered Sergeant O'Sullivan (who was in charge of the barracks) in bed. He told me he was a sick man. I noticed a black box beside the bed. On opening it, I discovered a perfectly new double-barrelled shotgun which I duly took possession of. I had no definite orders at this stage, and was doing my own searching for arms. On leaving the sergeant's room, I met Diarmuid Hurley and Jos. Aherne on the landing, both carrying rifles. "We have been in there already, Paddy", said Hurley, indicating the room I had just left, but I proudly exhibited the shotgun as evidence of what I had found and they had missed. "Come on, then! We're off!", said Hurley, but, before he left the barracks, Hurley arranged for a priest and doctor to come to the injured Constable Lee. Surely this action speaks volumes for his (Hurley's) thoughtfulness and humane instincts. I also remember him speaking highly of Sergeant O'Brien and Constable Collins who had refused to co-operate in the capture of their barracks.

It always puzzled me as to why the other members of the garrison did not show up. It appears that at least two of them were married and living out, but even if Sergeant O'Sullivan had joined Constable Lee in the hall, it is probable that, by firing at us through the door, we might not have succeeded in gaining admittance. He did not know for certain how many R.I.C. were in the barracks when we arrived on the scene, but, as far as I remember, the total strength was two sergeants and seven constables. It is more than likely they thought there was a hundred of us there, as they were led to believe was the case in the attack on Carrigtwohill. Actually, there were no more than ten of us that night at Castlemartyr, some of whom were engaged solely with the detention of the two R.I.C. prisoners. Only about half an hour elapsed between our arrival at the barracks and our departure after its successful capture. We moved home to Midleton again, elated and the richer by nine or ten rifles, revolvers and one double-barrelled shotgun. The effect on the morale of both the Midleton and Cobh companies, as well as on all Volunteers in the county, was immense. We now had two successful barrack captures to our credit, and were justifiably proud of our achievements.

Intense R.I.C. activity followed. Several men were arrested and questioned, some of whom had actually taken part in the capture, and others who were not at Castlemartyr at all. However, no one was identified by the police, and all were released. It was perfectly obvious to us that some were known, as no disguises were used, but, for reasons best known to themselves, the R.I.C. declined to recognise anybody.

I think the enemy report of the affair placed the number of attackers as about a hundred. Poor Sergeant O'Sullivan must surely have been in desperate straits to explain the loss of his barracks.

Attack on Cloyne R.I.C. Barracks:

The period, 9th February 1920 to 8th May 1920, was uneventful except for thorough organisation of companies in our battalion area - 4th battalion. Companies had been formed in all the villages in the area, but except in the case of Middleton and Cobh, arms and ammunition were still very scarce. However, we continued our secret training and were always alert for opportunities to supplement our stock of arms.

Then came a day in April 1920 when Mick Leahy and I were working together on a boat belonging to Mr. Pat Hanlon, our employer, and Mick confided to me that plans were being made to attack and capture Cloyne R.I.C. barracks. He outlined the plan, and honoured me by asking me what I thought of it. I remember being so impressed that I told him it seemed impossible for us to fail. Practically every Volunteer around Cloyne was to be on the job, but the main brunt of the attack was, once again, to be borne by men from Cobh and Middleton. Diarmuid Hurley and Mick Leahy were the principal planners. I asked Mick how soon the job would come off, and he told me that the date was not yet finally fixed. He certainly expected the capture of the barracks would be no simple matter, as the barrack building had been strengthened to resist attack, by the erection of steel shutters on all windows, front and rear, the number of the garrison had been increased, and it was expected that, after the loss of Carrigtwohill and Castlemartyr, the R.I.C. would be

more cautious and alert. The plan, therefore, envisaged a determined defence of the barracks.

The plan of attack was also one of determination to succeed, and as far as I could learn from Mick Leahy, every possible contingency was provided for. Cloyne village was to be completely isolated. All telephones and telegraph wires in the vicinity were to be cut, and all roads leading to the village were to be blocked by felled trees.

On the morning of 8th May 1920, I received orders to report to the schoolhouse, just outside and on the Midleton side of the village of Cloyne. Arrangements had been made for the conveyance of rifles to the schoolhouse, and, on arrival there, I would be given my final instructions.

With Jack Aherne of the Midleton company and Donal Leahy (a brother of the O/C, Mick) from the Cobh company, I was told to occupy a corn stores immediately opposite the barracks. Jack and I had rifles; Donal had a hatchet, but no gun. Our job was to keep up a continuous fire on the front windows of the barracks whilst other parties were trying to effect an entry to the barracks from one or both houses flanking the barrack building. The nerve-wracking part of our job was to get into the stores without being observed from the barracks across the street. We walked casually down the village street to the stores, and found the entrance gate secured by a strong iron bar. Fortunately for us, Donal Leahy made short work of the bar, and we were inside in less than a minute. We mounted a stairs to a room with windows, directly opposite to and a little more than

half the height of the barracks. We removed net wire from the windows, and found we could fire at will on all the front barrack windows. Jack Aherne took up a position at one window, and I at the other. Donal Leahy sat between us. When all was ready, I gave the signal, "Now, Jack!", and we opened up simultaneously. The time was approximately 10 p.m.

I remember the crash of the glass, and the ping of our bullets as they struck the steel shutters on the barrack windows. To me, it was a delightful sound and very encouraging. Our first four volleys were rapid fire, and thereafter steady and deliberate. I suggested to Jack to vary his shots to different windows of the barrack, and I did likewise. We were in high good humour with ourselves. This applied also to Donal Leahy who, I should say, had a nerve wracking time sitting between us, as he was unarmed, except for the hatchet. The R.I.C., of course, returned our fire vigorously. I recollect one bullet dislodging the plaster from the frame of the window through which I was firing.

After about three-quarters of an hour of firing by both sides, I could distinctly hear shouts of "we surrender, we surrender" from the R.I.C. What a thrill it was when I saw what appeared to be a white pillow case being thrown from a window in the barracks. I felt in ecstasies, and roared at the top of my voice, "Come out then!". I next heard a shout, "Cease Fire!", and never doubted it came from our side. The three of us then dashed downstairs and out into the street, to meet the garrison coming out of the barracks with their hands up. Mick Leahy then had the police - a sergeant and nine or ten constables - grouped together, and placed

under guard whilst the barracks was being searched for arms.

Before the actual surrender, Diarmuid Hurley and his party had blown a hole in the barrack wall, from inside the adjoining house. He had thrown some petrol into the breach, ignited the petrol and set fire to portion of the barracks.

As I entered the barracks, I could see that half of it (and portion of the adjoining house) was on fire. I could hear bullets exploding in the flames. What a thrill I got when I found a fully-loaded police carbine and a .45 short Webley revolver, hanging on the wall of the ground floor room I had entered! I took possession of these and left the barracks as, owing to continually exploding ammunition in rooms which had caught fire, it was highly dangerous to remain. The job was done. Yet another highly elating success.

We fell in on the Main Street and sang the "Soldiers Song", with great gusto. The boys from Ballymacoda were in great form, but were foolish enough to identify their presence by shouting, "Up Ballymacoda", until ordered to stop by Mick Leahy. We were congratulated on the job we had done, Mick Leahy assuring us that our steady fire had contributed immensely to the successful capture of the barracks. Our fire, he said, had boosted morale and helped to steady the nerves of our demolition squads. Our only bad news was that Diarmuid Hurley had been wounded in the arm, and had suffered arm burns from the flaming petrol. However, he received attention from the local doctor and was not in a serious condition.

Jack Aherne and I were together in the street

when either Tomás Hourihane or Pádraig Manley approached us and told us our job was not nearly finished yet. We were to assemble all the arms we could, and get them away to safety. We were to use our own discretion as to how this was to be done. Fortunately, Jack Aherne, who was a farmer's son from near Midleton, was very familiar with Cloyne and district. He knew a farmer named Spillane who owned horses and cars, so we decided to go to Spillane's for the necessary transport.

