

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1522

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1522.....

Witness

Edward McGrath,
Killea,
Templemore,
Co. Tipperary.

Identity.

Brigade Vice Commandant,
Tipperary No. 2 Bde.

Subject.

I.Vol. and I.R.A. activities,
Tipperary, 1916-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

File No S. 2846.....

Form B.S.M. 2

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1,522

STATEMENT BY EDWARD McGRATH,

Killea, Templemore, Co. Tipperary,

Vice Commandant, 2nd (Mid.) Tipperary Brigade.

On September 1st 1914 I took up duty as principal teacher of "Killea Boys" National School. I was then twenty-five years of age and resided with my people in my native village of Loughmore about seven miles from Killea. At the time I was a member of the Loughmore Company of the National Volunteers and I remained a member of that organisation until Easter Sunday, 1915, when I attended a review by the late John E. Redmond of National Volunteers in the Phoenix Park, Dublin. I was not very impressed by what I saw and heard in the Phoenix Park on that Sunday and I concluded that the National Volunteer organisation was not likely to be of any great service to Ireland. Sometime later, possibly in the spring of 1916, I had thoughts of forming an Irish Volunteer unit in Loughmore, but sympathisers were few. As a matter of fact, I could only find one other man, Michael Egan of Kilkilahara, to show any interest in the project.

After the Rising of Easter Week, 1916, I helped in making a local collection for the Irish National Aid Fund, and I may say that many of those who subscribed did not at all like the idea of helping the dependants of killed or imprisoned Irish Volunteers. The notice calling the meeting to receive subscriptions for the fund was posted up publicly in Loughmore over my name and was removed by some members of the R.I.C.

In the summer of 1917 I assisted in organising a Sinn Féin club in Loughmore. Almost immediately afterwards I was visited by a few R.I.C. men seeking information. They wanted to know the names of the officials of the club and they gave me a nice little lecture, suggesting that Sinn Féin was bound to fail and that if I got out of it there were positions with better pay and better prospects of promotion which might come my way. I was rather indignant with them, gave them no information and said I proposed to continue to support Sinn Féin.

Within a very short period of this interview with the R.I.C., the school manager, Very Revd. Canon Kiely, P.P., Templemore, received a communication from The National Board of Education informing him that I had attended and addressed a Sinn Féin meeting at Loughmore in June. He wrote the Board asking them who supplied the information. Meanwhile I had been informed by letter from the Board that I had been fined £5 for attending and addressing a Sinn Féin meeting and asking me to give an undertaking to sever my connection with Sinn Féin. I refused to pay the fine or to give the undertaking, and, on the canon's advice, I closed the school for the summer holidays. On his suggestion, too, I kept out of his way as much as possible so that when replying to communications from the Board he could say that he was unable to get in touch with me.

At the end of the summer holidays I reopened the school and continued teaching there for some weeks. Then one day Canon Kiely called to the school and told me that the Board of Education had decided to withhold the school grant whilst I was employed there. To save His Reverence

any further embarrassment with the Board, I decided to leave. Canon Kiely told me he would amalgamate the boys' and girls' schools and that no teacher would be appointed in my stead until I was again free to take up my work there. His promise to me was approved by His Grace, Most Rev. Dr. Harty, and my position in Killea school remained vacant for five years until I resumed in September, 1922. He also took up with the Board the question of salary outstanding to me and I was paid for my services up to the day I left the school.

In September I went to Dublin to attend the funeral of Thomas Ashe. There I met some Volunteer leaders, amongst them Thomas Atkins. He enrolled me in the Irish Volunteers and asked me to form a unit when I went home and to continue training until I got further instructions. On my return I introduced the matter at a meeting of the Sinn Féin club and asked those who were interested to remain after the meeting. That night I enrolled seven men. Soon the number grew to twenty or so. I was aware that a Volunteer unit had been organised in Thurles but for the time being I did not contact them, but a Mr. Nicholas Cody of Shanakill (later Fr. Cody of the Maynooth Mission to China), who was in touch with the Volunteer unit in Roscrea, kept me informed of what I should do. I secured some British army training manuals and some other military books, studied them and then did my best to train my less enlightened brethren. Arms were collected where possible, and by the end of 1917 I had a double-barrel shotgun, a .22 rifle and a .32 bore revolver.

Towards Christmas, 1917, I was invited by the Thurles Volunteer Company to attend a meeting in Thurles

for the purpose of meeting a Volunteer organiser from G.H.Q. named Seán MacLoughlin. At that meeting arrangements were made for MacLoughlin to visit areas where units were in existence. At the time, between 20 and 30 men were on the roll of the Loughmore unit, and on the occasion of MacLoughlin's visit to us he supervised the election of officers which resulted in the following appointments:

Company Captain	- Edward McGrath (myself)
" 1st Lt.	- Michael Egan
" 2nd Lt.	- Dermot Dunlea
" Adjt.	- Michael Ryan
" Q/M	- Patrick Burke.

1918:

Early in this year the Volunteer companies in Thurles, Two-mile-Borris, Glengoole, Moycarkey, Holycross, Drumbane, Upperchurch and Loughmore were organised into a battalion, and a Battalion H.Q. was established in Thurles. James Leahy, then of Thurles and now residing in Nenagh, was appointed Battalion Commandant. I was appointed Battalion Vice Commandant; Matthew Butler of Turtulla was appointed Adjutant, and I think, but I am not certain, that M. Dwan of Thurles was then Quartermaster.

