

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1.456

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1456.

Witness

John Kelleher,
The Rock,
Midleton,
Co. Cork.

Identity.

Lieutenant, Midleton Company, 4th Battalion,
Cork No. 1 Brigade.

Subject.

Activities of Midleton Company, 4th Battalion,
Cork No. 1 Brigade, Irish Volunteers, 1917-1921, and
East Cork Flying Column, 1920-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

File No ... S.2783..

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STATEMENT BY JOHN KELLEHER,

The Rock, Middleton, County Cork.

I was born in 1899 in the townland of Knockmonlea, Killeagh, County Cork. My parents were farmers and, as a very young lad, I remember my grandmother telling me the story of how my great grandfather was hanged by yeomen in Youghal in 1798. My grandparents were, later, evicted from their holding by agents of British landlords and suffered a great deal as a result. I suppose, therefore, it was only natural that I should, from my earliest youth, have a hatred for all things British.

My family moved to Middleton, County Cork, in 1910 and, when my school days were over, I went as an apprentice to the Middleton Engineering Works.

In common with other lads in Middleton, I joined the local branch of the Gaelic League but, owing to my youth, I was not a member of the National (Redmondite) Volunteers when a Company was formed in Middleton about 1913.

Prior to the Rising of Easter Week, 1916, there was no Irish Volunteer unit in Middleton and my first connection with the Volunteers was, when a Company was organised here, early in the year 1917 (or perhaps very late in 1916). There were only about eight of us, altogether, in this Company, the Captain being a man named John Brady. The number increased to a dozen, or so, after a short time. We held meetings and drilled secretly. Our numbers steadily increased as the year 1917 went on and I remember that Jack O'Shea and Sean Buckley were Company Officers at that time. It was, I think, late in the year 1917 when the 4th Battalion, Cork No. 1. Brigade, was formed and the Middleton Company (known as "B" Company) was attached to the Battalion. Michael Leahy of Cobh was Battalion O/C.

When the threat of conscription into the British Army occurred in the early months of 1918, the members of our Company rocketted to about a hundred. As the scare passed, the numbers dwindled until we were left with, approximately, thirty-five or forty men, practically all of whom served with the Company during the years that followed.

Early in 1918, we commenced to parade openly and in uniform. John Brady our Captain was arrested about this time for 'illegal' drilling and Jack O'Shea took his place.

In August, 1918, I went to Dublin to do a year's course in motor car engineering at the Technical Schools, Ringsend. While in Dublin, I became a member of a Volunteer Company attached to the 3rd Battalion (as far as I can remember). The Battalion Commandant was Simon Donnelly. Other officers were Seán Micheál Cullen and Frank Casey. I remember attending drill parades in a Sinn Féin hall at Vavasour Square, Bath Avenue, Sandymount, Dublin.

Early in 1919, I returned to Midleton, County Cork, and resumed my association with the local Volunteer Company. At this time, Diarmuid Hurley was Captain with Joe Ahern, Midleton, as second in charge. Jack Shea was, I think, 2nd Lieutenant. Hurley was a West Cork man who had been working in Belfast for a year or so prior to his coming to Midleton where he was employed as foreman in Coppinger's, Corn Merchants. While in Belfast he was attached to an Irish Volunteer unit there and such was this man's extraordinary personality that he was, almost immediately on his arrival in Midleton, appointed Captain of the local Volunteer Company. Hurley was a man of great driving force, one who was anxious to get things done rather than talked about. He played a vital part in the Company and Battalion activities until his death at the hands of the British on 28th May, 1921.

Under Hurley's vigorous leadership, Company organisation was stepped up and action began. As a preliminary, he was anxious to acquire arms on the fight and he arranged a series of raids on houses where he learned that guns were kept. To mention but a few of these raids Hurley and four or five of us raided at night the house of an ex-British Army Major. He got a sporting gun or two and a few bayonets, not of much use. Another such raid took place on the home of the District Inspector of police named Webster, at Ballinacurra, a mile from Midleton. On this occasion I had received information from the D.I.'s servant man that there were some guns in the house and that the best time to raid would be on a Sunday when the District Inspector had left the house to attend Church. I told Hurley about this and he, with three or four of us, got into the D.I.'s house one Sunday and took away a number of old sporting rifles and pistols. Hurley carried a revolver on these raids. He was the only one, so far as I can recollect, at the period, who had a revolver. In connection with the question of arms it should be understood that we always had a dozen or more shotguns available as some of the members were farmers' sons or farm labourers to whom shotguns were available. To augment our meagre supply of guns, Hurley arranged with some Volunteer in Belfast to buy him three or four revolvers. This was done with money subscribed by the Midleton Company and the guns arrived safely to us.

The first open gesture of defiance to British authority by us occurred on Easter Sunday, 1919. It was decided to fly the tricolour from the Town Hall, Midleton, in celebration of the anniversary of the Rising of 1916. Jerry Ahern (killed at Clonmult in February, 1921) and myself put up the flag. The local R.I.C. threatened to remove it, whereupon, Diarmuid Hurley, with about a dozen Volunteers, some armed with shotguns, entered the building, barricaded the stairway and awaited the arrival of the R.I.C. The latter, no doubt informed of what had happened, made no attempt to enter the Town Hall and remove the flag.

Attempts to capture military guard at Ballyquirke Aerodrome.

On 4th July, 1919, an attempt to raid and disarm a party of Military at Ballyquirke Aerodrome, situated between Mogeely and Killeagh, County Cork, was a failure. So far as I can remember, the actual attack on the guard was to be carried out by a party of Cork City Volunteers under Terence McSwiney. Our job was to help out by blocking roads and cutting telegraph wires in the neighbourhood of the aerodrome. At any rate, about twelve men from "B" (Midleton) Company, with D. Hurley in charge, proceeded to a spot near Mogeely that night. There were, also, some Volunteers there from Cobh, to ambush any relieving enemy force that might come from the direction of Killeagh. We waited all night for the Cork men but there was no sign of them until daybreak, when it was deemed advisable to carry out the plan to attack. I understood, afterwards, that the Cork men, who were travelling by motor, were sent the wrong road to Ballyquirke by someone from whom they inquired the way. As a result they went far out of their course, hence their late arrival at the scene.