We got some help to bring about twelve rifles to Spillane's yard and had no difficulty about securing a horse and trap. Jack and I were now by ourselves, and I remember feeling a sense of loneliness after the exertions of the previous hectic hour or so. "My God, Jack," I said, "we will have the devil's own job to get out of this, as all the roads are blocked". I thought then of Mick Kearney (later Commandant in the National Army, and presently Fine Gael organiser in Cork). Mick was one of the stalwarts of the Midleton company. His family had a carpenter's business at Churchtown, near Midleton, and Mick was a good man with a saw. I knew he had taken part in the Cloyne attack, so I decided to go back to Cloyne, locate him and ask him to come with us to saw a passage through the trees which had been felled across the roads outside Cloyne, which we would now have to negotiate with our horse and trap, with its precious cargo. Jack Aherne agreed I should go, so I left him yoking up the trap, and ran back to Cloyne. I was fortunate in overtaking a party of our lads, with the police still prisoners. The latter were grouped on the road, about a quarter of a mile on the Midleton side of Cloyne, and Mick Leahy was addressing the prisoners

when I arrived, panting and out of breath. Mick was warning the R.I.C. not to identify any man who took part in the attack, and advised the R.I.C. that they should resign and take up arms against the old enemy. I found Tomás Hourihane and told him what I wanted, and why. He realised my predicament, immediately located Mick Kearney and told him to come with me. What luck for Jack Ahern and me that Mick was amongst that group, and able to secure a good saw. He and I returned to Jack Aherne as fast as we could. He had the horse and trap already loaded, and we moved off at once. The time was about midnight. Before we moved off, however, one of the shafts broke, and we had to unload our stuff on to another cart, owned by our friend, Spillane.

We had decided to bring the guns to Jack Aherne's orchard which was situated at Mile Bush, about three miles on the Carrigtwohill side of Midleton. We intended avoiding the main road as much as possible. The last mile would have to be on the main road from Midleton to Carrigtwohill, unless we manhandled the rifles across country. Hoping for the best, off we went.

Before we reached Churchtown, we had to saw our way through two road blocks of trees, and I thanked God that I had thought of securing the services of Mick Kearney. We arrived at Churchtown about three o'clock on Sunday morning, 9th May 1920. Mick Kearney was now home and, as we expected no more road blocks, Jack and I decided to continue our way without him, but not so soon. We all had a very good friend in Johnny Kelleher who kept the townland pub and who, we were well aware, would be delighted to open up for us. We had no trouble convincing ourselves that we could do with a drink or



two, though I must admit I was very anxious to get to Jack Aherne's orchard.

Johnny welcomed us, and set them up with pleasure. Feeling happier after a few jorums, we bade Mick Kearney good-morning, and set off on the last stage of our journey. There was, however, one more thrill for the two of us. Approaching the main road (from a side road) between Carrigwohill and Middleton, we were just in time to see two lorries of police pass, going in the direction of Middleton. We both got a shock. If they had seen us, we were helpless, although I am sure we would have done our best to save the rifles. Thank God! We were not detected, so we continued on our way, safely, to the orchard. There we oiled and greased the rifles, wrapped them in sacks and buried them near an apple tree. Our job was well and truly accomplished, and I enjoyed a much needed sleep in Jack Aherne's house that morning.

A sad story, with a sadder ending, began that same Sunday. Jack's people cultivated fruit in a big way, and had a market in Cobh where they sold fruit. Jack's father was dead, and he lived with his mother, two brothers and two sisters. One sister, Dinah, was a prominent member of Cumann na mBan. His eldest brother, Michael, was the mainstay of the family, and very industrious. Michael was, of course, sympathetic towards the Volunteers and was well aware that Jack and I were active members. That Sunday, we told him of our escapade the previous night and, although he expressed admiration for us, he thought we were foolish. What chance had we, he said, against the might of the

enemy, weren't we only knocking our heads against a stone wall, and we would all be killed before it was over. We had different ideas, and pointed to our successes at Carrigtwohill, Castlemartyr and Cloyne. After a good hour's argument, Michael wound up by calling on God to give us sense.

A few months later and after the arrival of Black and Tans in both Cobh and Midleton, times began to get really tough. Jack Aherne was a marked man. There came a day when a party of the Gordon Highlanders from Cobh arrived at Aherne's house in the townland of Ballyrichard. Mrs. Aherne, Michael and the two girls were at home. The family got permission to remove some furniture and bedding before their house was burned to the ground. Michael was shot and bayoneted. His dead body was later found about a hundred yards from the house. Officially, according to the British, he was shot, trying to escape.

Needless to say, there were many arrests and raids following the Cloyne attack. Not one Volunteer who took part was identified. It was evident that none of the defenders of the barracks was prepared to openly identify any of the attackers who were well known to them.

#### Capture of Cameron Highlanders at Mile Bush:

During the month of June 1920, an event of considerable importance took place at Mile Bush, on the main road, a few miles west of Midleton.

Early in the month, a battalion of Cameron Highlanders had arrived in Midleton, and had taken

over a disused mill in the town. This even did not, however, cause any attack of nerves or wind-up amongst the members of B. (Midleton) company. The Camerons lost no time in getting acquainted with their new surroundings, and that very evening, a cycle patrol of twelve, with an R.I.C. man as guide, left the town, on a routine journey through the district.

Heretofore, movements of the R.I.C. were kept under continuous observation, but now the movements of this new enemy became of more importance. The cycle patrol had no sooner left their quarters when word was conveyed to Diarmaid Hurley who at once decided to attempt its capture. What followed is a glorious example of quick decision and determination, and also a masterly exposition of the element of surprise in military tactics.

Assembling as many men of B. company as possible, Hurley moved out along the main road between Midleton and Carrigtwohill. With him he had about nine Volunteers, the majority of whom were armed with revolvers; others were unarmed. Amongst those present were the stalwarts of B. company, viz., Jos. Aherne, Tadhg Manley and Tomás Hourihane. Hurley's quick-thinking, fertile brain assessed the situation with an astonishing degree of accuracy, and the simplicity of his plan deserves to be recorded in the archives of military history as a masterpiece. To carry out his plan, he decided on having a game of bowls.

Probably the Camerons had never heard of this game, but their guide, Constable O'Connor, would no doubt be familiar with it. The game would explain the dispersal of a number of men along the road, for a distance of a

hundred yards or so. Hurley and Manley were the two contestants, and they had got as far as Mile Bush, a few miles west of Middleton, when the patrol of Camerons appeared cycling. It is hardly conceivable that the Highlanders expected any reception. It was a balmy June evening, their route was not long, they had no hills to climb, nature combined to make the patrol a really enjoyable spin, and they were descending the gentle slope of the road at Mile Bush when the peace of the evening was rudely shattered by the noise of a revolver shot, fired by Tadhg Manley. This was the signal for our lads to jump the patrol. The nine Volunteers were ideally distributed along the road and, in less time than it takes to tell, they charged the military and tumbled cyclists and cycles all over the road. The soldiers were held up and disarmed. Twelve rifles and twelve hundred rounds of ammunition, together with the bicycles, were captured.

The captured guns were quickly removed to a place of safety, and the soldiers, unharmed except for a few bruises, allowed to return to their barracks. B. company had yet another glorious triumph to its credit.

Neither Michael Leahy or myself had the pleasure of taking part in this capture. At the time it was taking place, we were cycling together from Cobh to Middleton, and we arrived at Mile Bush about five or ten minutes after the job was over. The rifles and ammunition had been taken to safety, but Diarmuid Hurley was still on the scene, and told us all that happened. We proceeded to Middleton by a quiet route, and reached our digs without interference by the enemy.

That was a memorable Saturday evening. The consternation of the O/C of the Camerons must surely have

begged description when he met his patrol, arriving back to barracks minus their arms and equipment.

Late that night, some of the soldiers began their terror campaign, by occupying a position on what is known as The Green, and opening Lewis gun fire straight down the main street of Midleton. Beyond striking terror into the hearts of the population, no damage was done. Jack Aharne and I were in my digs when the firing started, and we went out and around the back of houses to the vicinity of the Green, where we lay hidden near a garage, about a hundred yards from the Lewis gunner. We remained there, watching the soldiers until they withdrew to their barracks.

Proposed attack on Ballycotton R.I.C. Barracks:

Ballycotton, Co. Cork is a well known seaside resort, situated ten or twelve miles south of Midleton and nestling on a hill overlooking the Atlantic. Plans had already been completed to attempt to capture the R.I.C. barracks on the Sunday following the Mile Bush (bowling match) ambush. It was in consequence of these plans that Michael Leahy, battalion O/C, and I were cycling from Cobh to Midleton the previous evening (Saturday) and so missed, by a few minutes, the Mile Bush affair, as I have already mentioned.

The Ballycotton job was to be a surprise attack during daylight and carried out by the Midleton company. It was hoped that the usual Sunday crowd of visitors to the resort would enable us to assemble in the village of Ballycotton without creating suspicion or appearing conspicuous.

We did actually assemble there in the forenoon of

6th June 1920, but learned that the R.I.C. had been reinforced by a party of Cameron Highlanders from Midleton. Our officers then decided that the odds against a successful surprise attack were too great and, wisely, in my opinion, called off the attempt. Ballycotton R.I.C. barracks was evacuated soon afterwards.

