

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

No. **W.S. 1587**

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. **W.S. 1587**.....

Witness

Daniel O'Keeffe,
St. Flannan St.,
Nenagh,
Co. Tipperary.

Identity.

Company Captain.
Battalion Adjutant.

Subject.

Activities of Mitchelstown Company,
Galtee Battn., Cork 11 Brigade,
and A.S.U. 1914-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

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BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1587

STATEMENT BY DANIEL O'KEEFFE,

St. Flannan St., Nenagh, Co. Tipperary.

I was born in the year 1893, at Derrylahan, which is in the parish of Mitchelstown and is only a very short distance on the County Cork side of the boundary between Counties Cork and Limerick. Having completed my school education, I was apprenticed to the drapery business in the firm of O'Keeffe Brothers, Mitchelstown, then owned by my uncles. That was in the year 1908.

Nearly everyone in Mitchelstown at that time was interested in politics. There was in existence then, and for years afterwards, a powerful branch of the Ancient Order of Hibernians; the late William O'Brien, M.P. had his followers and supporters; John E. Redmond's Irish Parliamentary Party had a good quota of supporters; and a very few were I.R.B. men. Most notable amongst the latter group was a man named William Casey, proprietor of a bakery establishment in the town.

One of my earliest recollections of national activity is of a Saturday night during the winter of either 1908 or 1909 when Seán McDermott - one of the executed leaders after the Rising of 1916 - came to Mitchelstown and addressed a meeting in the Butter Market House. His audience was small and the meeting place was very badly lit. If memory serves me right, there was only a candle to give him light. He spoke on Fenianism and of the necessity for a physical force movement in Ireland. He was interrupted by one of the leading lights of the A.O.H., who passed some derogatory remarks about McDermott and tried to make a jeer of him, but McDermott replied in no uncertain words and the

intruder withdrew. On the following day, McDermott went to Kilcloney, where Peter O'Neill Crowley was killed by British forces in 1867, and addressed another meeting there. He may then have possibly been on an organising mission for the I.R.B., but of that I am not certain, for at the time I was too young to be taken into the confidences of Casey and the others. A few years later, Meagher Condon visited the district and addressed meetings on the same lines as Seán McDermott had done.

There was then, too, in Mitchelstown a branch of the Gaelic League, of which I was a member. On its rolls were approximately 200 names, and those principally instrumental in keeping the branch together and arranging the Irish classes were: the late Rev. Fr. Flannery, C.C., Patrick O'Kane and James Hannigan. O'Kane, who was a draper in the town, was an Irish scholar and had a fluent knowledge of the language. James Hannigan was for ever preaching Arthur Griffith's policy of Sinn Féin and recommending people to read "The Resurrection of Hungary". He was the local agent for the Singer sewing-machine company and, as such, had many contacts with people in the rural as well as in the urban area. Both O'Kane and Hannigan were close acquaintances of mine in those years.

Having completed my apprenticeship, I remained on as an assistant in O'Keeffe Brothers and was there when a company of Irish Volunteers was established in Mitchelstown in the springtime of 1914. Those responsible for forming the company were Patrick Coughlan, then a County Council engineer, William Casey, whom I have previously referred to, W.J. Ryan, then proprietor of a boot store, Edward Condon, a shopkeeper, David Walsh, a boot merchant, James O'Neill, and my friends Patrick O'Kane and James Hannigan. These

men formed a committee, and called a meeting, at which the ~~meeting~~ ^{company} was formed. I was one of those who joined the company at the initial meeting, and later found myself learning to form fours in the same section with the late General Liam Lynch, who in 1921 was appointed O/C of the 1st Southern Division but who was then (in 1914) a shop assistant at O'Neill's hardware stores in Mitchelstown.

At first there was great enthusiasm for the new movement. We could count our strength in hundreds. No officers were elected, but the committee whom I have just named controlled the company. The services of two or three British army reservists were secured as drill instructors. We paid a weekly subscription of 6d per man per week towards an arms fund, and I might say that each and every man looked forward to the day when he would own a rifle. The novelty of forming fours and parading soon wore off for many, including our instructors, and in a few months our strength dwindled to between 50 and 70 men. Two members of the committee, David Walsh and James O'Neill, were, however, by that time sufficiently well versed in military matters to enable them to take charge of the parades and training. The first meetings and parades were held in the Town Hall, but later we secured a more suitable premises - a large loft over a store with a very large yard, like a barrack square, attached. It was most suitable for both indoor and outdoor training.

About June, 1914, an instructor named Ward came to Mitchelstown and took over the training of the Volunteer company. We of the rank and file understood that he had been sent from Dublin by Sir Roger Casement.