Amongst those from "B" Company present with me that night were - Diarmuid Hurley, Tadg Manly, Joseph Ahern, Mick Kearney, Mick Cronin (Battalion Adjutant), Paddy Whelan, Mick Desmond and Mick Hallihan.

On 11th November, 1919, a further attempt was made on Ballyquirke by our Company and a few of the local Volunteers. The immediate vicinity of the aerodrome was previously reconnoitred by Diarmuid Hurley, Tadg Manly and myself. We noted the movements of the guard and the military maintenance party in general which numbered fifty to sixty men. On this occasion, Hurley's plan was that a few Volunteers should rush the sentries with revolvers, disarm them, and then that the main party of Volunteers should enter the guardroom and attack the guard with short stout sticks. Surprise was the main feature in the plan, as we were much too poorly armed to fight it out with guns.

At about 7 p.m. about twenty of "B" Company assembled at an old quarry near Ballyquirke and about two hundred yards from the aerodrome. There were three or four revolvers in our party. Some were detailed to patrol the road leading to Killeagh (two miles distant) and hold up any soldiers who might be returning to Ballyquirke. One soldier was held up; I believe he was after bringing mail to Killeagh. He was brought near to the aerodrome with the idea of following up closely behind him and rushing the sentry who would admit him. This decision had no sooner been taken than a scout reported that the guard at the camp had been alerted for some reason and had 'turned out'. This completely upset our plans which depended so much on surprise for their success, so, very reluctantly, Hurley decided to abandon the attempt.

Attack on Carrigtwohill R.I.C. Barracks.

On Saturday night, 3rd January, 1920, "B" Company to the number of thirty men, were mobilised at Ballyvodeck (about two miles west of Midleton) on a bye-road which leads to Carrigtwohill three miles further west. The time was about 9.30 p.m. Hurley informed us that we were to proceed to Carrigtwohill to attack and capture the R.I.C. barracks there in conjunction with the Cobh Company with whom we were to make contact close to the village of Carrigtwohill. Our lads had a few revolvers and shotguns: the Cobh men had some rifles captured from the British in Cobh a short time previous to this.

We marched to the old school-house at the eastern end of Carrigtwohill and about four hundred yards from the barracks. On arrival, we were detailed for different jobs, including patrols. I and a Midleton Volunteer named Jack Ahern were ordered to cross fields south of the village and get to a shed adjoining the western gable end of the barracks. We were actually on our way to the shed when rifle fire was opened on the barracks by men of the Cobh Company from position nearby. The R.I.C. replied with rifle fire but, so far as I can

remember, did not fire up any verey lights to summon assistance. This being the first barrack attack in the area I am of the opinion that the garrisons of R.I.C. barracks were not supplied with verey lights at that particular time. Firing by both sides continued for half an hour or so when I was detailed, along with John Moore of Cobh (a County Council quarry worker) to place a charge of gelignite at the western gable of the barracks to blow a breach so that the building could be rushed and the garrison forced to surrender. (The garrison consisted, to the best of my recollection, of a sergeant and seven constables). If this also failed we had a tin of petrol with us to burn the place, if such was necessary, to compel the R.I.C. to surrender.

John Moore and I placed the gelignite in position and sent word to Mick Leahy, the Battalion O/C. in charge of the attack, that all was ready. He gave instructions to explode the gelignite. The fuse was then ignited and when the smoke from the explosion had cleared a bit we could see a breach in the barrack wall about 6' by 4'.

Immediately after the explosion, Diarmuid Hurley, with four or five others from the Company, arrived on the spot. Without any hesitation Hurley shouted to us, "Come on, follow me", and dashed in through the breach, revolver in hand, followed by five or six of us including Mick Leahy the O/C. Hurley ran up the stairs and roared to the R.I.C. who were on the second floor "Come out and surrender, we are in". The next thing we saw was the bewildered garrison coming out on the landing with their hands up. They were ordered downstairs to the dayroom where they were placed under guard. Other Volunteers had, by now, entered the barracks and all of us made a thorough search for arms and ammunition. We collected the rifles and revolvers of the garrison together with some bombs. These were taken away to a safe destination. The task completed, we withdrew to Midleton. The attack on Carrigtwohill started about 11 a.m. and finished about 12.30 or 1 a.m. Shortly afterwards, the barracks was evacuated by the R.I.C. who were distributed amongst other barracks in the area.

Attack on Castlemartyr Barracks.

A month later - on Monday night 9th February, 1920 - saw another barracks fall to "B" Company. This time it was Castlemartyr, situated about six miles east of Midleton on the main Midleton-Youghal road. The barracks was a two-storied stone building on the main street of the village and had a garrison of a sergeant and about six constables.

The day of 9th February was a fair day in Midleton and it was customary for a few R.I.C. from Castlemartyr to do duty in Midleton on fair days, returning to Castlemartyr later in the day on bicycles. Hurley was informed that two R.I.C. - a Sergeant O'Brien and Constable Collins from Castlemartyr - were on duty in Midleton and he decided that they should be captured on their return journey. Hurley's idea was to bring the captured R.I.C. back to Castlemartyr and when the barrack door was open to admit the sergeant and constable and he (Hurley) with a party of men from the Midleton Company would rush into the barracks and hold up and disarm the garrison.

When the fair at Midleton was over that evening the two R.I.C. men set out for Castlemartyr on bicycles and were waylaid and captured at Churchtown North, approximately midway between Castlemartyr and Midleton, by Tadg Manly, Michael Hallihan and Michael Desmond all of "A" Company. Hurley was immediately informed of this and ordered a mobilisation of the Company near the village of Castlemartyr, all arms to be carried. We arrived there about 9 p.m. by which time the two R.I.C. men had, also, been brought and guarded close to the village. Hurley now spoke to Sergeant O'Brien and Constable Collins and told them what he intended to do (use them to gain admittance to the barracks). Both the R.I.C. men, particularly Sergeant O'Brien, refused point blank to co-operate. Threats of shooting were of no avail; they would have nothing whatever to do with the plan to enter the barracks.