Arrest of Tadhg Manley and beginning of "On the Run":

The Cameron Highlanders lost no time in commencing hostilities and making things hot and difficult for the Midleton company, in particular. The R.I.C. who failed or declined to recognise any Volunteers before the arrival of the Camerons now became the eyes and ears of the military authorities. Foot patrols of soldiers were sent out at irregular hours, almost nightly, and the R.I.C. accompanied parties about the area, obviously to familiarise the military with the district.

Most of the prominent Volunteers in Midleton decided to sleep away from their homes, in the hopes of avoiding arrest. Nevertheless, B. company (Midleton) was doomed to suffer a very heavy calamity. A party of Camerons raided the house of Mrs. Walsh, Chapel Street, Midleton, and succeeded in capturing Tadhg Manley. They almost, at the same time, captured our O/C, Diarmaid Hurley; the latter was lucky to escape out of the house by a back way. Tadhg was sentenced to a long term of imprisonment, and Diarmaid was compelled to go on the run. This was indeed a severe blow to B. company. These two men were very highly respected. Their fearlessness and daring were an inspiration to their men who would follow where they led, with supreme confidence and without a doubt as to the success of any venture they might undertake.

Jos Aherne was appointed O/C, B. company, in the absence of Diarmuid Hurley, on the run, and a worthy successor he proved himself. Undoubtedly, Mick Leahy, O/C, battalion, missed the uncanny counsel of Diarmuid and Tadg when planning attacks on the enemy, but nevertheless B. company carried on, despite the loss of such great officers.

    Military movements were kept under observation continuously. At night, parties of Volunteers, in pairs, were detailed to occupy a storeroom of the Midleton Engineering Works where, incidentally, Mick Leahy, myself and two other Midleton Volunteers, named John Kelleher and Jer. Aherne, were employed. The store gave a perfect view of the R.I.C. barracks and the military quarters - the idea being that, if a patrol was seen emerging from the military barracks, those of us watching would go to the homes of Volunteers in Midleton whom we knew to be sleeping at home, and warn them to get out. This procedure was discontinued after a few weeks, as it was considered to be too risky for the watchers.

    One morning about 1 a.m., I was in bed in my digs in the house of Paddy Barry, midway in Main Street, Midleton, when I heard the sound of marching men. A patrol of Camerons were passing by. I immediately dressed myself and, unarmed, followed after the patrol to see what they were up to. I walked openly down the street and had got as far as the junction at Coolbawn road when I heard an order, "Hands up". I immediately complied. A soldier approached me from a doorway and ordered me to go with him. He took me to the O/C of the patrol who was sitting on the bridge at the Castlemartyr end of the town. I had no

preconceived idea as to what would happen, or what I would do in any circumstances which might arise, but on seeing the officer, I said, "Good-morning", in a friendly tone. He bade me good-morning, and enquired what I was doing out at that hour. I told him I heard his patrol marching down the street, and that it was sheer curiosity which prompted me to follow. I sat on the bridge with the officer. We shared cigarettes and swapped yarns for about two hours, after which he blew a whistle. This was a signal for the patrol to fall in. I fell in to, and walked with the officer as far as my digs.

I reported the incident to Jos Aherne in great detail, and emphasised the significant fact that the patrol occupied both sides of the street and were inconspicuous in doorways. No talking or smoking was allowed; hence their presence in the darkness would not be revealed. Jos. made the incident the subject of a lecture to the men of B. company, and stressed the necessity for extreme caution when moving about late at night, to avoid being trapped by similar patrols.

#### Churchtown North (Whiterock) Ambush:

The Camerons evidently decided after the capture of their cycle patrol at Mile Bush that this method of patrolling was not a paying proposition, so they resorted to patrolling in lorries or Crossley tenders. These tenders were fast cars, capable of carrying eight to ten men, including the driver and auxiliary driver. It was observed that one lorry used to patrol, in the day time, at irregular intervals, the area Castlemartyr-Cloyne-Ballycotton-Aghada, and invariably returned to their barracks in Midleton via Ballinacurra or Churchtown.



Mick Leahy, who was still O/C, 4th battalion, decided to stage an attack on this lorry at Churchtown (Whiterock), situated about three miles from Midleton and on the main Midleton-Castlemartyr road. The date was 26th August, 1920.

On the evening of 25th August 1920, the actual site of the attack was chosen, and a tree, to be felled in front of the lorry as the latter ran into the ambush position, was selected. Mick Kearney, who lived only about two hundred yards from the position, was detailed to be ready to cut the tree. My instructions were to collect the rifles and ammunition which were dumped in Jack Aherne's orchard, following the successful attack on Cloyne barracks, and bring them to the scene of the proposed ambush. All available men from the Midleton company were told to report to Churchtown at 10 a.m. on the morning of 26th August, 1920.

On the evening of the 25th August, Jack Aherne and I thoroughly cleaned about ten or twelve rifles, and, on the morning of the 26th, we loaded them into a pony-trap belonging to the Aherne's and proceeded through Midleton to Churchtown.

Phil Hyde of Ballinacurra (later Commandant in the National Army), a brother of Volunteer Captain Tom Hyde, (killed in Spain during the Spanish Civil War, fighting with the Irish Brigade under General O'Duffy) had been recently demobilised from the British army. He was not then a member of B. company, but he was reputed to be a crack rifle shot, and it was hoped to prevail on him to assist in the attack.

When Jack Aherne and I arrived at the ambush position,

about fourteen Volunteers had assembled, and amongst them was Phil Hyde. The rifles were distributed to the men considered best fitted to use them, including Phil Hyde, Jack Aherne and myself. The tree fellers were detailed, and scouts posted. Mick Kearney cut the tree in such a fashion that, at the pull of a rope, it would readily fall. We, riflemen, took up positions behind the ditch on both sides of the road, and, by 11 a.m., all was in readiness for the attack.

Hours elapsed, but no sign of the expected lorry. I remember, however, being very interested in the position selected by Phil Hyde, and I introduced myself to him. He had placed himself and cut bushes, so that he had an effective field of fire. I remember that he was particularly well dressed and groomed and as cool as the proverbial cucumber. His special task was to shoot the driver of the military lorry, and somehow I felt confident that the task was in safe hands, although he looked completely out of place amongst us, as we were all dressed in working clothes.

Sometime prior to this, Jack O'Connell of Cobh (later Lieutenant-Colonel in the National Army) had come to Midleton to work. He was an engine fitter by trade, and had got a job in Mr. Pat Hallinan's Engineering Works, so that, in this attack, four employees of the firm were absent from work that day, three of whom were Mick Leahy, Jack O'Connell and myself. The fourth absentee was John Kelleher, a stalwart of B. company, from near Ballinacurra. He had a very important and nerve-testing job that day. He was detailed to watch the military when it left Midleton, note the route taken, and report to us at once. He had a motor bicycle at his disposal for the purpose.

Eventually he did report, and his news was alarming. Two lorries of military instead of one had left Midleton, proceeding in the Cloyne direction via Ballinacurra. Only one lorry as usual was expected, and it was anticipated that this lorry would travel via Churchtown as it usually did, so that the attack could be launched on its outward journey. It was now surmised that the two lorries would return to Midleton via Castlemartyr, and would, therefore, approach our position from the opposite direction to that anticipated by us originally. Nevertheless, it was decided to attack the two lorries. Fortunately, the site selected was suitable for attack in either direction, and very little adjustment of positions was necessary.

At about 2.30 p.m., we distinctly heard the noise of a lorry approaching. When it was about sixty yards from our position, fire was opened by us, and the men detailed to pull down the tree jumped to their task. The lorry accelerated, continued on at great speed and ran the gauntlet of our ambush. I can vividly recall one red headed Cameron Highlander standing in the centre of the lorry and returning our fire. I can still see that tree falling ever so slowly, and was sure it would fall in time to crush the lorry and its occupants. Actually, as it fell, it brushed the tail end of the speeding lorry. It was the Camerons' lucky day, however, and I pay my respects to their bravery on that occasion. The driver of the lorry was shot, as was the officer in charge. A few hundred yards further on, and out of view of us, we heard the lorry pull up, but only for a few moments, and then headed full speed for Midleton. We learned subsequently that the driver died, and we supposed the momentary stop was to enable the

auxiliary driver to take over. We waited a while, expecting a second lorry, but none came.

The job was over, and although we succeeded in adding to the nervous tension of the Camerons, we were sorely disappointed at our failure to achieve their capture. Being only three miles from Middleton and in danger of attack by vastly superior enemy forces, we lost no time in dispersing. Our arms were collected and loaded into a motor car which was in readiness nearby, and handed over to two local Volunteers for safe custody. These two Volunteers were the brothers Dennehy, one of whom was subsequently killed at Clonmult when serving with the column. If my memory serves me right, it was Jos. Aherne, Jack Aherne and myself who went in the car with the rifles. After handing them over to the Dennehy's, we made ourselves scarce till evening, when we returned to Middleton. We subsequently learned that the Camerons arrived in force within half-an-hour of our leaving the ambush site, and thoroughly searched the area. We were indeed lucky to have dispersed so quickly.