Recruiting and organisation work was then active. At The Ragg an old company which had lain dormant since Easter, 1916, was reorganised. Interest was aroused in the movement and further units were organised at Killea, at Templemore, at Castleiney, at Templetuohy, at Moyne and at Drom. On Palm Sunday a huge parade was held in Thurles. Upwards of 1,000 Volunteers took part in it. Practically every parish or chapel area in Mid Tipperary was represented by units varying in strength from 20 men or so upwards to 200 men from the Thurles companies.

After the parade a meeting of representatives of three battalion areas, North, South and Mid Tipperary, was held in the Sinn Féin hall in Thurles. Amongst those present were Dan Breen, representing South Tipperary, Willie Manahan of the Galtee Battalion, Seumas Burke (later T.D.), representing North Tipperary, and James Leahy and myself representing Mid Tipperary. Seán MacLoughlin, the Volunteer organiser from G.H.Q., presided. It was decided to form a brigade, with the whole County Tipperary as the brigade area, and I was appointed O/C of the new brigade.

I began nightly visits to the various areas, urging on the units the necessity of securing arms and learning to use them. Raids for arms almost every night was then a feature of our activities. When owners refused to hand over arms and ammunition, which frequently occurred, the Volunteers seized the arms by force. Every area was busy producing home produced munitions. Lead was collected, melted down and poured into bullet moulds of standard sizes. Cast iron piping was cut into suitable lengths for manufacturing bombs. Caps for the bombs were fashioned in friendly forges. A hole was drilled in either the cap or the cylinder through which a fuse could be put into the explosive charge. These home-made bombs were very inefficient and were a positive source of danger to all and sundry.

In May, 1918, at the request of Tommy Donovan, then O/C of the Drangan Company and who was killed in action at Killenaule in October, 1920, I visited the Drangan area. I forget now the details of what it was about but it concerned a dispute amongst rival Volunteer officers. Tempers were high and I advised Donovan to leave the area

for a time, which he agreed to do. I proceeded to Dublin to report to Michael Collins on the Drangan affair and thus escaped arrest, as my home in Loughmore was raided for me. It was at the time when Volunteer officers were rounded up on the plea of being concerned in what the British Government termed "a German plot". I was familiar with Collins at the time, having met him on several previous occasions, but when I called to the premises of the Irish National Aid and Volunteer Dependants' Fund, where he had an office, he was not present. I met Joe Doherty there and gave him a report on the matter. He told me that it would be looked into, and he also informed me that a reorganisation of Co. Tipperary was contemplated and that the county would likely be divided into three brigade areas.

It was, I think, around that time that Seán MacLoughlin (the Volunteer organiser) sent Tommy Meagher of Annfield with a despatch. R.I.C. and military made an attempt to hold up Meagher on the road between Annfield and Upperchurch. He pedalled rapidly down a steep incline away from them and was fired on and wounded. Dismounting from the bicycle, he rushed into a roadside house and avoided capture by getting out through a back window and away. MacLoughlin got a few Volunteers together under arms and placed a guard on Meagher's house. Leaving me in charge of the guard, with orders to shoot to kill should military or R.I.C. raid the place during his absence, he took the remaining Volunteers with him to go in search of young Meagher, who was then only 16 or 17 years of age. Some hours later he returned with the wounded boy. Poor Mrs. Meagher was distracted, but on sight of her son, with his arm bandaged but well able to walk, she completely recovered.

At that time the British military officers stationed in Templemore military barracks were in the habit of dining on Sundays at Hickey's Hotel, Templemore. A military band played outside as admiring crowds stood by looking on, and hundreds of troops from the garrison spent Sunday afternoons walking through the countryside. The staff of the Mid Tipperary Battalion were of the opinion that it was quite feasible to raid or capture the military barracks on one of those Sunday afternoons - an opinion which I shared. Plans were prepared and it was arranged amongst other things that the railway lines to Templemore would be cut, that trains would be run out on the railway tracks at Thurles station and the engines immobilised by destroying the injection valves, thus blocking the up and down lines there, and that the South Tipperary Battalion would hold the attention of the military in that area by creating diversions in the neighbourhood of military posts and barracks. G.H.Q., however, refused their approval of the operation and the project was allowed to drop.

During the conscription crisis period, huge parades and field exercises were frequently held. Thousands then thronged into the movement for fear of conscription and they caused any amount of trouble. Many of the newcomers had no respect for the officers, but with the passing of the conscription threat things resolved themselves, for thereafter we saw few, if any, of those who came into the movement at that time.

In the autumn a meeting was held at Brady's Mills, near Thurles, at which the Mid Tipperary Brigade was formed. I deliberately remained away from that meeting, as by then I had fully realised how entirely unfitted I was to hold

brigade rank or any rank. My only qualification was that I was a victimised national school teacher. However, I attended the next meeting and reluctantly agreed to accept the position of Brigade Vice Commandant. The other members of the Brigade Staff at that time were James Leahy, Comdt.; Matt Butler, Adjutant; and Michael Dwan, Quartermaster. The brigade was comprised of three battalions: No. 1 Battalion of which Jerry Ryan was O/C, with headquarters in Thurles; No. 2 Battalion, of which Seán Scott was O/C, with headquarters in Templemore; and No. 3 Battalion, with Patk. Kinnane as O/C and with its headquarters in Upperchurch.

During the summer of 1918 I set up a training ground at Loughmore, by kind permission of the Misses Cambic on whose lands the training ground was situated. There on Sundays Volunteer companies assembled and were instructed by the more advanced men of the Loughmore Company. I often detailed men from that company to visit other companies for training and instruction on week nights.