Notwithstanding this, Hurley decided to go ahead without the help of the captured R.I.C.. He, first of all, detailed a few men to go down the village and take prisoner any N.C.O. man out of barracks. Then, with Joseph Ahern, Tadg Manly, Sean Hourihane, Jack Ahern and myself, he approached the barracks and quickly ran up the steps to the door, while we crouched close to the wall near him. Hurley knocked. A voice said "Who is there". Hurley replied, "Sergeant O'Brien; it's alright". The door then opened about fifteen inches as far as the security chain on the inside allowed. When Hurley saw the door being held by the chain he tried to smash the chain with the butt of his revolver. The constable inside (Lee was his name) fired with his revolver through the opening. Hurley did likewise. Eventually, Hurley succeeded in smashing the chain and effecting an entry. We rushed in after him and I remember seeing Constable Lee bleeding from an eye wound received from a blow from the butt end of Hurley's rifle. We rushed upstairs and found a few of the garrison in bed. The place was searched quickly for arms and ammunition and when these had been collected Hurley, seeing the plight of Constable Lee, sent one of our lads for a priest and doctor. We then withdrew and made our way back to Midleton after releasing Sergeant O'Brien and Constable Collins.

We captured about nine rifles, revolvers and a plentiful supply of ammunition and some grenades. We also got a very light pistol, something we had never seen before.

Attack on Clovne R.I.C. Barracks.

It was on the night of 10th May, 1920, that another success fell to the 4th Battalion, when the R.I.C. Barracks at Clovne was attacked, the garrison (a sergeant and ten constables) forced to surrender and the barrack building almost destroyed by fire. The whole battalion took a part in the general plan of attack but, once again, as at Carrigtwohill, the assault party consisted of men from the Midleton and Cobh Companies. The Officer Commanding the operation was Commandant Michael Leahy of

Cobh. His second in command was Diarmuid Hurley, Captain of the Midleton Company. About four hundred men from the Battalion were out on duty on the night in question. The great majority of these men was engaged blocking roads and cutting telegraph wires in a wide area around Cloyne, in order to delay the advance of any relief parties of British troops from Cobh, Youghal, Fermoy or Cork, which might be sent to the relief of the garrison to be attacked in Cloyne. I have no definite details as to the disposition of our men engaged in these operations as I was one of those who took part in the actual attack on Cloyne that night. The village of Cloyne is about five miles south of Midleton.

On the night (Sunday), following the attack, the Gaelic League were staging a play in the schoolhouse, Cloyne. I and others of the Midleton Company were members of the Gaelic League and were taking part in the play. 'Props' and scenery were moved by us to the schoolhouse at Cloyne early in the evening of Saturday 10th May, 1920 and, under cover of these 'props', guns and ammunition were brought to the schoolhouse which was the point of assembly for those of us engaged in the attack on the barracks later that same night. The schoolhouse in question was about three hundred yards from the R.I.C. barracks.

Pretending to be engaged in preparing the stage for the play to be held next night, a party of about fifteen of us 'drifted' into the schoolhouse in ones and twos on that Saturday night about 8.30 p.m. or so. Amongst those whom I remember being present were Diarmuid Hurley, Tadg Manly, Joseph Ahern, Tomás Hourihane, D. Ring, Mick Desmond, Paddy Whelan and Mick Kearney - all from the Midleton Company.

We expected a stiff resistance from the R.I.C. in Cloyne following the successful captures of Carrigwohill and Castlemartyr barracks. The building had been specially strengthened against attack by the addition of steel shutters on all the barrack windows and we expected

the garrison to be on the alert. The plan of attack was, therefore, as follows: - The two houses (public houses) on either side of the barracks were to be occupied by us after closing time (10 p.m.). Parties of our men stationed in a grain stores across the street from the barracks and others at the rear, would open fire with rifles, while those in the houses adjoining the barracks would blast breaches in the party walls, thereby effecting an entrance from two sides to the barracks. Meade's public house was on the south side of the barracks and Power's on the north.

Shortly before 10 p.m. three of our men were told to go down the village and into Meade's public house; similarly in the case of Power's: the idea was that these men would remain on in the pubs after closing time and open the doors to those of us who would come along to be admitted after 10.30 p.m.

At about 10.30 p.m. I left the schoolhouse with Diarmuid Hurley, Manly, Joseph Ahern, Tom Hourihane, D. King and Mick Desmond. I carried a revolver and a quantity of gelignite. When we approached Meade's public house we found that Mrs. Meade would not allow our lads to remain on the premises up to the time of our arrival, with the result that the door was closed and we couldn't get in. We were debating what to do (for a very few moments as the barracks was next door) when Hurley decided to smash in the door with an iron bar that was across the window. This was done and we entered the house. The R.I.C. now suspected something was afoot and opened fire from the loopholes in the steel-shuttered windows. Our lads across the street and at the rear of the barracks replied with rifle-fire, and the R.I.C. garrison began firing up verey lights to summon assistance. Meanwhile, Mrs. Meade and her maid were removed to a place of safety in a house in the village. D. Ring, Desmond and I now went

to a sitting-room on Meade's first floor and prepared to lay the gelignite into the wall adjoining the barracks. Diarmuid Hurley, Tadg Manly and a few others proceeded to a room upstairs, the idea being that they should start tampering with the wall up there to distract the attention of the R.I.C. from us downstairs. When we had placed the gelignite into a recess in the wall we informed Hurley that all was ready. He came downstairs and gave orders to ignite the fuse and withdrew out of the room.