Ward was an ex member of the British army and had seen a lot of service in India. He had a voice like a trumpet and was a marvellous drill instructor. He remained with us for only a short period, and another ex British army man, a Sergeant Gleeson, who, through his marriage, had some local connections, then took over as instructor. During that summer of 1914, the training was enlivened by route marches on Sundays to such places as Ballylanders, Galbally and Ballyporeen. We looked upon them as good days out, enjoyed ourselves and were amused by the way people thronged to their doors and windows to stare at us as we marched by.

A review of Irish Volunteers was arranged to be held in Mitchelstown on Sunday, July 5th 1914, and was duly carried out. Special trains brought contingents from Cork City, Mallow and Fermoy. Every Volunteer company within 15 miles radius of Mitchelstown marched in and filled the square. Sergeant Gleeson, our company instructor, acted as marshal and arranged the various units in company and battalion order. One of the Crosbies of Cork was there on horseback, and appeared to be the senior Volunteer officer present. Sir Roger Casement was expected to come to Mitchelstown for that review, but his place on the platform at the top of the square was occupied by Colonel Moore, then a member of the Volunteer Executive in Dublin. Colonel Moore, in an address, apologised for Sir Roger's absence, who had then left on a mission to America, the mission which eventually led him to Germany.

Some short time after the outbreak of the 1st World War in August, 1914, a few A.O.H. men joined the

Volunteer company. We learned from them that instructions had been issued to all A.O.H. branches to form and control Volunteer companies in districts where Volunteer companies were not already in existence, or to join the Volunteer companies where they already existed, and to endeavour to get members of the A.O.H. into positions of control on the committees. Our numbers had dwindled a bit at the time, but soon swelled again as members of the A.O.H. and their sons joined the company. It was amusing then to see young fellows who had done the summer's training, trying to instruct the old men of the A.O.H. and showing them how to put their right and left foot forward. The committee still controlled the company, and while no election of officers had as yet taken place, James O'Neill and David Walsh had for some time previously become recognised as company officers. William Casey, too, frequently attended the parades and never missed an opportunity to speak a few words of encouragement, urging us to carry on in the Fenian tradition and reminding us that a Volunteer's duty was to Ireland, not to England.

At the time of the split in the Volunteer movement, I would say that our company divided evenly. About 35 men, principally old men and the A.O.H. members, left and formed a unit of National Volunteers with their headquarters in the A.O.H. hall. We who remained as an Irish Volunteer unit were mostly young men, mainly shop assistants in the town and some farmers' sons. James O'Neill took charge of our unit. Sergt. Gleeson, the instructor, also remained with us. We retained the hall over the loft as an Irish Volunteer H.Q. while we

were able to pay for it, and then took to the fields for our parades and training. Liam Lynch had at that time left Mitchelstown and had taken up another position in either Kanturk or Fermoy.

During that winter of 1914, James O'Neill paid a visit to England and actually succeeded in obtaining 45 brand new Lee Enfield rifles and bayonets for our company. They arrived in Mitchelstown packed, unassembled, in wooden cases, and labelled as machine parts. When assembled, the rifles were issued to individual members of the company for safe keeping. Some members might have as many as 5 or 6 rifles to look after. We carried them on parades through the town, and during 1915 we took them to Limerick and Cork with us. We had secured hiding places to keep them in, for we always feared that the R.I.C. would some day make a raid and capture them, but more about those rifles anon.

On Whit Sunday, 1915, the Mitchelstown Volunteer company travelled to Limerick to take part in what was to be an Irish Volunteer review. P.H. Pearse was in Limerick that day, and I understand that he was to review the Volunteer forces. Armed with rifles, we travelled first to Galbally by cars, where we heard Mass. Then "we fell in" and marched to Emly railway station, where we boarded a train for Limerick. It would be impossible to describe the reception we received on our arrival at Limerick. We were met by what appeared to be a well organised mob of British soldiers' dependants' and "separation" women. They flaunted Union Jack flags in our faces and shouted slogans at us which were anything but Irish. They fired stones, mud and every kind of dirt at us. We endeavoured to maintain the best order we could, but we encountered this opposition all along the

route of our march.

It was my first visit to Limerick, but, as far as I can now remember, it was in some part of Irishtown we halted and stacked our arms under guard. We then went and had a meal. While I have a recollection of seeing P.H. Pearse at some stage during that day, I don't believe that anything in the nature of the intended review took place. If my memory serves me right, we just rambled around viewing the sights until it was time to go back, collect our arms and "fall in" to commence our return journey.