In October I represented the brigade at the brigade officers' conference in Dublin. I put up at Fleming's Hotel in Gardiner's Place, not knowing that the conference was to be held there. I then went to Maurice Collins's shop in Parnell St., where I met Joe O'Reilly and the late Seán Ó Muirthile and learned from them that Fleming's Hotel was the venue for the conference. I felt that I had been followed by a detective and was not quite sure that I had evaded him. Many of the other delegates were under the same impression. As I was mentioning the matter to Joe O'Doherty, Michael Collins shouted that the next man mentioning "G" men would be severely dealt with. The main business of that conference, which was held on a

Saturday night, was for the G.H.Q. staff to receive verbal reports from the brigade officers on the position of the organisation in their areas.

On the following Monday morning I met, by arrangement, Michael Collins and Dick Mulcahy at Luke O'Toole's house in Croke Park. I forget now the exact lines on which our discussion ran, but my recollection is that Collins was all in favour of brigade and battalion officers acting on their own initiative. If the opportunity arose to do something, then let it be done with all haste. Mulcahy was more concerned with detail, what might be called in modern parlance red tape. He had been appointed Chief of Staff of the Volunteers some short time before and he harped on the fact that his appointment was the subject of common gossip amongst the people of Thurles, where he was well known having resided there for many years. He wanted to know what action we had taken or were taking to nip such gossip in the bud. I am still wondering what action an underground organisation such as ours was, could take to prevent gossip.

On the morning of the 11th November, 1918, I received a dispatch from the Brigade O/C instructing me to get in touch with a certain officer of the 2nd Battalion and to instruct him to proceed with me to Templemore to shoot District Inspector Wilson of the R.I.C. if the opportunity to do so arose. The officer did not see his way to carry out the order, so I went to Templemore alone. I placed my bicycle in a gateway in Patrick St. and spent several hours in gateways and doorways of shops where owners were friendly, waiting to see if I might see Wilson. Towards evening I saw him for the first time. He appeared to be going home, so I got my bicycle and followed him. I had, however, to abandon the attempt when I saw a patrol of R.I.C. men coming in our direction. I returned to the

town but did not see Wilson again. It was the first "Armistice" day and the town was full of soldiers, many of whom were drunk celebrating the cessation of hostilities in France. They had many civilian supporters and I considered that on that evening Templemore was no place for a lone armed I.R.A. man.

Seumas Burke (later Minister for Local Government) was nominated as Sinn Féin candidate for the Mid Tipperary constituency in the 1918 general election. The Volunteers took up the work of canvassing the electorate on his behalf. Lists of voters in the various townlands were prepared and the Volunteers visited the houses, noting down on the lists the results of the canvass, for, against or doubtful. In the latter cases more persuasive men followed up and before long it was evident that Seumas Bourke's election was a certainty. In East Tipperary, where Pierce McCann was the Sinn Féin candidate, things were not quite so easy. However, the Volunteers gave wonderful help in securing his election and provided protection for his supporters on the day of the poll.

1919:

This was rather a dull year so far as Volunteer activity was concerned. The death of Pierce McCann in Gloucester Prison on March 9th of that year came as a great shock. His remains arrived in Thurles on a Saturday evening and his funeral took place on the Sunday morning to his native Dualla. We found that the Thurles Volunteer companies were unable to deal effectively with the crowds of people on the Saturday evening, so all company officers were ordered to parade there early on the Sunday morning to take part in the funeral. The Brigade O/C was

in prison at the time. I set up a headquarters in the Sinn Féin hall and I got valuable help from officers of the North and South Tipperary Brigades. Dominick Mackey of Clonmel, Bill Hoolan of Nenagh and - Feehan of Roscrea are some of those who remain in my memory. The Volunteers acted very efficiently and the huge crowds co-operated with them in maintaining order and dignity.

I was then earning very little money and towards the end of the summer I availed of an opportunity to earn some good money by surveying and mapping flooded land beside the River Suir between Loughmore and Thurles for a local committee which had been set up to deal with the question of drainage. I then spent a month in laziness at Rinn College.

In December, 1919, I accepted the job of local organiser for the Dáil Éireann Loan. Indeed the Brigadier and other officers persuaded me to take up the work. It was pointed out that the work would give me a great chance of visiting all company areas, but in that respect I must say that I was able to give little or any time to the Volunteer work. Usually I spent the day in an area trying to whip up some enthusiasm in people who might help with the loan and enticing them to attend a meeting at night. The Volunteers always helped, but the meetings were long drawn out affairs. Undoubtedly the response was poor and but for the Volunteers it would have been a flop.

1920:

The Brigade Council decided that three R.I.C. barracks - one in each battalion area - should be attacked simultaneously on the night of January 18th 1920.

I was instructed by the Brigade O/C to attend the council meeting of the 2nd Battalion which was to select the barracks to be attacked in that area. At the Battalion Council meeting, Loughmore R.I.C. barracks was suggested. I pointed out that Loughmore was less than two miles from Templemore where there was a military garrison 1,500 strong; that the work of blocking the roads would be stupendous, and that the railway line was open to the military to advance along it from Templemore. I suggested either Moyne or Templetuohy barracks. Nothing was decided. I reported the facts to the Brigade O/C on the following morning and asked to be allowed to take the Loughmore Company to Holycross to assist the 1st Battalion in the attack on the barracks there, but he would not agree. I decided not to attend the next meeting of the council of the 2nd Battalion, as I was convinced that they thought my objection to their attacking Loughmore was a personal one. My people lived in that village and my home was there. I left them to decide for themselves what they should do. The 1st Battalion attacked Holycross barracks and the 3rd Battalion attacked Drombane barracks on the appointed night, but not one shot was fired in the 2nd Battalion area.