When the explosion occurred we discovered that the breach was only about two feet square and not large enough to admit even one man. The R.I.C. now started to fire from the adjoining barrack room through the breach we had made. Hurley then gave orders for six men to line up behind him on the landing. I had some gelignite left which, on Hurley's orders, I tied up in a handkerchief and lit a fuse. Hurley then ran with us alongside the wall of the room in which we had blown the hole and fired with his revolver through the breach. I ignited the fuse and flung the bundle of gelignite through the breach and into the barracks. The explosion which followed drove the R.I.C. from the adjoining room to an upstairs compartment. We had a tin of petrol handy and poured the petrol into a ewer and then flung it (the petrol) through the breach. Hurley next got a piece of cloth, lit it and flung it after the petrol. A sheet of flame immediately burst both in the barracks and the room in which we were. The curtains in our rooms took fire and soon the place was untenable. We cleared out on to the street and saw that half of the barracks was on fire.

All this time heavy rifle fire was proceeding both from the R.I.C. garrison and our men attacking front and rere. Our lads in Power's public house had breached the barrack wall on their side, but were unable to effect an entry by reason of the flames started on our side

by the petrol. The next move from the garrison was a white cloth fluttering from one of the upstairs windows as a token of surrender. Orders were given to cease fire, and Mick Leahy and some of his men in Power's public house entered the barracks. The door was opened and the garrison walked out with hands up and were placed under armed guard. We rushed into the burning barracks and grabbed all the guns we could lay hands on. Ammunition was exploding all over the place and very little of it was captured. In all we got about eight or ten police carbines and some revolvers. These were taken away to a safe destination.

The engagement at Cloyne began about 10.30 p.m. and lasted (until we took the surrender of the police) until close to 12.30 a.m. Our only casualty was Diarmuid Hurley who suffered burns on the arm from flaming petrol. His injury, which was treated by a local doctor, was not serious. A couple of the R.I.C. men were, to the best of my recollection, wounded in the fight. We withdrew from the village about 1 a.m. when we heard from our scouts that the military were approaching in force from Cork City; in fact, the noise of military lorries was heard by us on the roads not far from Cloyne as we crossed the fields on our way northwards to Midleton.

After the Cloyne attack, the R.I.C. garrison of about ten constables and a sergeant was dispersed to other barracks - Castlemartyr, Killeagh and Youghal in the East Cork area.

Ambush of Cameron Highlanders at Milebush.

Following the successful attack on Cloyne R.I.C. barracks in May, 1920, the R.I.C. barracks at Midleton was strengthened against attack by the erection of barbed wire barricades outside the building, steel shutters were put on the windows and the numbers of the garrison increased. At the same time a party of British soldiers

from the Essex regiment took up quarters in a disused factory about two hundred yards from the barracks. This, incidentally, was the first time the military occupied Midleton since the Napoleonic wars. The soldiers now in occupation of the old factory proceeded to patrol the district in the vicinity of Midleton at irregular intervals. However, the Essex regiment did not remain long with us because, on 5th June, 1920, they were replaced by a Scottish regiment, the Cameron Highlanders, who arrived in Midleton about 1 p.m. and took over from the Essex.

At about 7 p.m. that same evening I happened to be in Main Street, Midleton, when I met a blacksmith who lived about a mile from the town who was employed with me in the Midleton garage and Engineering Company. He told me that a Cycle patrol of Cameron Highlanders, numbering two men, under a Corporal and with an R.I.C. man named Constable Jerry O'Connor as guide, had left Midleton by the Mill Road (the latter runs north-west from Midleton). I met Diarmuid Hurley and told him what I had heard. He left me but returned a short time later with Tadg Manly and Tomás Hourihane, both from the Midleton Company. Hurley then instructed me to collect as many of the boys as I could; they were to bring revolvers and proceed out the main Cork road. In the meantime he had detailed a Volunteer named Cronin and a Fianna boy named Davy Walsh to follow the patrol (each taking a different route) and report back to him at a point on the Cork road outside Midleton. I contacted the following men :- Joseph Ahern, Mick Desmond, Mick Hallihan, Moss Barry, Mick Cotter and David Desmond and went with them about a mile and a half out on the Cork road at a place known as the Mile-Bush. There we met Hurley, Manly and Hourihane, who told us that the scouts had reported that the military had gone by the back roads to Carrigtwohill and were returning to Midleton by the main Cork-Carrigtwohill road.

Hurley now proposed that a score of bowls be played. In this game, which is a common sight in County Cork, a metal ball is bowled along the

roadway for a distance of two miles or so as previously agreed on by the players. Ahead of each bowler men are placed at various distances to mark the bowl where it stops. Hurley's idea was to allow the military to cycle in between the bowl markers; the latter, at a signal, would jump on the soldiers and disarm them.

It would be about 8.30 p.m. when we saw the Cameron Highlanders cycling in pairs approaching us in the vicinity of the Mile Bush hill. There is a double bend in the road where the patrol caught up with us. Here there were two donkeys on the road. Hurley and Manly drove them across the roadway, pretending to clear the way for the bowlers but, in reality, hampering the patrol. None of us took any notice of the soldiers we being, apparently, too intent on the game of bowls. Suddenly Hurley fired a revolver shot as a signal and we immediately jumped on the soldiers, knocked them off their bikes and took their rifles. Being taken completely by surprise they put up no resistance. The R.I.C. man was also overcome and his revolver taken by Mick Desmond. A few members of the military patrol, who hadn't quite rounded the bend of the road, dismounted when they saw what was happening, realising that something was wrong. The Corporal was with the rear party of about six men. Hurley now ordered the captured 'Tommys' (numbering a half a dozen) to march back in the direction of their comrades whilst we used them as a protective screen. He called on the remaining six to put their hands up. They did so, all except the Corporal, who ran away, leaving his bicycle and rifle behind. We collected the remaining rifles and about fifty rounds of ammunition from each soldier. A passing motor was stopped: the arms and ammunition were piled into it and taken away by Joseph Ahern and Tadg Manly. The 'Cameron' patrol was lined up and marched a good distance away down a breen where they were left to make the best of their way back to Midleton. Their bikes were thrown over a ditch.