On our way back to the railway station we encountered the same determined opposition, only more so. Free fights broke out as our assailants tried to grab our rifles. At the entrance to the railway station I fired my very first shot from a rifle, when I fired over the heads of the mob. The bullet dislodged a brick from the chimney of the hotel opposite. After a most exciting day, we got back to Emly by train and from there to Mitchelstown the best way we could. There we again securely hid the rifles, for we feared that the R.I.C. would raid for them during the days that followed.

Our next outing under arms did not take place until November, 1915, when the company went to Cork to take part in an Allen, Larkin and O'Brien commemoration parade. Strangely enough, the National Volunteers and A.O.H. branches also marched in that parade. It was hard to understand their mentality in doing so, and harder still when I mention that they left gaps in their ranks, sealed off with ropes, to represent reserved places for the numbers of their members who had answered England's call and joined the British Army. Beyond a

few shouted remarks by by-standers, that parade passed off in an orderly dignified manner, and there was no opposition such as we had encountered in Limerick. Thomas Kent of Castlelyons, Fermoy, addressed the Irish Volunteer contingents after the A.O.H. and the National Volunteers had moved off.

Sometime during 1915, Donnchadh Hannigan swore me into the Irish Republican Brotherhood. Except for the fact that I was a sworn member of the Brotherhood, the I.R.B. as an organisation did not enter into my life very much in the years that followed. Ernest Blythe was at that time in the habit of paying occasional visits to our neighbourhood, and I remember attending one I.R.B. meeting at which he presided. It was held at the Black Forest, Mitchelstown, and the principal item discussed was that of raising funds.

From an organisation point of view, the most important happening in our area during 1915 was the formation of the Galtee Battalion. It was only accomplished after long and arduous discussions. It embraced the Irish Volunteer companies and units of Ballylanders, Ardpatrick, Mitchelstown, Anglesboro, Dungrud and Galbally. Liam Manahan was then the creamery manager in Ardpatrick. A sincere, upright type of man, he was an enthusiastic and able Volunteer officer, and I would say that to him most of the credit for organising the units into a battalion was due. The battalion council meetings were held monthly in Galbally. I often attended those meetings as the representative of the Mitchelstown Company. As a rule, Michael Colivet came from Limerick to preside, but I remember on one occasion Ernest Blythe was present and took the chair.

Amongst other men who attended those meetings were Thomas Walsh (Kirk) of Mitchelstown, the Gallaghues and Howards of Anglesboro, and the Scanlons and O'Briens of Galbally.

For Easter Sunday, 1916, we in the Mitchelstown Company had orders to proceed to Galbally for manoeuvres. We had then in the company 50 Volunteers, all well trained in the art of soldering and all armed with Lee Enfield rifles. In addition to the 45 rifles already mentioned, we had meantime secured some others. The officers of the company then were:

James O'Neill - Company Captain.
 Thomas Walsh (Kirk) - 1st Lt.
 Dan O'Keefe (myself) - 2nd Lt.
 James Walsh (Bosco) - Adj't.
 William Gallahue - Q/M.

About 3 a.m. on that Easter Sunday morning I was called out of bed to go to James Hannigan's house. Two other assistants in O'Keefe Brothers, John Joe O'Brien and William Gallahue, both of whom were Volunteers, were called out with me. Patrick Coughlan, the County Council Engineer whom I have mentioned as being one of the original Volunteer committee, was amongst those present in Hannigan's house when we got there, and he appeared to be in charge of whatever arrangements were being made. O'Brien, Gallagher and myself were sent to Fergrove Wood to clean and oil a number of rifles which had been dumped there. Having completed that task, we returned to O'Keefe's for our breakfast and on our way met some members of the company who were going to the mobilisation place at Ballinbullan, about half a mile from the town.

After breakfast, while on my way to the mobilisation point, I met James O'Neill, the Company Captain. He handed me a dispatch which apparently he had just received. It was written in manuscript on Eoin McNeill's private notepaper, with a heading in Irish, and read as follows:

"To each Volunteer unit,

All parades cancelled. Volunteers completely deceived.

Signed, Eoin McNeill".

That dispatch was in my possession for a number of years afterwards. I was more than familiar with the wording of it and I am certain, without any doubt, that it was worded as I have given it above. After a hasty discussion, O'Neill and I decided to carry out our original orders to bring the company to Galbally.

There was a full mobilisation of the company. We marched to Anglesboro, where we heard Mass, and then on towards Galbally. A motor car came along, stopped, and a young man in full Irish Volunteer uniform stepped out. He was a stranger and we did not get his name. It was my first time to see a Volunteer in full uniform. He had no information for us, but on hearing that we were marching to Galbally he told us to carry on as we were doing.