#### Formation of 4th Battalion Flying Column:

In the month of September 1920, the idea of forming flying columns was conceived in the Cork No. 1 brigade area. These columns were to be comprised of men already on the run, or who were considered to be in danger of arrest. Diarmuid Hurley, who had been on the run and who had been out of the area for some time, returned to command the 4th battalion flying column. Mick Leahy, battalion O/C, conferred with Hurley as to the column's formation, and on 1st October, 1920, I was ordered by Mick to chuck my job with the Middleton Engineering Works, and report to Diarmuid Hurley at

Knockraha for whole-time duty with the column. Jos. Aherne, Jack Aherne, David and Michael Desmond (brothers), Michael Hallinan and myself - all of B. (Midleton) company - were the first members to report for duty with the column. As time went on, we were reinforced, until eventually the following comprised the 4th battalion column:-

Diarmuid Hurley, O/C.

Jos. Aherne, Vice O/C.

Liam Aherne (brother to Jos.)

Jer. Aherne (first cousin to Jos.)

Jack Aherne.

Christopher O'Sullivan.

Michael Desmond.

David Desmond (brother to Michael).

John Joseph Joyce.

Michael Hallinan.

Daniel Cashman.

Thomas Buckley.

Philip P. Hyde.

Michael Kearney.

Daniel Dennehy.

Patrick Whelan (myself).

All the above were from B. (Midleton) company.

John P. O'Connell.

James Clavin.

Patrick O'Sullivan.

Maurice Moore.

James Aherne.

The above were from A. (Cobh) Company.

Richard Hegarty, (Garryvoe) Ballymacoda Company.

Patrick J. Higgins, Aghada Company.

Sonny O'Leary, Killeagh Company.

Joseph Morrissey (Athlone) - I do not remember to which company he belonged.

The maximum number serving with the column at any given time was about sixteen of the above. Diarmuid Hurley, Jos Aherne, Jack Aherne, Michael Desmond, David Desmond, Michael Hallinan and myself were full-time members from its formation to the Truce in July 1921. (Diarmuid Hurley, up to the time of his death on 28th May 1921) Two men, named James Cagney and Joseph Duhig, both bank officials in the Munster and Leinster bank, Midleton, were with the column for one memorable weekend in December 1920 when the column was surrounded at Cloynes by a detachment of Cameron Highlanders, details of which I have given later in this statement. The column was armed with rifles and revolvers. There was a fair supply of ammunition, practically all of which had been captured from the enemy.

The nature of the terrain in the 4th battalion area did not lend itself to the security of a larger column for military operations. The area is comparatively flat country, well served with roads. The location of military garrisons at Cobh, Midleton, Youghal, Fermoy, Cork and Fort Carlisle were such as to enable the area to be overrun by enemy forces in quick time. For this reason, the column was kept small in numbers, but many men in the area were available at short notice as reinforcements, when necessary. The location of the column depended on information received as to the

movements and activities of the enemy. When it was learned that the military were paying particular attention to any district, the column was moved to that district, with a view to attack. For instance, we moved from Knockraha to Shanagarry, thence to Ballymacoda, Ladysbridge and on to Aghada. At each place, we were completely out of luck - no enemy forces appeared. We were particularly disappointed at Aghada as we had moved here on receipt of what appeared to be positive information of a daily patrol from Fort Carlisle. This fort is situated at the mouth of Cork harbour, on its eastern side, and, with its counterpart, Fort Camden, on the west side of the harbour, was built by the British to guard the approaches to the harbour. Fort Carlisle is quite near to the Aghada-Cloyne area and, although we occupied an ambush position and waited all day on 11th December 1920, no patrol appeared. I recall that the day was intensely cold, and we were glad when darkness fell when we withdrew.

#### Escape of Column at Cloyne:

From the ambush position occupied by us on 11th December 1920, we withdrew to the village of Cloyne and took up billets in the house of the local company captain, Bertie Walsh. Bertie was on the run, and the military had actually raided the house for him on the Sunday prior to our arrival. However, acting on the premise that lightning never strikes the same place twice, Diarmaid Hurley decided to billet there for the night of the 11th December and the day of the 12th December 1920. We were to return to Aghada on the evening of 12th December. It subsequently transpired that we were to move out sooner than we intended - and much quicker - and were

probably very fortunate to be able to move out at all.

Jos. Aherne was not well at this time, and lying in ambush in the intense cold all day on 11th December did not improve his condition. Phil Hyde was also with us. He requested permission to return to his home at Ballinacurra, only a few miles away, to attend to personal matters. Jos. and Phil were allowed home on condition that they sent two reliable men to replace them, and that is how James Cagney and Joseph Duhig, the two bank clerks from Midleton, came to be with the column, on that memorable week-end. James Cagney, later Commandant Cagney of the National Army and subsequently a bank manager, is now dead. (R.I.P.) Joseph Duhig, later Lieutenant Duhig of the National Army and presently a branch manager, is hale and hearty. I am sure James, while he lived, and Joseph, for the rest of his life, will remember Saturday night and Sunday morning, 11th and 12th December 1920.

Both were welcomed by the column and made themselves at home. They were well dressed as all good bank officials should be dressed, and bore no resemblance whatever to the rest of us in that respect. We had a good supper and a good night's sleep, secure in the knowledge that men of the local company had been detailed to provide sentries and see to our safety.

All went well until about 9 a.m., the next morning (Sunday). Jack Aherne and I were already up and about, when suddenly we heard the drone of military lorries. At the time, we heard them, they must have been entering the village. I dashed upstairs to warn Diarmuid Hurley and the boys, most of whom were up and



dressed. As I gave the warning, I could hear the soldiers (Cameron) banging on the hall-door with the butts of their rifles. Hurley immediately ordered dead silence, and instructed me to cover the hall-door. Going downstairs to do so, I distinctly recollect seeing our two bank officials with rifles, standing quite coolly at a back window, covering the rear of the house. They, like me, saw a soldier taking cover behind a wall at the rear, only about forty yards away from the house. It was very evident now that we were completely surrounded.

I moved quickly down the stairs, and took up a position on the first landing. I was there only a few moments when two soldiers succeeded in smashing down the hall door and effecting an entry. I immediately opened fire on them with a revolver; from the position I occupied, I had to fire with my left hand. The soldiers hastily withdrew. Hurley ordered us all to get out the back, but I showed him the location of the soldier I had seen at the rear previously, and told him that we were surrounded. At the side of the house on the main street was a large gate which led into the yard at the back. This gate was wide open, and so was a similar gate on the opposite side of the street. I got out into the yard, around the side, until I reached the gate adjoining the house, and being familiar with the lay-out of the village, looked towards the cross roads, about sixty yards on my right. I could see no sign of the enemy, but felt convinced that some should be in the vicinity of the cross. I conceived the wild west idea of hanging my cap on my rifle and exposing it to draw fire. The ruse was successful - two shots in quick

succession were fired at the cap. I again looked towards the cross, and was just in time to see a soldier take cover behind a street corner. I immediately opened fire on that corner, and succeeded in compelling the enemy to remain under cover there. In between shots, I signalled, by arm, to Diarmuid Hurley to come to me. When he came, I pointed to the open gateway across the street, and suggested that I would cover the column while they crossed the street and through the gate opposite. Hurley agreed to this. He ordered the members of the column to take turns at crossing the street while I kept up a steady rifle fire on the soldiers at the cross roads. When the last member of the column had got over, I made a dash for the opposite gate, and got there safely. We closed the gate behind us, and made our way to Aghada and out of danger.

A rather remarkable incident occurred when I was in the yard of Bertie Walsh's house and approaching the street gate from which I subsequently opened fire. As I was crossing the yard, a Mills grenade, thrown over the yard wall by a soldier, landed about two feet in front of me. It burst with a dull sound, and remained where it fell, in two equal parts. According to the text book, these grenades are serrated to assist fragmentation on exploding. I'm sure I was lucky that that particular grenade did not comply with the book requirements.

While I was in the yard, I saw Jack Aherne under cover of the wall dividing Walsh's yard from that adjoining. Jack used to shout, "My turn, now, Jock!", and raised himself to fire over the wall. The Cameron Highlander in the adjoining yard, not to be outdone, would shout in reply, "My turn, now, Paddy!" when he

too fired. Jack Aherne and "Jock" were still continuing their own private little war when Diarmaid Hurley ordered the rush across the street. That finished it.