That night in Midleton, when the patrol got back, the military came out and started indiscriminate rifle fire through the town, obviously with the idea of terrorising the people. The R.I.C. in their barracks, thinking that they were being attacked, opened fire from the barrack windows. This went on for several hours, the only 'casualties' being a few donkeys grazing on the nearby golf links.

About a week following the disarming of the patrol, the house in Midleton where Diarmuid Hurley and Tadg Manly lived was raided by military. Hurley wasn't there at the time but Manly was unlucky to be caught and taken prisoner. He was subsequently tried and sentenced to ten years' imprisonment.

Abortive attempt to raid Ballycotton R.I.C. Barracks.

Early in the month of July, 1920, Diarmuid Hurley decided to try and carry out a 'surprise attack by day on the R.I.C. Barracks at Ballycotton, about two miles south of Midleton.

Ballycotton is a seaside village on the south-east coast of Cork. The barracks had a garrison of about eight R.I.C. men. The village is a popular resort in the summer-time and on a Sunday, in particular, there would be many visitors. Hurley, therefore, decided on a Sunday for the attack when our presence in the village would not be noticed.

Before the appointed day I went out a few times to Ballycotton to watch the movements of the R.I.C. there. I reported what I saw to Hurley and, on the Sunday in question, about fifteen of us, all from the Midleton Company, most of whom were armed with revolvers, went to Ballycotton with Hurley in charge. The idea was to effect a surprise entry to the barracks, overpower the garrison and capture their arms and ammunition. When we arrived we discovered that a party of Cameron Highlanders had come along to strengthen the garrison on the day previous. This development, of course, completely upset our plans: our chances of

effecting a surprise entry were negligible and we could not hope to stage a full-scale attack with the numbers and weapons at our disposal. We waited all day in the hope that some of the soldiers would leave the barracks when we would capture them, but none of them moved out. As evening drew on no soldier appeared out of barracks: we had no alternative but to withdraw.

From now on it was the custom for a lorry load of troops, accompanied by an armoured car, to proceed from Cork to Ballycotton on a Wednesday and Saturday returning to Cork via Midleton later in the evening. It was observed that this party generally stopped at the top of the town (Midleton). Some of the soldiers went into the R.I.C. barracks and some into public-houses. Hurley decided to try and capture the military party and, on the following Wednesday night, he placed men with shotguns inside a public-house at the top windows which overlooked the spot near where the armoured car usually stopped. These shotgun men were to shoot the gunners standing in the turrets of the armoured car, while about twelve or fifteen of us (all from the Midleton Company) were around the street armed with revolvers to hold up the soldiers of the party returning from the barracks or in public-houses. Everything was in readiness and Hurley was about to signal the shotgun men to open fire when, from the local cinema only forty yards away, crowds began to pour out at the termination of the performance. Hurley was now in a dilemma. If his plans miscarried great loss of life to civilians would undoubtedly have occurred. He, therefore, reluctantly decided to call the whole thing off rather than run the risk of innocent people being slaughtered. It was a significant fact that the military party did not, in future, pull up at the position from which we had intended to attack them that night. At this period Diarmuid Hurley, O/C., Midleton, had to go 'on the run' owing to repeated searches being made for him by police and military. His place as O/C. was taken by Joseph Ahern.

An incident of British brutality to prisoners occurred about this time. Two brothers named Sean and Batt Buckley, who lived in a cottage about a mile and a half from Midleton, were arrested when their home was raided at night by Cameron Highlanders. Sean was a member of the Midleton Company; Batt was not. It was said that the soldiers found a revolver during a raid on the house. The two men were brought to Midleton barracks and were later the same night handcuffed together and brought by lorry towards Cork. When the lorry was about a mile or so from Midleton, Sean was shot and the bullet which hit him went right through his body and into Batt. The latter feigned death but, when the lorry eventually arrived at the military barracks, Batt asked for a priest to be brought to him. He was removed to hospital and recovered later.

Ambush of Military at Churchtown North (Whiterock).

It became customary for a lorry load of soldiers to go from Midleton to Ballycotton barracks every Friday forenoon, leaving Midleton by the Youghal road and returning via Cloyne and Ballinacurra in the evening. On 26th August, 1920, preparations were made to ambush this party of troops at Whiterock on the Midleton side of Churchtown north and about three miles east of Midleton. The attacking party, all members of the Midleton Company, consisted, so far as I can now remember of the following :- O/C. Joseph Ahern, Phil Hyde, Mick Kearney, Dan Cashman, Paddy Whelan, Jer. Ahern, Mick Desmond, David Desmond, Donal Dennehy, Jack Ahern, Mick Hallihan, Mick Murnane, Jim McCarthy, Thomas Donovan and my brother Jim. Most of the men were armed with rifles; some with revolvers. Danny Walsh, a Fianna boy, was acting as a scout to signal the approach of the lorry to the ambush position. I was detailed to procure a motor bicycle and, immediately the lorry of troops left Midleton, cycle out in front of it, proceed to Whiterock and inform Joseph Ahern of the strength of the military party and the route they had taken.

It was arranged to have a tree partly cut to be pulled down with ropes in front of the lorry when it reached Whiterock. Fire would then be opened by us from behind the ditches near the fallen tree, it being anticipated that the fallen tree would bring the lorry to a standstill, thereby making the soldiers an easy target.

Shortly before noon on the day in question, I was ready with the motor bike in a garage almost directly opposite the barracks in Midleton when a party of Cameron Highlanders, numbering about a dozen men in charge of a Lieutenant, got into a lorry and headed down the main street. I started my bike, got out in front of the lorry and proceeded out of the town along the Youghal road which was the route usually taken by the military. After a short while I noticed that the lorry was not following me. I then discovered that it had turned off in the direction of Ballinacurra and was proceeding to Ballycotton via Cloyne. I, immediately, went to Whiterock, saw Joseph Ahern and told him what had happened. He made some small changes in the disposition of his force as the military would now be returning from the opposite direction to that expected. I remember that Phil Hyde, lately demobbed from the British Army, was specially selected to shoot the driver of the lorry as Phil was reported to be a crack shot.