Personally, I had no information that the Rising was to take place that day. My reasoning, however, pointed to the fact that one was likely to take place sooner or later, and that morning's events led me to believe that something more than ordinary manoeuvres were intended. My only worry, and that of James O'Neill, as we marched to Galbally, was that whatever we might be

called upon to do, we and the company would do it well and in accordance with plan.

The manoeuvres at Galbally were carried out on that Easter Sunday evening without incident. Before dismissing the parade, Liam Manahan addressed the battalion and warned us to be on the alert, especially during the coming days.

Next day, being a Bank Holiday and no work to do, I went with a companion to Cork, with the intention of going to the races. Due to a downpour of rain, we did not go to the races but hung about the city for the afternoon. While sheltering under the veranda of a cinema, I heard a British soldier asking some of his companions, also British soldiers, what was the idea behind an order which had been issued calling all troops back to barracks by 5 p.m. and cancelling all leave. Later, when we visited a hotel for refreshments, we learned that trains from Cork were not proceeding further north than Limerick Junction. People who wanted to get to Dublin were stranded in the hotel. The news of the Rising in Dublin had reached Cork, but the only information we could pick up was vague, something like that Sinn Féiners and British troops were firing at each other across the Liffey. We returned to Mitchelstown with the news.

That night members of the Volunteer Company were posted in Mitchelstown to watch for R.I.C. or military activity. Next day, Tuesday, we sent a dispatch to Volunteer H.Q. in Limerick seeking orders or instructions. Either Michael O'Sullivan or his brother Patrick, with one other Volunteer, cycled to Limerick

with the dispatch. They arrived back without either orders or instructions. An attempt was also made to secure orders from Cork, but without result. To use modern parlance, McNeill's dispatch appeared to have put a spanner in the works. Later on during the week, probably on the Thursday or Friday night, Paddy Coughlan (the Co. Council Engineer previously referred to, a very reserved type of man but a sincere patriot), had the company mobilised under arms and took them out to a position on the Galbally-Ballylanders road. I do not know if he had received orders from any higher authority to do this, or what his intention was, or who he expected to meet there, but nothing happened and all were back in town by 8 a.m. next morning.

Immediately after the collapse of the Rising in Dublin, ~~over~~^{out} 50 odd rifles were taken out into the Co. Limerick and dumped near Anglesboro as a security precaution. Two mornings later, I was informed that the rifles had been surrendered to the R.I.C. and were then in the R.I.C. barracks. The news proved to be only too true. It came as a shock to me and I considered it the most regrettable thing that could have happened. It caused consternation amongst the rank and file members of the company, who maintained that they would have guarded and secured the rifles, as they had done for the previous 16 or 18 months. Due to the disorganisation which existed after Easter Week, 1916, no proper investigation was ever held to fix responsibility on the shoulders of those who were responsible for surrendering the rifles, but whoever was responsible, his or their action stands condemned for all time. What a boon 50 rifles would have been to

us in the years 1920 and 1921. To finish with the period up to the Rising of Easter Week, I would like to place on record that, with the exception of the Galtee Battalion, there was then no properly organised and armed Irish Volunteer unit on a line from Limerick to Cork. I learned later that had the original plans for the Rising been carried out, our first objective would have been to march to Limerick Junction, occupy the railway station there and hold a position along the railway line.

On or about 10th May, 1916, and while we were still reading the news of the executions in Dublin, a large party of British military arrived in Mitchelstown. They broke up into smaller parties and, accompanied by R.I.C. men from the local barracks, commenced raiding. The R.I.C. had a complete list of the names and addresses of all members of the company. With the exception of James Hannigan, who had gone out into the country on his business, we were all rounded up and detained in the barrack yard for the day. Hannigan, hearing of the raids, returned to his home, and on learning that the police and military had raided for him, reported to the barracks and he, too, was detained. That night, all, with the exception of five, were released. William Casey, Michael and Patrick O'Sullivan and Patrick Roche were sent to Frongoch, where they were detained until the following August, and James Hannigan was detained in English prisons until Christmas, 1916. When he arrived home on Christmas Eve night, he was a very much changed man. He was on a bit in years, being a much older man than most of us at the time. He had grown a beard, and it was evident that he was in a bad state of health due to his treatment while in prison.