On that day, Sunday, 18th January, I kept Loughmore barracks under observation. Some of the R.I.C. men spent the day drinking and by nightfall were pretty drunk. They then adjourned to a private house and had drink brought there in bulk. I then went to the place of assembly where I expected to find Volunteers with arms, but only one man was under arms - he had a shotgun. I believed then, as I do now, that had men with arms been available, we could have captured that barracks that night. The drunken R.I.C. men in the private house could easily

be surprised by rushing in through the back and front doors; a quick change into the R.I.C. men's uniforms and then acting like a rowdy drunken party and ambling up to the barrack door would have done the trick. However, I might be wrong.

On March 4th 1920 James Larkin of the Upperchurch Company and one of the O'Briens of Silvermines had an exchange of shots with some R.I.C. men at The Ragg. Two R.I.C. men were killed. Young Tom O'Dwyer, a Lieutenant of The Ragg Company, was questioned and threatened by R.I.C. men. We advised him to go on the run. I was speaking to him during Holy Week, when he told me he was still sleeping at home. I advised him not to do so. On the night of March 27th 1920 he was shot dead in his home by R.I.C. men. James McCarthy of Thurles, whose brother, Billy, was a Lieutenant of one of the Thurles Companies, was shot dead by R.I.C. in similar circumstances on the previous night. I was sent to Cork by the Brigade Staff to secure the services of the late Mr. Patrick Lynch, K.C., for the next of kin of O'Dwyer and McCarthy at the inquests which were held in Thurles. Lynch was then representing Mrs. McCurtain at the inquest in Cork on her husband - the murdered Lord Mayor. He promised to come to Thurles, which he did. I collected the statements of evidence and took them to him at his home in Dublin.

Subsequently I visited Cork again, this time to try to identify an R.I.C. man who was reputed to have taken part in the shooting of young O'Dwyer at The Ragg. R.I.C. patrols in Cork were in the habit of assembling together near the statue, and although I watched there for several days I failed to spot the wanted man. As I was in Cork

I tried to get a job in Ford's factory. I had sold my motor bike sometime previously for £25 and was then down to about £5 or £6. Michael Quill was helpful, but unsuccessful, in trying to get me a job, and Liam de Róiste suggested that I should spend a term at the Munster College of Irish in Ballingearry until something in the way of a suitable position turned up for me. However, I returned to Mid Tipperary, cycling practically all the way back. During my absence District Inspector Wilson had been shot dead in Templemore on August 16th 1920.

Templemore was agog with excitement. The so-called miracles of the bleeding statues were then supposed to be taking place and the streets were packed with pilgrims, beggars, stall-holders and undesirables. The police and military had disappeared off the streets and the Volunteers had taken over. They controlled traffic, introduced parking and maintained order. Dublin drivers were the worst offenders. Jimmie Walsh, the author of the "miracles", did not confine himself to Templemore. After visiting the statues the pilgrims were recommended to visit a holy well in a mountainous district about six miles away. Wet weather set in and the road to the well deteriorated. Men were employed to maintain the surface of the road and it was apparent that funds must be raised. Jimmy Leahy, the Brigade O/C, decided to put a tax of 2/6d per day on all motor cars going to the well. There was an outcry. Count O'Byrne, Chairman of the North Tipperary County Council, requested an interview with the Brigade O/C. I accompanied him on the interview. The Count pointed out that the tax was irregular. The O/C pointed out that everything had to be irregular to deal with the situation that had arisen. The Count then wanted the tax to be controlled by the County

Council. The O/C would not agree, stating that he had to pay the men working on the road, also to feed and pay the Volunteers who were directing traffic and policing the town and district. He refused to give The Count an account of his takings and disbursements, saying he intended buying arms with any balance which would be left over. I don't think that balance could have been very big. All men on duty were given their meals at Kelly's, Patrick St., and luncheons were supplied to traffic men on duty outside the town. Seán Scott, Commandant of the 2nd Battalion, was in charge of the collection of the tax. When the tax was paid, slips of paper called "stickers", with the date stamped on them, were handed to the drivers. Cars bearing these "stickers" were seen as far away as Cork, Kerry and Sligo.

Mrs. Kennedy of Hickey's Hotel, Templemore, set a room aside for me and for any companions I might wish to bring in. In the roof outside the room door there was a skylight which could easily be reached by standing on a trunk. In the event of a raid we could readily escape by the skylight, and a trusted maid would close the skylight and put the trunk back in its place. One evening in Hickey's while chatting to a young British officer he told me his tale of woe. He said he would have to leave Templemore in two days time and go with a party of recruits to Tipperary Town. I met Jerry Ryan, Commandant of the 1st Battalion, next day and asked him if he could arrange to attack this party. Owing to other commitments Jerry was unable to undertake the operation, but he said he would send on the information to the 3rd (South Tipperary) Brigade. The lorry containing the officer and his recruits was attacked next day at Thomastown, between Cashel and Tipperary. There were

casualties, among them the officer, for I saw him shortly afterwards in Nenagh with his arm in a sling.

About the second week of September, 1920, some members of the 3rd Battalion, in charge of their Commandant, Paddy Kinnane, ambushed a party of R.I.C. men at Killoshane about five miles from Templemore. Two R.I.C. men were killed and one wounded. Big Jim Ryan of Shanakill, who was collecting the motor tax on the mountain road, heard the shooting and was the first to arrive in Templemore with the news. Within a few minutes of his arrival and whilst I was listening to his account of the occurrence, a Crossley tender full of Black and Tans pulled up opposite to Hickey's Hotel where we were. They had the wounded R.I.C. man with them. Immediately afterwards a Volunteer rushed in to say that the Black and Tans were charging across the street towards the hotel. We escaped by racing out through the back of the premises, on to the roof of a shed and scaling a wall ten feet high. I never believed I was so lively.