At about 4.30 p.m. the noise of the lorry was heard by a scout who signalled, from high ground on which he was posted, the approach of the enemy. When the latter came into view about sixty yards from our position, fire was opened by us and at the same time three or four of our lads were pulling on the half-cut tree to bring it down across the road. The driver of the lorry was killed in our first burst of fire and the Lieutenant, who was sitting beside the driver, was wounded. However, he (the Lieutenant) got hold of the wheel

and kept the lorry going. Meanwhile, our lads were making frantic efforts to pull down the tree, whilst the military in the lorry replied vigorously to our fire. Just as the tail of the lorry passed the tree it (the tree) fell with a crash grazing the end of the lorry but, of course, failed to stop its progress. Heavy firing continued on both sides as the lorry dashed through our position and out of sight around a corner. We heard it stop and quickly start again, presumably to remove the dead driver and put a man in his place. The military then proceeded with all speed to Middleton while we quickly dispersed, knowing that a large enemy force would come out from Middleton when word was received of the attack.

I cannot say what casualties the enemy suffered on this occasion; their driver was certainly killed and a few soldiers must have been wounded (if not killed) but I cannot be at all definite on the point.

Flying Column formed in East Cork.

Enemy activity in our area now increased; searches for wanted men became more frequent and for this purpose, the R.I.C. at Middleton were augmented by a Company of Black and Tans. It became increasingly difficult for I.R.A. to sleep in their homes in case of raids, with the result that certain men had to go 'on the run'. These men constituted the nucleus of the East Cork Flying Column which was formed about late September, 1920. Diarmuid Hurley was O/C. of the Column which at first consisted of eight or ten men. Amongst those whose names I now remember were Paddy Whelan, Joseph Ahern, Phil Hyde, Tom Buckley, Dan Cashman and Jimmy Glavin. The first headquarters of the Column was at Knockraha about four or five miles north of Carrigtwohill. Here, a few members of Middleton, Knockraha and other Companies went for training at week-ends. The training courses were conducted by Phil Hyde and Tom Buckley, both ex-British Army men.

After six weeks or so, the Column moved to the Ladysbridge area about two miles south of Castlemartyr to the house of Michael Conway where Mick and David Desmond (Midleton), Dick Hegarty (Garryvoe), Mick Shanahan (Ballymacoda) and I joined it. The Column in East Cork was necessarily small because the nature of the country (generally flat with many good roads) made it almost impossible either to move, or conceal, a large body of men without the enemy becoming aware of the fact. It was planned to obtain help from the local Companies in staging attacks on enemy troops when the occasion would arise.

The Column lay in ambush on several occasions in the vicinity of Dick Hegarty's house at Garryvoe, as the house was being repeatedly raided by the military, but the latter never came when we were waiting for them.

In mid November, 1920, the Column moved to Churchtown south, about seven miles south of Midleton. It was usual for military lorries to pass here en route to the coastguard station (occupied by British Marines) at Ballycraheen. We remained in ambush for several days in the district but again had no luck; the British did not show up.

Column attacked and surrounded at Clovne.

On Saturday 8th December, 1920, the Column moved into the village of Clovne and billeted in the house of Bertie Walsh on the road to Ballycotton. Phil Hyde, Joseph Ahern, Tom Buckley, Dan Cashman and myself returned to Midleton and were replaced by others from the Midleton Company two of whom were bank clerks named Duohig and Cagney. What followed was related afterwards to me by those who took part.

Early on Sunday morning 9th December, 1920, the boys were awakened by loud rapping on Walsh's door and, on looking out, discovered soldiers all around the place. Hurley ordered that mattresses be put up to the windows and then went downstairs with a few others, opened the door and fired at the military in the street.

Fire was also opened by our lads from the windows. The soldiers withdrew down the village street, whereupon Paddy Whelan and Jack Ahern rushed from Walsh's house across the street to a gateway and opened fire down the street. Under cover of this fire the men all got across safely from Walsh's and were able to move out of the village without suffering any casualties.

After leaving the Column on Saturday 8th December, 1920, I met Mick Leahy, Battalion Commandant, in Midleton that night and the two of us went and stayed the night at Burke's of Ballintotas just outside Churchtown. On Sunday morning word reached us that the Column was surrounded at Cloyne. Immediately, about twenty men from the Midleton Company were hurriedly mobilised to go to the relief of the lads at Cloyne. We had actually moved off towards Cloyne when we heard from scouts that the Column had got away safely; in fact, we met them later in the day at Churchtown south.

On Monday 10th December, 1920, I return to the Column which was then located at the house of a man named O'Brien, at Glennageare, about five miles north-east of Cloyne. From there we moved south-west to Upper Aghada where we had hoped to contact parties of military who used come across the river by boat from Cobh to Aghada pier and then on to Fort Carlisle at the eastern entrance to Cork Harbour. We waited in the vicinity of Aghada many days, but no enemy forces appeared. We next moved north-east again and, on Christmas Eve, 1920, we billeted in a farm outhouse at Kilmountain on the back road from Mogeely to Churchtown north which is, approximately, four and a half miles east of Midleton. While we were there, Diarmuid Hurley, the Column O/C., received details of a party of Black and Tans stationed in Midleton which patrolled the main street each night. Hurley decided that this patrol should be attacked and, with this in view, we moved closer to Midleton to engage the enemy on 28th December, 1920.

Attack on Black and Tan Patrol in Midleton.

On the night of 28th December, 1920, the following members of the Column entered Midleton about 8 p.m. and proceeded to a laneway off Charles Street adjoining the main street:- Diarmuid Hurley, Paddy Whelan, Phil Hyde, Joseph Ahern, Jackeen Ahern, Mick Kearney, Michael and David Desmond, Donal Dennehy, Dan Cashman, Michael Hallihan, Michael Murnane, Jim McCarthy, Thomas Buckley and myself. All were armed with revolvers. Hurley's information was to the effect that the enemy patrol, numbering about a dozen, left barracks about 9 p.m. and moved down the main street, half of the party on one side of the street and half on the other side. The 'Tans' walked slowly down to the end of the town and back again.