As we left Cloyne, we had occasion to cross the road between Cloyne and Aghada. Jack Aherne was with me. He looked towards Cloyne, and spotted two soldiers on the road. He immediately knelt down, and opened rifle fire on them. They did not reply to the fire. The column had escaped.

We had gone about half a mile when we heard intense rifle and Lewis gun fire which presumably was directed on Bertie Walsh's house - but the birds had flown.

Here, it must be recorded that, although the Cloyne men who were detailed act as sentries, failed to give us warning of the approach of the military. They did send word to Midleton of our plight, and Jos. Aherne, even though a sick man, managed to organise a small rescue party to come to our assistance. This party was actually en route to Cloyne when word reached them that we had all escaped.

In connection with this event, it was believed that some enemy spy had informed the British garrison at Midleton of our presence in Walsh's house. Certainly, on arriving at Cloyne, they immediately singled out that house and surrounded it, except for the left front. Had they been informed of our presence there, I imagine they would have arrived in greater strength and would have succeeded in covering the loophole through which we escaped.

Reviewing the event after a lapse of thirty-six

years, I find it as vivid as if it happened recently.

I was proud to say that there was no sign of panic amongst the members of the column; even the two bank officials behaved with exemplary courage, notwithstanding the fact that it was their first time under fire.

This absence of panic, I attribute in a great measure to the coolness, resourcefulness and heroic example of our leader, Diarmuid Hurley.

#### Ambush of Police Patrol at Midleton:

Immediately following our escape at Cloyne, Diarmuid Hurley decided that the Aghada area was too dangerous, so we moved to an unoccupied farmhouse at Kilmantain, a few miles north-east of Midleton. While we were here, word was brought to Diarmuid that a patrol of R.I.C. and Black and Tans patrolled Midleton each night, and he decided to go in with the column and attack this patrol, but, first of all, Jack Aherne and I were to go into the town, to note and report the strength and disposition of the patrol.

The whole column, including Jack Aherne and myself, moved into Midleton under cover of darkness, and assembled at a saw-mills in Charles Street. The date was about the 27th December 1920, and the time, approximately 8 p.m. From the saw-mills, Jack and I continued on to the main street. We arranged that I would take up position at the corner of Charles Street which is situated about midway in the main street, and at right-angles to it. Jack posted himself further down the main street, in the vicinity of the Midleton Arms Hotel. We were armed with .45 Webley revolvers and wore trench coats and caps.

I was only about five minutes at my post when I

saw a patrol of Black and Tans, marching slowly towards me. They moved in pairs, about six paces apart and on both sides of the street, four pairs on my side and two pairs on the opposite side, together with an old R.I.C. man named Mullins. All were armed with rifles and revolvers, with the rifles slung on their shoulders. In the last pair on my side was a Constable Gordon with whom I was well acquainted before I joined the column. When passing, he noticed me and, evidently surprised at seeing me, shouted, "Hallo, Paddy!". I said, "Hallo, Gordie!", which was my usual way of addressing him. For a moment, I thought he would leave the ranks and come over to me, but fortunately he carried on with the patrol. I am sure my heart missed a beat or two. Gordon knew me well. He had not seen me for the previous few months, and now he was looking at me wearing a trench coat and cap, items of apparel which I had never previously worn in his presence. I remember wondering if he suspected something was afoot. If he did, he kept his suspicions to himself, as the patrol continued sedately down the street. I waited until he had passed Jack Aherne, when I went and collected him, and reported back to Diarmuid Hurley, comparing notes on our way. We had a perfect picture of the whole patrol, and lost no time in describing their disposition to Hurley. He immediately issued his orders. There were sixteen of us, all intimate with the lay-out, knowing every house and doorway in the main street. Ten of us took up positions in doorways between Charles Street and along about forty yards of the main street up to the Midland Arms Hotel. The remainder did likewise on the opposite side of the

street. I was at the corner of Charles Street and Main Street, and Diarmuid Hurley was at the Midland Arms Hotel end of Main Street, on the same side as I was. It was decided that, when the patrol was between our two positions on the return journey, Hurley would open fire, and this was to be the signal for all of us to go into action. Each one of our party was armed with a revolver.

We were only about five minutes<sup>in position</sup> when the patrol returned - still in the same order as I had seen it earlier. Hurley judged his shot to perfection, and at once all of us opened fire. The patrol was taken completely by surprise and, in a comparatively short time, the attack was over. Some of the Tans did fire back at us, and there were a few narrow escapes on our side. Dan Cashman of Midleton was fortunate to be carrying a cigarette case in his vest pocket - it was badly dented by a bullet, but it probably saved his life. Jim McCarthy of Midleton, although not a member of the column, took part in the attack, and was wounded in the wrist. Otherwise, we escaped unscathed. But what of the patrol? Constable Mullins was shot dead, and about six other Tans wounded, some of whom died later from their wounds. Some of the patrol threw their rifles on the street and ran away. "Cordie" escaped uninjured, and somehow I was glad of this as I still think he was not of an evil nature. Two of the Black and Tans were lying on the footpath near me, bleeding profusely. Sergeant Moloney of the Midleton R.I.C. had been sent earlier to the house of a British ex officer, to collect the latter's uniform. The sergeant was returning to barracks with the uniform, and as his return coincided with the attack, he came under our fire, was shot in

the foot, and dropped the uniform convenient to where I was, and only a few yards from one of the wounded Black and Tans. I knelt down beside the Tan and spoke to him. He told me his name, which I have now forgotten, and said he was from Liverpool. He said he would resign if he recovered from his wounds. He then offered me his wallet. I took it from his hand and put it back in the breast pocket of his tunic, and told him I was doing so. I then got the uniform which Sergeant Holoney had dropped, folded it and placed it under the Tan's head. The poor fellow lost a lot of blood, and I expect he was one of those who eventually died of wounds.

I cannot say with any certainty now what number of rifles and revolvers we captured that night. I do know I secured one rifle and one revolver, and I'm sure the rest of our lads were just as successful.

This attack took place only a few hundred yards from the R.I.C. barracks and about five hundred yards from the military post. The whole affair lasted about twenty minutes. We withdrew by the same route as we had arrived. All the boys were in great form, and they had every right to be, but I recall having mixed feeling, due to my so intimate contact with the wounded Black and Tan.

Official reprisals followed in Middleton within a day or so, houses of some prominent citizens, including those of Edward Carey and John O'Shea, being wrecked by military and Black and Tans.

National Archives Act, 1986, Regulations, 1988

**ABSTRACTION OF PART(S) PURSUANT TO REGULATION 8**

**Form to be completed and inserted in the original record  
in place of each part abstracted**

- (i) Reference number of the separate cover under which the abstracted part has been filed: WS 1449/A
- (ii) How many documents have been abstracted: 3pp
- (iii) The date of each such document: 28 June 1956
- (iv) The description of each document:  
WS1449 Wilson Statement Comdt Patton J. Wilson. P 47-49 (incl)  
names of individuals

(Where appropriate, a composite description may be entered in respect of two or more related documents).

- (v) Reason(s) why the part has been abstracted for retention:  
(c) Would or might cause distress or danger to living persons on the ground that they contain information about individuals, or would or might be likely to lead to an action for damages for defamation.  
( These will be the reasons given on the certificate under Section 8(4).)

Moloney

Name: (J. Moloney.)

Grade: Col.

Department/Office/Court:

Date: 7 March 2003.



Incident with an Amusing Sequel:

Early in January, 1921, Diarmuid Hurley received information to the effect that a niece of R.I.C., Midleton, was suspected of sending information to the local District Inspector. She was supposed to have a typewriting machine for the purpose. She lived with the \_\_\_\_\_ and his wife at \_\_\_\_\_, Midleton, only a few hundred yards from the R.I.C. barracks. Diarmuid Hurley decided to search the \_\_\_\_\_ house for the typing machine, and brought me with him. We were armed with .45 revolvers. It was about 8 p.m.

In answer to our knock, Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_ opened the door. Hurley enquired if her niece was inside. Before waiting for a reply, we entered the house, telling Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_ to follow us. We found the \_\_\_\_\_ and his niece in the sittingroom, comfortably ensconced before a blazing fire. The \_\_\_\_\_ remained seated and was perfectly cool, not showing the slightest signs of fear when we entered, carrying revolvers. Hurley told him our business. The \_\_\_\_\_ said he was not aware of any typewriter being in the house, nor did his niece pass on any information to either the District Inspector or the military. Hurley said he would search the house, and requested the niece to accompany him, leaving me to look after \_\_\_\_\_ and his wife.