Rumours spread like wild fire that Templemore would be burned to the ground as a reprisal for the ambush. Pilgrims, stall-holders and tramps all made a hasty exit and within twenty-four hours normal conditions prevailed in the town once more. The abnormal conditions brought about by Walsh and his "miracles" had lasted for approximately three weeks.

It was, too, about this time that I met at Hickey's Hotel in Templemore some members of the British Labour Party's Fact Finding Commission who were investigating the horrors committed by British forces in Ireland. The leader of the party told me that they could never find an eye-witness of

the destruction of property by British forces. I invited the party to come to Loughmore where the Sinn Féin hall had been wrecked and set on fire, where the creamery had been burned down, and where my father, my sister and her husband had to leave our home and look on while it was being wrecked and looted, and that I would provide at least one eye-witness. I don't think they wanted to meet any eye-witness, for they failed to keep the appointment and Loughmore was only four statute miles from Templemore.

Early in October, 1920, an unsuccessful attempt was made to ambush an enemy cycle patrol in Loughmore. While in position we distinctly heard the sounds of the patrol as it approached, then heard orders being issued and the rattle of cycles as the patrol turned and moved off again. About a week later an attempt to ambush an R.I.C. patrol between Templemore and Loughmore also proved abortive as the patrol did not arrive.

On October 25th 1920 Michael Ryan of Curraghduff, Upperchurch, a well known member of the Sinn Féin organisation, was taken from his sick bed at his home and shot dead by members of the R.I.C.

I had arranged for the Loughmore Company to parade for training and inspection on Friday night, October 29th 1920. I can well remember the date, for I expected to see the funeral carriage of Terence MacSwiney pass on a train on its way to Cork. About 1.30 p.m. that afternoon I received information from a postman named Tom Lanigan that the military proposed to wreck the town of Templemore that night. Lanigan had received the information from the Misses Harkness of Templemore, who, in turn, had received it from an R.I.C. Sergeant's wife who occupied a

flat in their home. Lanigan was a most reliable man, and as his information was generally correct I set out at once for Templemore.

I met Harry Newman, O/C of the Templemore Company, and got him to send a trusted Volunteer to Castleiney to the Battalion O/C, asking him to co-operate with us to the best of his ability. I arranged with Newman to mobilise his company and to send a runner to each company officer, asking for help, arms, if not arms and men. We wanted help from Drom, Barnane, Castleiney, Clonmore and, if possible, from Templetuohy. I promised to get at least 40 men armed with shotguns and rifles from Loughmore. The runners would convey the country men to the assembly point. Newman would arrange to have barbed wire strung across the fronts of five gateways in Patrick St., from behind which the Volunteers would attack and from which the Volunteers could readily retire after the action to the Carden Demense, via the rere of the premises. My idea was to hit hard and suddenly when the military started wrecking and looting; hence the need for so much help. Each party in a gateway would have a Templemore Volunteer with them to guide them back to the Demesne. I was greatly shocked that night when a scout reported to me that the units were not co-operating, as the action had been cancelled by a battalion officer. I returned to Templemore for the night, my concern being that some of the rural Volunteers might come into the town and, in the confusion, fall into the enemy's hands. The military turned out and burned two houses - Kelly's and Smith's - to the ground. They looted some shops and broke the windows of practically all other shops in the town. It was not a case of drunken and infuriated soldiers running amok. They acted on the orders of officers who accompanied them.

Next day, Saturday, I went to Cork to attend the funeral of Terence MacSwiney. I met Michael Staines in Cork and discussed the general position with him. Jack Meagher of Annfield, who was then in Cork, asked me would I go with a party to Limerick to attempt the rescue of Tadhg Crowley who was in prison there. I was agreeable, but later learned that the action was off. I met Tadhg afterwards in Limerick and he told me that he had been looking forward to it.

I returned to Templemore on Sunday, 31st October. I met Jerry Ryan there and we discussed the burning and wrecking of the town and the result of my project to prevent it. Jerry told me of his success in capturing and destroying Littleton R.I.C. barracks that day but said he feared reprisals in Thurles. I said why not meet them if they attempted reprisals. Jerry said that was his intention. I promised him some men and arms, for I knew that some of the 2nd Battalion Staff were in Templemore, but when I approached them they said the journey to Thurles was too long.

I got back to Loughmore and I sent a dispatch to Michael Egan, Vice Commandant of the 2nd Battalion, and got a man to bring me my rifle and 30 rounds of .303 ammunition from the dump. Egan arrived armed with a .45 revolver. We moved off towards Thurles. Lieutenant Michael Ryan of the Loughmore Company met us on the way and, as he had no arms, he acted as our scout. We reached Thurles in good time and were led by a scout to a stable in the farmyard of St. Patrick's College. There we met Jimmy Leahy, the Brigade O/C, Jerry Ryan and some other Volunteer officers and men who had assembled for what we termed "the defence of Thurles". We rested while reports came in. Michael

Ryan, who had come with Egan and myself, was sent home again because he had no arms.

Later that night we took up a position at the Suir Bridge in Thurles. Leahy and Goorty Carty went and got the street lights in the town put out. I saw a man approach the bridge, hesitate and then turn right to go down The Mall. I had him put under arrest and when I questioned him it was perfectly evident by his accent that he was an Englishman. I accused him of being a British soldier from Templemore barracks in civilian clothes and he admitted it. When I asked him did he realise his position, he said that he understood perfectly but protested that he was not spying. I had him blindfolded and held prisoner under armed guard in a lavatory which was situated just beside the bridge. When the Brigade O/C returned I reported the capture to him. He said "Release the poor devil" and that was done.