In October, 1916, I and five others were summoned and tried at Mitchelstown Petty Sessions Court on a charge of singing rebel songs. The offence was stated to have been committed on the occasion of an excursion to the Munster hurling final in Dungarvan. An R.I.C. detective named Jeffers was on duty at the railway station when the songs, including "The Felons of our Land", were sung. A few weeks later we received the summons. The presiding magistrates were three local J.P.s, all members of the A.O.H. We were sentenced to two months' imprisonment with hard labour. In an effort to humiliate us, the magistrates gave us the option to sign bonds to be of good behaviour, but we opted to go to prison. Due to pressure from my employers, I was released from Cork Prison after doing three weeks of my sentence.

In the early months of 1917, Volunteer activity was at a low ebb. In May of that year, a number of us cycled to Fermoy to welcome home David Kent of Bawnard, Castlelyons, who was returning from prison in England. He was one of those who had been sentenced to death after the Rising but whose sentence was commuted to one of penal servitude. Speaking to us that day in Fermoy, he emphasised the need for reorganising the Volunteers so that the good work might be continued. It was following this trip to Fermoy that we reorganised the company in Mitchelstown. Some of the old faces were missing, but many new ones appeared in their stead. Drilling and parades were resumed, but now secretly and at night-time in the fields.

As far as I can remember, it was during that year of 1917 that the British authorities deported Liam Manahan,

O/C Galtée Battalion, to England. During Manahan's absence, Donnchadh Hannigan, the Vice O/C, took over as Battalion O/C. Manahan returned after a few months and resumed his work as manager of the creamery in Ardpatrick. Hannigan, however, refused to recognise Manahan as O/C of the battalion, and a rather critical position arose as both men (Manahan and Hannigan) staked their claims to the appointment. This created an undesirable state of affairs. Both claimants had their supporters, not only amongst the battalion and company officers but among the rank and file, some of whom had considerable influence in the Volunteer and Sinn Féin movements at the time. Fortunately, as far as I can remember, men kept their heads and ill-feeling did not develop. Eventually G.H.Q. ordered that an inquiry be held into the whole affair, and M.W. O'Reilly of Dublin (now Managing Director of the New Ireland Assurance Company) was sent down to conduct the inquiry. It was held on a Sunday afternoon and night in Maloney's farmhouse near Knocklong. I represented the Mitchelstown Company, and every officer present was given an opportunity to express his views as to who should or should not be the Battalion O/C. Personally, I favoured Manahan. We in Mitchelstown recognised him as the Battalion O/C prior to his deportation, and I believed that it would have been an injustice to remove him from his appointment in the circumstances that had then arisen. There was no charge against him, and I had always believed him to be an alert, efficient officer.

The result of the inquiry was not made known to us until some months later. G.H.Q., acting on its findings,

disbanded as such the Galtee Battalion. The units comprising it were allocated to the East Limerick Brigade, Tipperary No. 3 Brigade and Cork No. 2 Brigade, according to the areas in which the units were situated. Thus the Mitchelstown Company, being situated in Co. Cork, was allocated to Cork No. 2 Brigade. This arrangement did not meet with general approval and had repercussions in the company. Personally, I had no objection to going in with Cork No. 2. I looked on it as an order from G.H.Q. which should be obeyed. Others, including Michael O'Sullivan, who was an influential member, objected, and considered that G.H.Q. might be prevailed upon to reconsider the decision and that the Galtee Battalion should be re-established. All this had an adverse effect on the company. Disorganisation set in and the regular parades lapsed. For a time the conscription crisis in 1918 made us forget about these difficulties and all hands rowed in to train the hundreds who flocked into our ranks to save themselves from conscription, but who flocked out again when the conscription threat was over.

On either St. Patrick's Day or Easter Sunday, 1918, a Sinn Féinn meeting or an anti-conscription meeting was held in Kilcloney, about five miles from Mitchelstown. The Volunteer Company marched to the meeting, and we were followed from Mitchelstown by a party of 5 or 6 R.I.C. men. I was detailed to prevent the R.I.C. men from approaching the platform or going near the principal speaker, who was from Dublin but whose name I cannot recall. I selected some members of the company who, like myself, were armed with revolvers, approached the R.I.C. men and told them in plain language what they might expect if they attempted to force their way in towards the platform. They made no

attempt to force the issue and there was no attempt made to interfere with the meeting or the speakers. As the R.I.C. men knew me personally, I assumed that some night or another they would raid O'Keeffe Brothers for me, and on that account, except on very rare occasions, I took the precaution of sleeping in friends' houses. In other words, I was what we then termed, partly 'on the run' - at business by day and away from the premises by night.