Hurley assigned his men to doorways and laneways on either side of Main Street, extending for about 160 yards, and at about 9 p.m. the enemy patrol appeared as expected. On reaching the corner of Charles Street, fire was opened by Jackeen Ahern and Jim McCarthy. This was the signal for a general attack by us. I was stationed at the end of the main street and opened fire on the 'Tans' nearest to me. Some of the 'Tans' fell wounded; others appeared to be killed outright. A few ran up a laneway off Main Street where they met some of our lads who shot them. A 'Tan' who left barracks on hearing the firing was shot as he reached Charles Street corner. Practically every member of the enemy patrol was a casualty when the firing ceased. One did escape by rushing into a shop and out the backway. Dead and dying 'Tans' lay here and there all over the street. We collected a rifle and revolver from each one and the local priest, Father Dennehy, gave spiritual attention to the wounded and dying. Sergeant Moloney, a local R.I.C. man, who was with the patrol, was slightly wounded in the leg. His revolver was also taken. Our only casualty was Jim McCarthy of Midleton who received a bullet wound in the wrist which healed subsequently. The whole affair lasted about twenty minutes after which we withdrew with the captured arms to Kilmountain.

First Official Reprisals.

What, I believe, were the first official reprisals were carried out in Midleton on 1st January, 1921. Notices signed by the British General Strickland were served by military officers on certain people in the town that their premises would be destroyed, presumably because the owners were regarded as sympathisers of ours. Shortly after midday, lorries of soldiers began to arrive in Midleton and parties of military in charge of officers entered the shops of Paul McCarthy, Edmond Carey and Jack O'Shea in Main Street. The occupants were ordered to get out. Mines were then placed in the premises and the buildings partly demolished by the explosions which followed. That same night, the Midleton Garage and Engineering Works, situated almost directly opposite the R.I.C. barracks, was burned to the ground by Black and Tans. This latter incident was not classed as an official reprisal. I left Midleton that night and reported the details of the burnings to Diarmuid Hurley who was then with the Column at Churchtown north about three miles east of Midleton.

Shortly afterwards, I moved with the Column to a disused farmhouse about a mile south of the village of Clonmult and approximately six or seven miles north of Midleton. After some days there I, together with Tom Buckley and Phil Hyde, left the Column on orders. We were replaced by three other men. I returned to Midleton where new Company Officers were appointed as follows :- Captain: Phil Hyde, 1st Lieutenant: Mick Kearney. 2nd Lieutenant: myself.

The Column remained in the old farmhouse at Clonmult until 20th February, 1921. On that afternoon, when Diarmuid Hurley, Joseph Ahern and Paddy Whelan were absent inspecting an ambush position twelve miles to the south, a party of military arrived unexpectedly at Clonmult: these were later reinforced by Black and Tans. The Column was surrounded and practically wiped out. Twelve were killed

while prisoners, two wounded and two unwounded men taken prisoners to Cork where the two unwounded men, Maurice Moore and Paddy O'Sullivan, both of Cobh, were subsequently hanged. Only one member of the Column escaped from Clonmult, viz. Jack O'Connell of Cobh. Following the disaster at Clonmult the survivors of the Column - Diarmuid Hurley, Paddy Whelan, Joseph Ahern and Jack O'Connell went into billets at Loughcarrig about three miles south of Midleton.

At this period (February, 1921) the enemy nearly always travelled in convoys of lorries, making it impossible for us to ambush them because of our losses in men and arms at Clonmult. About the same time, we secured some empty shell cases which had been fired in practise from the British forts, Carlisle and Camden, at the entrance to Cork Harbour. These empty shell cases were picked up by fishermen in their trawls and were being used as ballast in the boats. The idea of converting these shells into land mines was considered so, with the assistance of Tom Hyde of Ballinacurra, we filled a few casings with war flour and Irish cheddar, made the exploders and, with detonators we received from Cork, decided to try out this home-made land mine on an enemy convoy at Ballyedekin, Churchtown North. The date was 10th April, 1921.

Mine exploded at Ballyedekin.

Word had reached us of an enemy convoy coming from Youghal to Midleton and expected to pass the position, selected by Hurley, at Ballyedekin in the evening of 10th April, 1921. Earlier in the day I helped to bring the landmine to the position where it was buried under a heap of stones on the roadway over which the convoy would pass. The wires connecting up with the mine by which it was to be exploded ran for about a hundred and fifty yards down a boreen at right angles to the position on the main road. Those also present were Diarmuid Hurley, Joseph Ahern, Paddy Whelan and Jack O'Connell.

The two latter were armed with rifles and were located on high ground overlooking the landmine. Their job was to cover those of us in the vicinity of the mine. There were also a few men from Churchtown acting as scouts.

At about 5 p.m. the noise of lorries was heard approaching from Youghal. I connected up the mine and the first lorry with Black and Tans and military, towing another lorry of military, came into view. As it passed over the mine, Joseph Ahern pressed the switch and a deafening explosion occurred. The lorries stopped and immediately soldiers and Tans spread out into adjoining fields and moved towards our position, drawn by the rifle fire of Jack O'Connell and Paddy Whelan. We scattered quickly. There was no help at all for us in a stand-up fight as we were hopelessly outnumbered and outgunned. After some hairbreath escapes, during which we were within almost talking distance of the soldiers, we managed to escape and finally assembled again at Ballinacurra about five miles to the south-west. I cannot say what casualties we inflicted on the enemy on this occasion. Some of them must have been killed or wounded in the explosion. That night I returned to Middleton where I was in time to see the returning lorries of troops. The latter shot up a few public-houses in the town as a sort of reprisal for what had happened at Ballyedekin earlier in the evening.