The O/C then detailed his plans. The bridge would be headquarters for the night. I would take a party consisting of Jerry Ryan, Commandant of the 1st Battalion; Michael O'Connell (Mixie), Brigade Q/M; Lieutenant Matty Butler of the Holycross Company, Volunteers McGrath and Kane and two Volunteers from, I think, the Moycarkey Company down The Mall, turn right, move parallel with Liberty Square, turn right again and take up a position at the junction of this road - also called The Mall - and Liberty Square. By this movement we hoped to catch the R.I.C. looters and marauders in Liberty Square in a cross fire, i.e. the fire between my party and the party under the Brigade O/C at the bridge. Michael Egan would move off immediately after us with a party to hold

the road leading to the R.I.C. barracks and to keep our line of advance open, as it would also be our line of retreat after the action.

The night was misty and lights from windows were very diffused. Having reached the last turn on our way to our position, Jerry and I left our party at that point and we proceeded, one at each side of the street, towards Liberty Square to reconnoitre the position there. I had reached the National Bank Buildings which I heard a scuffling noise and then what sounded like the rattle of a tin container some distance behind me. I looked back and saw a knot of men proceeding in the direction of the river. I crossed over to Jerry's side, told him what I had seen and we both returned to our party.

Egan and his party had not moved into position and it was evident that some unexpected development had arisen, but ^{what} to do was the problem. Then we heard a flurry of shots, then again the patter of the rubber or felt soled shoes of the R.I.C. men and we saw ghost-like figures flitting past dimly lighted windows. Some of our men maintained that the figures were those of members of the murder gang. We threw ourselves down. McGrath, Keane and myself were at one corner of the cross, Jerry and the others at the other side of the road. Three figures appeared and I gave the order to fire. I am certain I saw one of them go down, but the others got away. We heard the scurrying feet racing back towards the river. Then a couple of mighty splashes as some of them jumped the Mall wall and into the River Suir. Matty Butler opened fire on a figure that he saw running towards the Square. I neither saw nor heard this figure, but some said they heard the patter of the feet.

I decided to retire. I had heard the hum of motor engines, and if lorries came into The Square and played their headlights down The Mall we were just sitting ducks for their marksmen. We could not retire to the headquarters at the bridge lest our own men there might mistake us for the enemy and open fire on us. It had been decided that in the event of our not being able to get to H.Q. we should proceed towards Turtulla, cross the Suir there and return to town along the eastern bank of the river. We fell back slowly, making as much use as possible of the available cover. While crawling along I saw a few figures of men - obviously R.I.C. men or Black and Tans - crouching in a laneway on my left. I opened fire down the lane and the figures disappeared at once.

On the outskirts of the town we took to the fields and proceeded at an angle of 45 degrees to the road. After crossing a fence I noticed cattle that had been lying down, rise and look away from our direction. Thus warned, I halted my party and occupied a position in extended order along the fence. Soon a party of five or six men came into view. I told my party to prepare to fire. Jerry Ryan approached me and said that some of our men were of the opinion that the men approaching us were railway men going to work. I did not believe that any civilians would be out on such a night, but withheld the order to fire. We moved off to our right and the men passed on our left at a distance of about 40 yards. Subsequently Jerry told me that it was a mistake not to have fired. He had learned that the men who passed us were part of the gang whom we had fired on earlier in the night on The Mall.

We spent the remainder of that night in a haybarn and towards morning concealed our arms in the hay. Jerry knew all about the place and promised that our arms would be safe and would be looked after. I returned to Thurles with Mixie O'Connell and had a wash, a shave and a good breakfast. It was fair morning and Mixie opened up his shop and carried on as usual.

Whilst on the look-out for Michael Egan, whom should I see but Phibbs, the British Intelligence Officer in Templemore military barracks. He was accompanied by a soldier in civilian clothes. They went towards the horse fair. I had no gun and when Egan arrived he had none either. His had been taken from him when he was captured the night before by the R.I.C. gang, but he had been rescued - minus his gun - within a few minutes of his capture by Jimmy Leahy, Mick Small and Goorty Carty. We went in opposite direction to try and get a few guns, but as a round-up and search by the R.I.C. and military was expected all guns had been dumped outside the town. Jerry Ryan looked us up, and when he discovered that we had designs to shoot Phibbs he advised us to leave the town at once. Egan and I then left Thurles, moving northwards through field and fen.

Soon afterwards I had a conversation with Jerry Ryan in which we discussed the question of transferring the Loughmore Company from the 2nd Battalion to the 1st (Jerry's) Battalion. We did not come to a decision, but Jerry promised me that he would let the Loughmore Company have four or six Martini Enfield single shot rifles and a quantity of .303 ammunition, provided, of course, that they paid for them. The transfer was made soon afterwards.,

but the rifles had to be loaned again almost immediately to the 1st Battalion for some contemplated action. They had not been returned at the time of my arrest but I understand that they were returned in due course. Jerry also provided me with a German automatic pistol. I had given my revolver to a man on the run and I never saw the man or the gun again.

George Plunkett, then attached to the G.H.Q. staff, came into the area towards the end of November or early December, 1921. With him I discussed the question of the action, or rather the inaction of the staff of the 2nd Battalion. We also discussed a matter which had arisen concerning guns which had been loaned by the Drom and Barnane Companies to the Templemore Company for the proposed action on October 29th to which I have already referred. The guns had not been returned and were then a bone of contention between the companies. As an initial step, Plunkett ordered the arrest of the man to whom the guns were handed. I passed on the order to Martin Deegan, O/C of the Clonmore Company, who duly executed it. The man in question was a schoolteacher, and Deegan released him on parole so that he could attend at his school each day and on the undertaking that he would surrender himself each evening after school hours until such time as the inquiry regarding the guns took place. On the first day of his parole, however, our prisoner was taken into custody by British military. At the same time several people, including a number of Volunteers, were arrested by the military and R.I.C. in Templemore. I soon followed them into captivity, and, as most of the witnesses were not available, I expect the whole matter was allowed to drop.