On one of those rare occasions on which I did sleep in O'Keeffe's, I was roused early in the morning by a maid, who told me that the R.I.C. were about to raid the place and that they were already in the hallway downstairs. William Gallagher, another assistant in the shop and, like myself, partly 'on the run', was also there. He, being partly dressed, got out through a back window and escaped through neighbours' gardens at the back. I, being undressed, climbed through a skylight and lay on the roof while the search was in progress. This was a plan of escape which I had often contemplated, and it worked when the need arose. Gallagher and I spent that summer "on our keeping", staying with relatives and friends. Towards the end of the year we parted, he taking up a position in Carrick-on-Suir, I taking one in Tipperary Town.

After a few months in Tipperary Town, I returned in the spring of 1919 to my old position in Mitchelstown. The Mitchelstown Volunteer company was still unattached - the old problem of having the Galbally Battalion re-established or of joining Cork No. 2 Brigade had not resolved itself. During that year of 1919, I attended several parades and meetings and exerted what influence I had in an effort to get the company into Cork No. 2, but without success.

In January, 1920, with two other members of the company, P.J. Luddy and Maurice Walsh, I was summoned to a meeting with Liam Lynch. Lynch was then O/C Cork No. 2 Brigade, and the meeting took place at Walsh's house in Curracuna. We discussed the whole position of the Mitchelstown Company. Lynch told us that he was more than anxious to have the company in his brigade. He realised, he said, that we were an old and well trained company, but that while we remained unattached we were of little use to the organisation as a whole. He appointed me Company Captain, P.J. Luddy, 1st Lieutenant, and Maurice Walsh, 2nd Lieutenant, and gave us every encouragement to go into Cork No. 2 Brigade as a company of the Glanworth Battalion. Liam Lynch later appointed Maurice Walsh, Assistant Brigade Adjutant, and on the formation of the 1st Southern Division appointed him to the Divisional Staff.

We promised to do all we could and, on my suggestion, he promised to send Tom Barry of Glanworth, the Battalion Commandant, to a parade of the company to conduct an election of officers. It was on this undertaking that we accepted our appointments previously. Barry came along in due course, the position was explained to the members, and this time all were willing to fall into line with Liam Lynch's wishes. The election of officers was held by ballot and resulted in a confirmation of the provisional appointments.

During that springtime and early summer of 1920, Liam Lynch and three or four other brigade officers conducted an inspection of all Volunteer companies in Cork No. 2 Brigade. The position revealed was far from satisfactory. Many company officers had never received any training

and were not, therefore, capable of training their companies. The company parades were more in the nature of a meeting of a social club than of a parade of a military force. To remedy this state of affairs, he (Lynch) set up officers' training camps in remote places in North County Cork. In these camps the company officers were given a thorough grinding in the rudiments of discipline, drill, field exercises, signalling, first-aid, etc. To give them confidence too, they were invariably brought at least once during their training period into contact with enemy forces by firing at R.I.C. or military patrols or by sniping at enemy posts. Lynch did not consider it necessary that either Luddy, Maurice Walsh or myself should attend these officers' courses, but I took the precaution of having substitute officers trained and ready to take over lest any of the three of us should be arrested, appointed to an active service unit or become a casualty.

Our activities then became almost full-time work. Situated as it is, on the main Cork-Dublin and Cork-Limerick roads, Mitchelstown was considered an important centre. A daily report of all enemy activity, including particulars of enemy forces passing through, whether military, R.I.C. or Black and Tans, number of lorries in the convoys, and routes taken, had to be sent to the Brigade O/C. Telephone and telegraph wires had to be kept continually cut and the roads trenched or blocked. The Sinn Féin courts were then functioning and Volunteers had to undertake police duties, going out into the country to investigate complaints, arrest the offenders, bring them before the courts and guard prisoners. We had instructions to be constantly on the watch for spies and British secret

service men coming into the area. I cannot recall having come in contact with any of the latter. There was, however, the case of a man named Power who, it was learned, intended to join the R.I.C. He defied all warnings to refrain from doing so, and it was decided to shoot him. Three of us fired on him one night, but, with the devil's luck, he escaped through a shrubbery, left the district and eventually joined the R.I.C. Other tasks which kept us busy included providing escorts and guides for senior officers - such as Ernie O'Malley, who was frequently in the Mitchelstown area - and the operation of a dispatch centre. The local branch of Cumann na mBan rendered valuable assistance at that time. They were often called upon to act as dispatch carriers and to help in raising funds. Miss Tessie McCrohan - now Mrs. O'Keefe, my wife - was a founder member of Cumann na mBan in Mitchelstown.