Mine explosion at Middleton Courthouse.

A short time after Ballyedekin, it was decided to try out another of our mines in Middleton. This time the place selected was the Courthouse which adjoins the R.I.C. barracks at the top of the main street. It was not possible to get closer to the barracks as the area for a distance of twenty yards or more around it was covered with barbed wire; besides, a sharp look-out was maintained by the garrison.

It was not hoped to achieve anything spectacular on this occasion but, at least, it would be evidence to the enemy that we were still active and had a new weapon at our disposal. Rifle fire was first opened by a few of our lads on the barracks: the garrison replied as usual and sent up verey lights. Under cover of our fire, I approached the courthouse carrying the mine, placed it against the door, retreated about forty yards and exploded it. The noise was deafening. The explosion blew in the courthouse door and shattered windows in the vicinity. Our lads kept up their sniping for about half an hour afterwards. The enemy did not leave barracks, being content to fire indiscriminately from the windows long after our lads withdrew. I cannot say if we inflicted any casualties on the enemy. We suffered none.

R.I.C. men shot in Midleton.

Saturday 14th May, 1921, saw another attack made on the R.I.C. in Midleton. So far as I can remember orders were received from Brigade Headquarters in Cork that an R.I.C. man should be shot in every town in the battalion area. Early on that day, Sergeant Coleman of the R.I.C. was shot dead in a public-house in Midleton. At about 2 p.m. two Black and Tans were proceeding down the town when they were ambushed by three I.R.A. men, Jackeen Ahern and Tom Buckley from the Midleton Company and Tom Riordan from the Lisgould Company. The three lads lay in ambush behind a low wall at the end of the town. They had rifles which were brought in by Mick Murnane of Coppingerstown. Fire was opened on the 'Tans' at about 150 yards range, both of whom were killed and their guns captured. Another policeman named Sergeant Gleeson narrowly escaped, although fire was brought to bear on him too. Gleeson, subsequently, got back safely to the barracks. That same evening at Loughcarrig two British marines, stationed at East Ferry, were shot dead by members of the Ballinacurra Company.

Reprisals by British Forces.

On Saturday night, 14th May, 1921, a large party of Cameron Highlanders came into Midleton and commenced raiding houses. Some of the soldiers went in the direction of the local Golf Links where they chanced to meet a youth named MacNamara who was walking to his home along the railway line. The military shot and killed MacNamara. Later that night some others of the party called to the house of a Volunteer named Richard Barry who lived about a mile outside Midleton. Barry was arrested by the Cameron Highlanders. Next day his dead body was found on the railway line about a mile on the Midleton side of Carrigtwohill. Seemingly this same force of Camerons then went to the home of Jackeen Ahern at Ballyrichard and, not finding him at home, arrested his brother Michael. On the following day Michael's dead body was found inside a fence about three hundred yards west of Carrigtwohill near where the main road to Cork branches off to Cobh. Another I.R.A. man named Ryan from Woodstock, a short distance north of Carrigtwohill, was taken from his home that night and shot dead by the same party of Cameron Highlanders. Two other Carrigtwohill men not members of the I.R.A. were murdered the same night by the Cameron Highlanders' raiding party.

The following day Sunday 15th May, 1921, a large party of military again arrived in Midleton and made wholesale arrests in the town. Many men were paraded for identification as being implicated in the shootings in the town the previous day but none were detained.

On Monday 16th May, 1921, I was approaching Midleton and when about 400 yards from the town I met Jer. Ahern, Jerry Walsh and Denis Fitzgerald, three local Volunteers. They told me that the funerals of Sergeant Coleman and the two 'Tans' shot on the previous Saturday night were being held and not to go into the town. As we were talking a lorry of Black and Tans from Youghal came on us. We were

told to get into it and were taken to Midleton Barracks. While in the barracks I remember Sergeant Moloney (who knew me well) coming over to me and whispering "I think you're done". After some consultation between the military, the 'Tans' and the R.I.C., Fitzgerald was released. I was then put in a lorry with a party of armed Cameron Highlanders. Ahern and Walsh were put into another lorry. Before we moved out a member of the local Cumann na mBan District told the/Inspector of Police that she would hold him responsible for our safety.

The convoy set out for Belmont Military Hutments, Cobh. While en route, Sergeant McIntosh of the Cameron Highlanders, who was in my lorry, wanted to haul me out on to the road and shoot me. When we got to Belmont Hutments we were put into a prison cell off the guardroom. Ahern and Walsh were then taken out and brought before a Captain Morrison for interrogation. I was then brought over to Morrison under armed escort in charge of Sergeant McIntosh who hit me a few times with the butt of his revolver. Morrison questioned me about my I.R.A. activities and, needless to say, I denied having anything to do with the ambushing or shooting of British police or soldiers. I remember him asking me "Who owns your house?" I told him my father owned it. I was then returned to my cell.

On Wednesday 18th May, 1921, my home at Coppingerstown was blown up by a party of military, only bed-clothes were permitted to be taken away before the house was blown up. At the time my father, mother, three brothers and four sisters lived there. My mother, who was returning home from Midleton, saw the whole occurrence. That same night one of the Cameron Highlanders came to me in my cell and told me what had happened.

I was kept in Belmont for about two weeks and, while there, was taken out as a hostage by a military patrol on one occasion. I was

handcuffed and threatened to be shot if the patrol was ambushed. Jer. Ahern and I were later put aboard a sloop in Cork Harbour and brought to Cork. There we were put into a lorry with a party of British Auxiliaries and taken to Cork gaol. I was in Cork gaol when I learned of the death of our valiant leader Diarmuid Hurley on 28th May, 1921.

After about a month in Cork gaol I was moved with fifty or sixty of the prisoners to Spike Island. After the Truce in July 1921, we smashed up the cells in Spike and made the place practically uninhabitable with the result that we were moved to Maryboro' gaol from which I was released on 7th December, 1921.

Signed: *John Kelleher*
 Date: *12th July 1956*

Witness: *T. O. Gorman*

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