The \_\_\_\_\_ knew me well, and told me so. He said he remembered me working in Mr. Hallinan's Engineering Works, Midleton, (burned by British forces in late 1920), and assured me that the R.I.C. had no part in the burning of that premises. It is possible that such was the case, as Mr. Hallinan was a well known loyalist, his brother, Major Hallinan, having

fought in the British army during the 1914-1918 war. The R.I.C. and the District Inspector were well acquainted with these facts, so, in all probability, it was not the R.I.C. who were responsible for the senseless outrage.

Having thoroughly searched the house without finding any evidence to incriminate anybody, Hurley returned to the sittingroom and informed accordingly. He (Hurley) expressed the hope that he had not alarmed Mrs. unduly. Having ordered the not to report to his barracks for at least half an hour, we bade them goodnight.

The niece accompanied us to the hall door and chatted for a moment. Hurley jokingly suggested cutting off the girl's hair. I looked at her and said, "It would be a pity to destroy such a lovely head". We then moved off. Some short time after, we heard that the suggestion to cut off the niece's hair was not taken as a joke. In fact, she told her friends that it was I who make the suggestion, and only for Hurley she would have lost her hair.

One day, later on, Diarmuid Hurley, Jos. Aherne, Jack O'Connell and myself were in the vicinity of Middleton, and, feeling hungry, decided to call to the house of two elderly ladies - ardent loyalists - for a meal. We pretended to be British officers in mufti, looking for I.R.A. men. We succeeded in our ruse, as we were provided with an excellent meal. During the course of conversation, the ladies told us that they had no knowledge as to where the I.R.A. were in the habit of staying, but said that two of them, Hurley and Whelan, had the audacity to raid house

in Midleton a short time previously, and that only for Hurley, Whelan would have cut off the hair of the niece. The four of us laughed heartily at this, and it was a standing joke with Hurley ever after. I often wonder what would have happened if we told the ladies that Hurley and Whelan were amongst the guests they were so hospitably entertaining.

Clonmult:

Some time in January 1921, the column moved to Clonmult and occupied a disused farmhouse, about a mile from the village.

The house was in an isolated position, and was reached from the main road by a long, narrow winding breen. It was about six hundred yards (as the crow flies) from the main road, and was between the villages of Lisgould and Clonmult. The house was invisible from the road until one reached Clonmult, as it was situated on a slope running from the main road to about half a mile below the house. There were high fences in front and on both sides. Between the house and the road, the land was covered with heather. There were also some trees in the vicinity. The house itself was a one-storey building with a thatched roof. There were three small rooms and one large living room (or kitchen). There was one small window in the back and three in the front of the building. The location was considered a safe place, particularly as it was in a very friendly area, practically all the young men of which were members of the I.R.A.

As was customary whenever the column moved into a district, the local I.R.A. company was instructed to

be always on the alert, to report movements of enemy troops who might happen to come into the area. The column did not, however, rely solely on the watchfulness of the locals. Two sentries were, at all times, posted at excellent look-out positions. In addition, two of the column were detailed to patrol the roads in the immediate neighbourhood during the night. It was never intended to defend the house in case of attack - hence it was not prepared for defence. If enemy troops arrived, it was anticipated that their presence would become known to us in advance, and I know it was Diarmuid Hurley's intention, in such circumstances, to evacuate the building and give battle outside.

All went well until Sunday, 20th Februrry 1921, a fateful day for Ireland and one which is remembered with anguish, particularly by many families in Cobh and Midleton. It was about 4 p.m. on this date that the column was surrounded, forced to surrender and practically wiped out while the men were prisoners in the hands of a brutal enemy. A poignant aspect of the tragic affair was that it had been decided to evacuate the house at 6 p.m. that same Sunday evening to billets in the townland of Leamlaura, some six or seven miles away.

During the week ended 19th February 1920, Diarmuid Hurley received a despatch from headquarters, Cork No. 1 brigade, Cork city, to the effect that a convoy of military would be conveying explosives by rail from Cobh to Cork on the 22nd (or 23rd) February. Hurley was directed to attack this convoy, but if he felt that the job was beyond him, he was to report

accordingly to brigade headquarters when the latter would make alternative arrangements. On Saturday, 19th February 1920, Diarmuid handed me that despatch to read. I did so, and immediately saw red. I felt that brigade headquarters should never have the slightest doubt of our willingness to comply with, or our ability to carry out the order. We had proved ourselves on so many occasions prior to this, without either help or direction from brigade headquarters, that I felt distinctly offended, and said so. Hurley was also indignant at the tone of the despatch, and so was Jos. Aherne.

On Sunday 20th February 1920, Hurley decided to take Jos. Aherne with him to select a site to ambush the train, in compliance with directions from brigade headquarters. We had a Ford car at our disposal at the time, which Jos. Aherne was to drive. I was to take charge of the column in the absence of Diarmuid and Jos., and move out from Clonmult to Leamlaura, as arranged, at 6 p.m. that evening.

Diarmuid and Jos. were actually seated in the car, with the engine running, when Diarmuid got out and came back to me. He told me that Jos. was not familiar with that part of the railway line between Cobh and Cobh Junction - the latter is about seven miles from Cobh - and, as I was well acquainted with the layout, being a Cobh man, he had made up his mind to bring me along. He asked me for my opinion as to who he would place in charge of the column in our absence, and I suggested Jack O'Connell of Cobh. That explains how I was an absentee from Clonmult on that fateful day, and how Jack O'Connell came to be in charge of the column

on that terrible Sunday. The last words I said to Jack before leaving were, "Be careful, Jack!" I collected my carbine and .45 revolver, mementos of Cloyne R.I.C. barracks, and accompanied Diarmuid and Jos. from the scene of what was to be an awful tragedy.

As I was not present at Clonmult during the fight which took place later that day, I do not intend to give any details, but will leave it to survivors to do so. Suffice for me to say that Ireland, that day, lost some very gallant men which she could ill afford to lose. I am sure our lads gave a good account of themselves before being compelled to surrender to vastly superior enemy forces. May their souls rest in peace!

Diarmuid, Jos. and I moved off down the winding boreen in the Ford car, about 3 p.m. Before we reached the main road, Diarmuid asked me would I like to bid good-bye to Bob Murray - Hurley and I sat in the back seat, with Jos. driving - and I said we would leave it to the driver to decide. I have no doubt that Jos. heard this conversation, and I wondered what he would do. Bob Murray had a public house in the village of Clonmult, and was a particular friend of the column. In ordinary circumstances, we would, and should have called on him. However, it was destined that we would not do so on this occasion, as Jos. turned right on reaching the main road whereas he would turn left to call on Bob Murray. Had I encouraged the idea of calling to Murray's, Jos. might have done so, and it is possible we would still be there when the military attacked the column. As we were well armed, we would have been able to go to the rescue, and I have no doubt we would have enabled the column to escape, by

carrying out an attack on the enemy's rear. However, it was not to be.

We proceeded on our journey to Cobh Junction, about fourteen miles to the south, and selected a site for the proposed attack on the train. I do not remember what time it was when we finished our task, but I do recollect it was pitch dark, and I would place the time at 6.30 or 7 p.m. We were on the railway line, near Cobh Junction, and about to depart to where we had our car parked, when we heard the roar of military lorries coming along the road, proceeding to Cork. There were nine or ten of them. We lay hidden until they passed, little thinking where they were coming from, or that they held as prisoners some survivors of our column. When the lorries had gone, we picked up our car and drove in the direction of Leamlaura where we had arranged to rejoin the column.

We were in the vicinity of Killacloyne, a few miles on the Cork side of Carrigtwohill, when we were stopped by Mick Burke, captain of the Cobh company, who told us that the column had been wiped out at Clonmult except for one man. He had no further details.

We were staggered by this news, thought it impossible that he could be right, and hoped he was wrong. Poor Diarmuid was frantic on hearing the news, and asked me where I thought the one survivor would go. I gave, as a guess, Canavan's house at Knockraha in Martin Corry's territory - he was O/C, Knockraha company. We decided to go there, and, sure enough, there was Jacko (Jack O'Connell), the one man who escaped from Clonmult, the man whom I suggested should be in charge.

in our absence. He looked in a pitiable condition after his terrible ordeal - he had led a sortie from the house in Clonmult and was the sole survivor of the attempt - and told us all he knew. The four of us then set off by car for Clonmult.

On arriving there, we crossed the field to the ill fated house which was still burning - the British had set fire to the thatched roof before our lads surrendered. There we found twelve of our comrades, laid side by side, in a field adjoining the house, their faces covered by a long canvas sheet. Some local people had come to the scene after the military had left, collected the bodies and laid them as we found them. I undertook the heartbreaking task of uncovering their faces and identifying them, calling out each name consecutively. This sad task took me some time, but, between sobs of anguish, I managed it. There were two distinct pauses as I went along the row, as I had great difficulty in naming Liam Aherne (Jos. Aherne's brother) and Jerry Aherne (first cousin to Jos.). I will not even attempt to describe the mental anguish of Diarmuid Hurley. All four of us - Diarmuid, Jos., Jacko and myself - sobbed with a terrible grief and sense of loss at the fate that had befallen our beloved comrades, some four or five of whom had bullet holes in the face, just below their eyes, where they had been shot by the Fens whilst prisoners. There was nothing we could do but cover up their faces again, and take our sad departure to Leamlaura.