Whilst I was on holidays in August, 1920, Maurice Walsh received a dispatch from Liam Lynch asking that a reliable armed Volunteer from the Mitchelstown Company be sent to Mallow for 24 hours active service. Walsh detailed Jerry Clifford to go. He did so, and the operation in which he was required to take part was a successful one. It was the capture of Mallow military barracks and the seizure of the arms and ammunition from it.

In the autumn of 1920, a battalion active service unit, under the command of William (Dormie) O'Regan of Doneraile, was formed. Three members of the Mitchelstown Company - P. J. Euddy, Jerry Clifford and James O'Mahony - were members of the active service unit from its formation. I kept constantly in touch with the A.S.U., as I was particularly keen that they should carry out some operations

in the Mitchelstown area. I had previously examined a position at Glenacurrane and considered it an ideal site for an ambush. It was about three miles from Mitchelstown on the Tipperary Town side of Mitchelstown and on the main Tipperary-Fermoy road. There in a valley on the fringe of the Galtee Mountains, the road ran straight for a distance of about one mile, and wooded slopes at both sides of the road provided ample cover. Convoys of British troops passed there regularly.

I persuaded O'Regan to bring the A.S.U. to Glenacurrane. He did so sometime in October, 1920. When I went out there to meet him, I was surprised to see large forces of British military deployed in extended formation and searching through the woods along both sides of the road. The A.S.U. were billeted in the neighbourhood, but in view of the enemy activity O'Regan decided to withdraw from the area for the time being.

It was not until mid December, 1920, that the A.S.U., or the column, as we then preferred to call them, returned to Glenacurrane. I joined them there and I would say that the strength of the column was then about 28 or 30 men. All were armed with rifles. With the column were Dick Willis and Richard Bolster, both of whom were key men in capture of the arms at Mallow military barracks. They had with them one of the Hotchkiss machine-guns which were captured in that raid, and they were then proficient in its use. I should also mention that the position at Glenacurrane was in the East Limerick Brigade area, it being slightly over the border from Co. Cork. Learning that we were billeted there, the East Limerick Brigade Column came along and joined forces with us. Donnchadh Hannigan and Tomás Malone (otherwise Seán Fórde) were in

charge of the East Limerick men. The Brigade Adjutant, Daniel Shinnick of Castletownroche, later killed in the Civil War, was with O'Regan in charge of our column.

The ambush position was occupied about 7 a.m., well before daylight, the East Limerick Brigade men on one side of the road and our unit on the other. The Hotchkiss gun, with Bolster and Willis as its crew, was posted on a slight height where there was a commanding view of the road. About 10 a.m. two lorries of British military going towards Fermoy came along and were allowed to pass through the ambush position, as in view of the strength of the joint columns it had been decided to hold the position in the hope that a big convoy of British forces might come along. During the day we were supplied with refreshments by the local people, who catered for such a large number of men as best they could. It was a bitterly cold day.

About 3 or 4 p.m. that afternoon, the two lorries of military which had passed in the morning-time returned and it was decided to attack them. They had apparently gone to Fermoy for mails and were then returning to Tipperary Town. A farmer's car was pushed out on to the road to stop the leading lorry, and almost simultaneously rifle fire was opened from both sides of the road on the two lorries. Bolster and Willis brought the Hotchkiss gun into action, and in about five minutes time the British soldiers, four of whom had been killed, surrendered and the whole thing was over. We captured in all 18 rifles, a large quantity of .303 rifle ammunition, a box of grenades and two bags of mails. The East Limerick Brigade column retained most of the captured arms and ammunition. The lorries were then set on fire and burned. In the mails we found a packet addressed to the infamous

Lieutenant Litchfield at Tipperary military barracks. It contained a medal awarded to him for valour in Ireland.

After the ambush at Glenacurrane, the East Limerick Brigade column moved back into their own area while we continued to operate in the battalion area. We occupied various ambush positions without having an engagement, as the expected enemy forces did not arrive. There was one small inconclusive engagement near Glanworth when a few members of the column opened fire on a party of military who were escorting a Coroner to an inquest. Our movements within the area were somewhat restricted, for at that time the British forces could be numbered in thousands, based as they were in military barracks at Fermoy, at Buttevant, at Mitchelstown, and in the military camps at Kilworth and at Ballyvonare, all within a radius of about 15 miles.

Dormie O'Regan, the column leader, was anxious to have an engagement near his native place of Doneraile. Once we remained in that district for over a week, billeting in local houses at night and occupying an ambush position by day. This position was within a mile of Ballyvonare military camp and was on a road which, according to the information given us, had been patrolled by enemy forces several times during the week previous to our arrival there. We occupied the position on six successive days without seeing either a soldier or a policeman. O'Regan sent a few men to snipe the barracks in the hope of getting a patrol out, but there was nothing doing.