James Kennedy, a Volunteer of the Loughmore Company, reported to me that a Crossley tender load of Black and Tans frequently plied between Templemore and Dovea R.I.C. barracks just after dark. The road was quite straight for most of the way, with just a few bends here and there, and the tender usually travelled at terrific speed. Arms were then in very short supply in the Loughmore Company. As I have related, my rifle had been left in Thurles and Egan's .45 revolver had been captured there. We considered that a wire cable drawn across the road at a suitable height would sweep the Black and Tans sitting back to back off the tender and on to the road. We assumed that if a few shots were fired when the tender was about 60 yards from the trap, the driver would switch off the headlights and the cable would thus remain invisible to the occupants. Kennedy undertook to obtain such a cable. I was arrested a few days later and, as far as I know, there was no further action taken as regards ambushing the tender.

At that time I and some other men who were on the run were in the habit of sleeping at night in a shack which had been erected for us by a great family - the Burkes of Graiguefrahane. The father, mother, brothers and sisters were all in the movement. On the morning of December 9th 1920, as I was leaving this shack one of the boys of the Burkes asked me to loan him my automatic as he was going on a raid for arms with another Volunteer. I lent him the gun and then went to my sister's house in Loughmore to procure a change of socks. She told me that the military had been there raiding about $1\frac{1}{2}$ hours earlier. I was anxious to get away but she insisted on preparing breakfast for me, and that led to my capture. As a matter

of fact, I had only one sock changed when military rushed in and took me prisoner.

I was marched to Templemore military barracks. Conditions there were very bad, but the greatest hardship was the lack of sanitary facilities and the refusal of the guards to allow me to go to a toilet. While I was there a soldier prisoner was placed in the cell next to mine. The guards told me he was at one time a prisoner of the "Shinners", that he was released and, on his return to the barracks, was courtmartialled and sentenced to a term of imprisonment. Meals were passed into the cells through a T shaped hole, one arm of the T opened to the cell on the right, the other to the cell on the left. It was quite easy for prisoners to talk to each other through this hole. My soldier neighbour asked me for a smoke and I gave him some tobacco and a piece of newspaper which enabled him to make a cigarette. I felt a bit nervous, for he was none other than the soldier whom I had questioned and made a prisoner in Thurles. I had, however, no cause for fear. He did not recognise me and he told me the story of his capture and detention at the bridge in Thurles.

Later on I was told by Phibbs, the intelligence officer, that I would be taken out as a hostage on lorries. Within a quarter of an hour I was forced on to a lorry. The officer, a Canadian, asked me if I had any rations, and when I said "no" he procured some sandwiches for me. In the lorry I sat beside this officer, who told me I could smoke if I so wished. We drove to Cloughjordan. There I was placed in the R.I.C. barracks, and things were looking very nasty for me when an acting sergeant of the

R.I.C. came in. He asked me if I was McGrath from Loughmore, and when I told him I was he said his name was Lordan. He talked about Loughmore and about my dismissal from the school. Before leaving the room he warned the R.I.C. men that I was not to be interfered with in any way. Soon afterwards the military returned and we went back to Templemore by a different route. The whole party was jittery.

Next morning I had another trip as a hostage. This time we drove through Borrisoleigh, along the valley road, then often called the valley of death an account of the number of ambushes which took place there, and on to Nenagh. I sat in the cab of the lorry with the officer and driver. Everyone was "windy". I noticed a trench across the road before the soldiers saw it. Then a sudden swerve to the right, a sickening jolt and dead stop, but no shots were fired. I was pulled from my seat and was made stand with my back to the lorry. A soldier jerked the bolt of his rifle, pointed it at me and brought it to his shoulder. I asked the officer if I was to be shot in cold blood, and he cried out to the soldier, "Don't shoot him, he is no use to us dead". The lorry was got out of the trench and the trench filled up with stones from a nearby wall. We were off again. In Nenagh I met my officer friend of Hickey's Hotel in Templemore. How glad I was that I had about 14 days growth of beard on and that he didn't recognise me.

There was some talk between the officer in charge of our party and the provost guards at Nenagh military post. I was led to a cell. What a horror! The floor was covered with blood. Finger and complete hand prints in

blood on the walls. Blood had splashed on to a window about 8" high and then had run down the walls, and there was a basin full of bloody water on the floor. I was told to walk around in the blood and that my blood would soon be mixed with the blood on the floor. Several Black and Tans came in, gazed at me and at the cell but did not interfere with me. My greatest fears were from one young English soldier who tried to incite the others to violence.

Five or six days later I was again taken from my cell in Templemore Barracks and brought out as a hostage. We again went to Borrisoleigh, which was packed with military and R.I.C. men. The whole lot then moved off towards Nenagh. I had learned from one of the soldiers that a lorry had been ambushed at the point where we had run into the trench a few days earlier. After a halt and a discussion the party moved off again - this time in three columns - a column of military at each side of the road and about 250 yards back from it, and a column of R.I.C. men who moved along the road. I was made to walk in front of the column, which moved along the side of the hill on the right-hand side of the road, and all the time I was in charge of a soldier who had orders to shoot me if anything happened.