That night, Jacko (Jack O'Connell) and I shared a bed. I remember putting my arm around him, to give



him some comfort and consolation. I believed - and told him so - that he had done all that was humanly possible to save the column.

The following were killed on that fateful Sunday, 20th February 1920:-

James Aherne, Cobh.

James Glavin, Cobh.

Liam Aherne, Midleton.

Jerry Aherne, Midleton.

Michael Desmond, Midleton.

David Desmond, Midleton.

Donal Denny, Midleton.

Christopher O'Sullivan, Midleton.

Michael Hallinan, Midleton.

John Joe Joyce, Midleton.

Richard Hegarty, Garryroe.

Joseph Morrissey, Athlone.

The following were taken prisoners:-

Paddy Sullivan, Cobh.

Maurice Moore, Cobh.

Paddy Higgins, Aghada.

Conny O'Leary, Killeagh.

Paddy Sullivan and Maurice Moore were executed in Cork gaol on June, 1921. Paddy Higgins and Sonny O'Leary had been badly wounded at Clonsilla (Higgins, while a prisoner). Their lives were saved by the advent of the Truce in July 1921.

Fate was particularly unkind to Dick Hegarty. He was at home in Garryroe for a few days, and had rejoined the column that Sunday after we had left, in

time to meet his death.

As can be easily imagined, the fate of our comrades at Clonmult had a terrible effect on the four of us, so, before planning any further attacks, we decided to rest awhile, with friends, in the 4th battalion area.

#### Attack on Hampshire Regiment at Youghal:

Some time prior to the Clonmult tragedy, Tom Hyde of Ballinacurra, a member of B. (Middleton) company and later killed in Spain, fighting with the Irish Brigade under General O'Duffy, discovered that fishing smacks at Ballinacurra were carrying, as ballast, used artillery shells which were evidently discarded by the British garrison at Fort Carlisle. Tom conceived the idea that, if these empty shell cases were filled with explosives, they could be used by us as road mines. He had no difficulty in securing a supply of cases from fishermen, and, to my knowledge, four land mines were subsequently made and used against the British in our battalion area.

The first mine was used in an attack on the Hampshire regiment stationed at Youghal in January, or early February, 1921. This was carried out by Paddy O'Reilly and Thomas Power, both of the Youghal company.

Prior to Sunday, 20th February 1921 - the date of the Clonmult tragedy - Paddy O'Reilly arrived at column headquarters in Clonmult, bringing an empty shell case which he had received from Tom Hyde. He planned to explode a mine under a party of soldiers who regularly went from their barracks in Youghal to a rifle range, about one and a half miles outside the town. Diarmuid

Hurley, the column O/C and then O/C of the battalion, agreed to the proposal, and told me to fill the shell case with explosives and instruct Paddy O'Reilly in the use of the exploder. Paddy and I moved to a field, about one hundred yards from the column headquarters. I filled the shell with three or four different explosives, including gelnite, and inserted the detonator which, incidentally, had a short lead. The exploder was of the box type, about nine inches square, and electrically controlled by a switch, the 'off' and 'on' positions being indicated. Paddy had a lead of about one hundred and fifty yards. I remember stressing the fact that, even though the lead between the exploder and the mine was so long, the explosion would take place immediately the switch was put to the 'on' position, provided, of course, that the lead and detonator were both in good condition. The procedure appeared a very simple one to Paddy, so having satisfied myself that he thoroughly understood what to do, he put the filled mine into a pony trap and drove off to Youghal.

On their way to range practice, the soldiers in Youghal travelled on foot by either of two routes. One was through the main street of the town, the other, at the rear of the town (known as the lower and upper route respectively). Tommy and Paddy selected suitable positions to explode the mine on each route, but, on the first three occasions they lay in wait, the military used the other route. On the fourth occasion, the soldiers passed over the route where the mine was concealed. Paddy pressed the switch to 'on', when he judged that the main body of troops was marching over,

or close to the mine. Several tommies were killed and wounded in the explosion, including some of the regimental band. It appears that Paddy pressed the switch too soon. Had he waited a second or two longer, the effects would surely have been more disastrous, as the troops proper would be in more dense formation than the band. Paddy and Tommy got safely away after the occurrence.

Here, I think, it is in order to trace briefly the subsequent career of these two young heroes. During the tragic civil war in Ireland, Paddy and Tommy took opposite sides. Paddy became what was known as an Irregular. Tommy joined the National Army with the rank of Lieutenant. The latter was killed in an engagement with the Irregulars at Bruree, Co. Limerick, in August 1922. Paddy was captured while carrying arms, and executed by the Regulars (National Army authorities) in Waterford gaol, about November 1922. (R.I.P.) They were both brave lads and deserved a far, far better fate. What a calamity, the civil war was!

#### Further use of Land Mines:

Tom Hyde, who had conceived the idea for using discarded shell cases as mines, proceeded, on his own initiative, in May 1921 to place one of these mines against the side of the courthouse in Midleton. This was a particularly daring act, as the courthouse adjoined the H.I.C. barracks, and the mine, when filled, weighed three or four stones. The resulting explosion caused little damage, but did succeed in rattling the nerves of the garrison as the latter indulged in intensive indiscriminate firing immediately after the explosion occurred.

Again in May 1921, Tom Hyde, with a few men from the Midleton company, exploded a mine at Carrigahane, about a mile on the Castlemartyr side of Midleton. This time, the objective was a lorry load of soldiers, several of whom were wounded. On that occasion, Diarmuid Hurley, Jos. Aherne, Jacko O'Connell and myself were billeted in Murnane's of Coppingerstown, only a few hundred yards from the scene of the explosion. We made a quick getaway, and were lucky we moved off in the right direction, as we were unaware at the time of Tom Hyde's exploit.

Mine exploded at Ballyedekin:

On April 10th 1921, the fourth mine attack - the second, in sequence - took place at Ballyedekin, about six or seven miles from Midleton, on the main Midleton-Youghal road.

Diarmuid Hurley, Jos. Aherne, Jacko and I were billeted near Churchtown when Hurley got word that a convoy of troops was to leave Youghal for Cork on 10th April 1921. Hurley decided to attack the convoy, and, for that purpose, enlisted the help of Mick Kearney of Churchtown and another local Volunteer whose name I have forgotten. I think it was Mick Kearney who selected the site for the attack, as he was more familiar with the locality than any of us. The intention was to explode a mine under the convoy at a selected spot. Hurley and Jos. Aherne would operate the mine, while Jacko and I would cover their escape with rifle fire. It was not our intention to stage a prolonged attack on the convoy, as there were only four of us engaged. Mick Kearney and the other Volunteer were posted as scouts some distance away

(on high ground) from the ambush position, to signal the approach of the enemy convoy.

Having filled the shell case with explosives, we proceeded by pony and trap part of the way; coming near the site we had to manhandle the mine for a few hundred yards. I recollect it was heartbreaking work, carrying that mine. We carried it in pairs, changing over regularly for relief. We buried the mine under a heap of stones on the roadside, and then took up our allotted positions, Jos. Aherne on the exploder, with only about eighty yards of a lead, with Diarmuid Hurley at his side to signal him when to press the switch, Jacko and I about a hundred yards away, with rifles. All six of us were on the same side of the road, Diarmuid and Jos. being down a bit, on a narrow winding by-road which joined the main road a few yards from where the mine was placed.

It was about 4 p.m. when we heard the convoy approaching. The scouts signalled us, and, in due course, Jos. Aherne pressed the switch. The convoy consisted of four Leyland lorries and about five Crossley tenders, all loaded with military. The mine went off with a deafening roar, hurling the stones, in which it was buried, into the air. The leading lorry was halted by the explosion, and Jacko and I opened rapid fire on the troops. The latter replied vigorously, those in the cars not affected by the explosion immediately jumping out and advancing through the fields on our position. Jacko and I dashed into the winding by-road where we continued to run, crouching alongside a furze-covered fence. Both Jos. and Jacko were six-

footers, and were evidently spotted by the military who opened up heavy Lewis gun fire on us. I can vividly recollect the bullets cutting through the furze over our heads. Across the field, on the other side of the fence from us, was a party of military advancing towards us in extended formation. Our predicament was now pretty serious. Heavy fire was now opened by these troops, and we saw that their objective was not us, but Diarmuid Hurley who was running across a field, in full view of them. Actually, he was in the next field - not the one we were in - to them. We were no more than thirty yards from the advancing soldiers at this time, but it was evident that Diarmuid Hurley had their full attention, as they never located us. It was also evident that the British Lewis gunners were firing from the scene of the explosion, independently of the military advancing through the fields. We lay low, and, crawling through fences, eventually succeeded in making our escape - a providential one, surely! A feature of the occurrence was the speed at which the British got into action after their initial shock from the mine explosion.