On another visit to that district we learned on a Sunday evening that there were three military horses tied outside the hotel in Doneraile. We assumed that they were from the camp at Ballyvonare, and with a view to drawing out a military patrol O'Regan sent a few men to fire at the horses and their riders on their way back to the camp. That was done, and we saw one of the horses galloping back riderless along the road.

The military did come out that night, in two lorries. Two of our men, from a high bank overlooking the road, flung two home-made grenades at the lorries. As luck would have it, one grenade fell into a lorry but failed to explode, and the other one missed the lorry and exploded on the road. At the time I was at a crossroads about 150 yards from where the grenades were thrown. I opened fire on the military, who replied and advanced towards me. The main portion of our column had not then taken up their positions. In fact, with the exception of the two men with the grenades, none of the others was in his right position. Mine became a precarious one and O'Regan asked for volunteers to go to my assistance. The Mitchelstown members of the column volunteered at once, and under cover of their fire, but still under fire from the military, I succeeded in withdrawing unhurt. The engagement was then broken off. At that time a strict check was kept on our .303 ammunition, and later when O'Regan checked mine it was found that I had fired 13 rounds. We heard afterwards that the military suffered casualties - a few of them had been wounded - but I always felt that a golden opportunity for a successful ambush was lost on that occasion. Had both sides of the

road been occupied in good time, I believe that the action could not have failed.

In March, 1921, I was again anxious to have another try for an engagement in or near Mitchelstown. O'Regan agreed and the column was brought to billets in Ballyarthur. As I was near home and suffering from a nasty complaint, I got a few days leave in the hope that a rest at home would cure my ailment.

One evening towards the end of my leave, I called to the home of people named Moriarty. Their house had been used as a H.Q. by the column when in the vicinity, and on their invitation I decided to sleep there for the night. I knew that the column had moved off again in the meantime, but I wanted to find out where I would locate it. Next morning there was a big round-up by British military in the district, and I left when Miss Moriarty warned me that soldiers were approaching the house. Had I remained there I was quite safe, for it transpired later that the house was not searched that morning. Taking what I thought was the safest route to get away from the military, I was fired on as I was crossing a wall which was hit near me by five or six bullets. Safely across the wall, I stooped to tie my boots and was congratulating myself on my lucky escape, when a voice nearby shouted, "Come over here, Paddy, with your hands up". Looking up, I found myself covered by a soldier with his rifle. I was unarmed and, thinking that I could bluff him, I told him that I was a farmer's son and that I was out looking for some cattle that had strayed during the night. A very angry officer of the Lincolnshire Regiment, with his revolver drawn and pointed at me, then came along and asked

me questions about where Danny Breen and his men were around there. I stuck to my story that I was only looking for stray cattle; but to no effect. With a few other civilians who had been taken prisoners, I was escorted to the road where the military had their lorries parked. On the road I saw Lieutenant Litchfield, whose medal we had found in the mails at Glenacurrane. Where the lorries were parked on the road was in the vicinity of Glenacurrane, and our escort, walking behind us with the muzzles of their rifles in our backs, threatened in vile language what they would do to us as a reprisal for their comrades who had been killed in the ambush.

We were packed up into the lorries and taken to Kilworth Camp. Later we were removed to Maryborough Prison, where I was detained until the general release following the signing of the treaty in December, 1921.

There were a few incidents which happened after my arrest and which, for the purpose of the record, I would like to mention. In that early summer of 1921, the British forces carried out their rounds-up with cavalry - in fact, they mounted infantry men on artillery horses. This was a great asset to them for cross country work and was a grave menace to the column, so much so that the column was disbanded and broken up into sniping parties.

Then there was the shooting of a much wanted R.I.C. man in Mitchelstown. That task was undertaken and carried out by two young Volunteers, one of whom was Leo Skinner - now District Justice Skinner.

Again, on the Sunday prior to the Truce, Volunteers entered Mitchelstown and took up positions covering the

R.I.C. barracks and the exits from the military barracks, whilst another party prepared to disarm troops who were expected to go with mules and water-carts to draw water from a pump. The military party did not come out to draw the water that afternoon, and when the Volunteers withdrew from the town they were pursued by British forces. A running fight then took place, in which my old friend William Gallagher was wounded.

Following my release from prison, I was appointed to the Battalion Staff as Battalion Adjutant, the rank which I held during the Civil War and during which I fought on the Republican side with Cork No. 2 Brigade.

Signed: Don O'Keefe

Date: 21 February 1957

Witness:

Grace
(Investigator)