After a short time the military column got into extended order, and as they moved across some bare fields fire was opened on them from a point higher up on the hill. I was marching in front of them at the time, and hearing the whine of the bullets I threw myself down. After a few minutes the firing ceased and I was ordered to get up and go forward again. Several times during the day the columns were halted by single shots fired from high up on the hillside. Then hell seemed to open as all three

columns replied with rifle and machine-gun fire. I had a close-up view of the reaction of British Tommies to guerilla warfare. They were simply terrified and, despite the attempts of an officer to persuade them that the I.R.A. had no rifles, they persisted in drawing together in little groups as if for greater safety. At one stage when the firing was extra heavy, I was sitting behind a fence having a smoke. Curious to see what was happening, I raised myself up to have a look. The column was concentrating machine-gun and rifle fire on a fallen wooden gatepost which was lying at one side of a gap in an earthen fence. One end of the post looked like a man's black head of hair.

Towards evening the three columns, together with columns which were out from Nenagh, converged on Ross Cottage. One prisoner was taken - a young boy whom I saw run out of a house to bring a horse in from the fields. He was given a bad beating and I was given a few clouts for interfering. That night, in Templemore Barracks a friendly guard dried my socks for me. They were drenched as I had to wade through a swollen mountain stream.

On Christmas Day, 1920, I received a visit in my cell from my friend, Canon Kiely, P.P., Templemore. He heard my Confession in the cell. Revd. Fr. Hickey, C.C., Templemore, was arrested on Christmas Eve. He was lodged in the barrack hospital and refused to take exercise unless he was permitted to exercise with myself and Jack Hynes, who was also a prisoner there. Fr. Hickey, who was an American citizen, was released after a trial. I was also permitted to receive a parcel of food which was sent in from my home on that Christmas Day, but another parcel containing a much needed change of underclothing which was also sent in, never reached me.

1921:

In the second week of January, 1921, Jack Hynes, my fellow prisoner, and myself were taken from Templemore Barracks and brought under escort to the New Barracks in Limerick. I had been exactly 33 days a prisoner in Templemore. After a long delay in the New Barracks we were taken to the County Gaol, where I was detained for three days in a reception cell before being transferred to the prison proper. There I renewed acquaintance with Mixie O'Connell of Thurles for a brief period. He told me to meet him for a chat in the prison chapel on the following Saturday afternoon. I did so, but our conversation was abruptly ended when my name was called by the guards. Hynes, myself and some others were being transferred to the Ordnance Barracks. On arrival there the officer ordered the Tommies to kick us out of the lorries.

Conditions in the Ordnance Barracks were abominable. We were quartered in a long narrow building like a stable with a complete lack of sanitary facilities. Con Halloran from Clare and some other Clare men were brought in and billeted with us in the stable. We had neither spoon, knife or fork. Our meal - some form of stew - was served in a baking tin. We stood around the tin and each man in his turn took up what food he could with his hand and ate it. It will be better appreciated how repulsive all this was when I mention that we had no means of washing ourselves. In fact, I had very few opportunities to wash during the preceding weeks. We became infested with lice. Two Limerick men, Seán Hartney and Jack Rea, were in and out as hostages. We were almost starving and Rea advised me to trust a soldier who, he said, would

buy us some food. I removed a £5 note which I had hidden in the toe of my boot for an emergency, and gave it to the trusty soldier. I never saw him afterwards.

From the Ordnance Barracks in Limerick we were taken on a long tiresome journey to Kilworth Camp. We arrived there at nightfall, cold and hungry. Next morning I informed our (prisoners') Camp Commandant of our condition. We were medically examined and isolated. The enemy O/C of the camp ordered us to strip and have our clothes fumigated. I, on behalf of the others, pointed out to him that we were clean when we were arrested and that it was the duty of our captors and jailers to provide us with clean clothing. I told him that fumigation often ruined garments. I had the support of all the prisoners, none of whom would agree to take off their clothes for fumigation. Next morning the O/C again called to the hut where we were isolated, and asked me how I proposed to delouse our clothes. I asked him to lend us some heavy smoothing irons and let us have baths, and he agreed.

On the following morning we were ordered to undress and to proceed to the baths in our overcoats. We walked up the hill to the west side of the camp where the baths were situated. There we stood shivering in the cold of a January morning. When we complained we were told that the water was not yet hot. It was still not hot when we were allowed into the baths twenty minutes later, but, however, I enjoyed mine.

Amongst the prisoners in Kilworth at the time I found many friends and acquaintances, including David Kent.

of Castlelyons, the Hallinans of Clondulane, Nicholas Power and Ned Power of Passage, Co. Waterford, and the late Seumas Doyle of Enniscorthy who, in 1916, had travelled under a flag of truce from Enniscorthy to Dublin to receive the surrender order from P.H. Pearse.

A few weeks later I was taken with a number of other prisoners to Cork, then to Queenstown - as Cobh was then called - from there by destroyer to Belfast and finally to Ballykinlar Internment Camp. At the dockside in Belfast we were attacked by Orange mobs and many of the prisoners received serious injuries. The naval officer from the destroyer asked the military escort who were awaiting us to protect us, but he asked in vain. One prisoner became insane and was removed two days later to a criminal mental asylum.

I do not propose in the course of this statement to deal at length with the conditions and my experiences in Ballykinlar Camp. Sufficient to say that the conditions there were a big improvement on those which I had experienced in Templemore, Limerick and Kilworth.

On December 9th 1921, exactly twelve months from the date of my arrest, the general release of prisoners following the signing of the Treaty took place. I returned to my home in Loughmore.

I took no part with either sides in the Civil War. His Grace of Cashel and Emly, the late Most Reverend Dr. Harty, and my old friend, Canon Kiely, P.P., Templemore, supported my application for reinstatement in the school, and after an absence of five years I resumed as principal teacher in Killea in September, 1922.

Witness:

J. GraceSigned: Eamonn Mac Craiz

Date:

25/10/56