I have no knowledge of enemy casualties on this occasion, but I heard later that quite a number were badly wounded.

Having reached the cover of some trees, we rested awhile, and watched the military searching the fields, a few hundred yards away. We were very uneasy as to the fate of Diarmuid Hurley, and were overjoyed when, on arriving at Murnane's of Coppingerstown, we found him sitting there, equally overjoyed at our safe return.

Dame Fortune certainly smiled on us that evening at Ballyedekin!

Contact with North-East Cork Column, and Death of

Diarmuid Hurley:

It is with a deep sense of sorrow that I record the following events which ended so tragically, and left us bereft of our beloved and fearless leader, Diarmuid Hurley.

Early in May 1921, we were contacted by Con Leddy, O/C, North-East Cork flying column. He invited us to join his column in a proposed attack on a convoy of military in West Waterford. We proceeded to Con Leddy's headquarters at Conna, about six miles west of Tallow, Co. Waterford, where we met Con and his officers in O'Keefe's house. The family was, I think, related to Paddy O'Keefe, now Secretary of the Gaelic Athletic Association. Having discussed the proposed attack, it was decided that Con Leddy would select the site, and that we would meet on 28th May 1921, to make final arrangements.

On the night of 27th May 1921, Diarmuid Hurley, Jacko O'Connell, Jos. Aherne, Tom Buckley (Midleton) and myself were billeted in the townland of Bloomfield, about a mile from Midleton and three miles from Carrigtwohill. Diarmuid, Jos. and I slept in the same bed that night. On the morning of 28th May, Diarmuid learned that an enemy cycle patrol from Cobh had raided several houses in the Carrigtwohill area, and were permitted to return to Cobh unmolested. He was very annoyed at this, particularly as instructions had been issued by him to all company commanders that they



should arrange to have Volunteers on duty at all hours, to take any steps in their power to harass the enemy; even if only, in this instance, the roads had been sprinkled with broken glass, to puncture the bikes of the military - anything to keep the nerves of the enemy on edge. Diarmuid considered it more important for himself to go into Carrigtwohill and enquire into this matter rather than keep his appointment with Con Leddy. He, therefore, instructed Tom Buckley and me to go to the meeting at Conna, and he would go into Carrigtwohill.

On his way to Carrigtwohill, about a mile from Middleton, there is a road junction, one road leading to Carrigtwohill, the other to Lisgould. When in the vicinity of this junction, Diarmuid had the misfortune to run into a foot patrol of R.I.C. and Black and Tans from Middleton. He was armed with a revolver and a Mills grenade. He was recognised by some members of the patrol and called upon to halt. Hurley opened fire on the patrol, threw his grenade, and made a dash for cover alongside a low fence. When he was a few yards from the corner of the fence, he was fatally wounded by a bullet which entered his back, and came out through his stomach. He died where he fell, and, for some reasons best known to themselves, the patrol left his body there and returned to their barracks at Middleton.

What a victory for the enemy! There can be no doubt they appreciated their unexpected good fortune in ridding themselves of such a formidable opponent, an opponent who fought them fair and square, who had to attack them to capture their arms, so that he could

prolong the fight against them, a man who, when he had the enemy at his mercy, was never imbued with the idea of cold-blooded murder, nor did he ever suggest that his men should be other than merciful to a beaten opponent. Great indeed was the enemy victory that fateful day - 28th May 1921 - and if they were jubilant, as well they might be, the remnants of our flying column were correspondingly sorrowful. We had lost an irreplaceable leader, and Ireland, one of her most fearless sons.

In the meantime, Tom Buckley and I duly arrived at Conna. We waited there all day, but Con Leddy did not keep the appointment as arranged. On our return journey, we had reached the village of Clonmult when we were informed of the death of Diarmuid Hurley and the removal of his body to Gurteen. Jos. Aherne, Jacko and I had his remains taken to Churchtown where we got Dr. John Walsh of Midleton to embalm the body, after which, with the help of John Kelliher of Churchtown, we had the remains interred, temporarily, in a vault in the local cemetery.

After the Truce of July 1921, Diarmuid's body was re-interred, with full military honours, in the Republican plot in Midleton cemetery, beside his predeceased comrades who were killed at Clonmult on 20th February 1921. There to-day rests the honoured remains of most of the flying column of the 4th battalion Cork No. 1 brigade, I.R.A. Of the original column, I am the sole survivor. I pray for them constantly, and have shed many a tear over my memories, always when I hear the Soldiers' Song, and particularly when that anthem is played by the Artane

brass band to the thousands assembled in Croke Park, Dublin. I listen to the thousands singing, but I shed silent tears, and, thinking of my dear, former comrades, pray that God, in His mercy, has seen fit to assemble them with Him in His heavenly home, for they are deserving of eternal happiness. I knew them all intimately, and fail to recall any but the noblest instincts in good, clean-living men - men who were inspired by love of Ireland and who nobly died in her cause. May their souls rest in peace!

Election to Vice Commandant, 4th Battalion:

Early in June 1921, the company commanders of the 4th battalion assembled at Dungourney to elect a battalion O/C. The meeting was held in the open, and was attended by about ten or twelve officers, including Jos. Aherne, Jacko O'Connell, David O'Brien (Cobh), Martin Corry (Knockraha) and myself.

I explained the purpose of the meeting, and said that, no matter who was elected, we could never be fortunate enough to have a commander as good as the late Diarmuid Hurloy. All were agreed on this, and I then proposed Jos. Aherne as O/C. Martin Corry seconded the proposal which was passed unanimously. Jos. Aherne then suggested that a Vice Commandant should be elected. To my surprise, I was proposed by David O'Brien and seconded by Martin Corry. This also was passed unanimously. Jos. and I held these ranks until the truce of July 1921, and, on the formation of the National Army, we joined up and hold the same ranks in the then 42nd Infantry Brigade.

People who sheltered and fed us:

Before I finish my story, I feel I must refer to those gallant people who gave us food and shelter during that terrible period of nine months, from October 1920 to July 1921. No narrative of these times would be complete without reference to these people. They were well aware that, by giving shelter to us of the I.R.A., they were risking their lives and their homes. The viciousness and unbridled brutality of the enemy, by taking revenge in reprisals, both official and otherwise, were commonplace throughout the country. Yet, the people rose to the occasion. Their Irish spirit rose to magnificent heights of self-sacrifice, and whenever a natural nervousness existed, that spirit awakened and produced marvels of heroism. I sincerely hope that future historians will not fail to pay tribute in this respect. Surely, it is not too difficult to picture the dire straits in which the I.R.A. would find themselves if the people failed in their support of the cause, the support which was vital to the success with which the army's efforts were eventually crowned.

I am, after a lapse of thirty-five years, trying to recall the names of some of these gallant families in East Cork who gladly gave us food and shelter, many of whom gave us their own beds that we might sleep in comfort, and amassed debts to buy the food for us. In my opinion, these are people who deserve special recognition for the unstinted services they so willingly gave.

I have succeeded in recalling the following,

although I am sure there are many others whose names  
escape me:-

Hogarty's - Bloomfield, Midleton.  
Lurnano's - Coppingerstown.  
Terry O'Brien - near Carrigtwohill.  
Fitzgerald's - Ballinbrittig, Knockraha.  
Canavan's - Knockraha.  
Garde's - Garryroe.  
Higgins' - Aghada (parents of Paddy  
Higgins, wounded and captured  
at Clonmult).  
Rev. Father Flannery, C.C. - Midleton.  
Aherne's - Ballyrichard (parents of  
Jack Aherne).

In conclusion, in addition to myself, the following  
who gave service in the column still survive:-

Major Jack O'Connell (Jacko) - Cobh.  
Commandant Paddy Higgins - Aghada (now residing in  
Dublin).  
Captain Dan Cashman - Midleton (now residing in  
Dublin).  
Sonny O'Leary - Killeagh (now residing in Dublin).  
Commandant Mick Kearney - Churchtown (now residing  
in Cork).  
Joseph Ouhig - Manager, Bank of Ireland. (address  
unknown).

SIGNED:

*Patrick J. Sullivan*  
Colonel

DATE:

*June 25<sup>th</sup> 1956*

WITNESS

*[Signature]*

