ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1,668

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

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Witness

Thomas Hevey
Commercial Hotel,
Ballina, Co. Mayo

Identity.

Brigade Adjutant, West Mayo Bde., I.R.A.

Subject.

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STATEMENT BY THOMAS HEVEY,

Commercial Hotel, Ballina, Co. Mayo.

At the request of the Bureau of Military History, I have agreed to commit to writing my recollections of that period of Irish history which is now generally described as the War of Independence, together with some autobiographic notes which will, perhaps, indicate what went on to the making of an Irish Volunteer.

Unlike the Evangelist, St. John, I have not devoted any time to meditation or other spiritual or mental exercise in preparation for the task - after some thirty-five or forty years - of describing my experiences. Again, unlike Julius Caesar, I have decided to write in the first person, though it goes somewhat against the grain to have to repeat the personal pronoun with undue frequency. It must be clearly understood that where comments are made on persons or events, they are the expressions of my own opinion and may, of course, be entirely erroneous or misconceived, due, perhaps, to faulty memory or, perhaps, to an unconscious personal bias. The facts or events themselves are, however, in a different category, and are set out as clearly as I can recollect them, and in the order in which they occurred and at the times stated.

Born in July 1904, on U.S.A. Independence Day, in Inis Cortaidh, my earliest recollections are of the grass covered slopes of Vinegar Hill, with its ruined windmill on the summit, and my father's quiet voice as he pointed to the Duffry Gate and other storied spots where clashes between

the Yeomen and the Gael had occurred in 1798, and in my childish imagination I saw the hated red coats flee before the gallant pikemen, but always the story ended in defeat and disaster. Never a victory, except a very transient one. This had the peculiar effect of making me feel that we were someway inferior to the English enemy. It embittered me, and at a very early age I longed for the opportunity to strike a blow for Irish freedom. Of course, I see clearly since that this conditioning of my mind was a protracted process and was the result of my father's tales of Ireland's misadventures, together with my mother's hostile attitude towards everything English. My father taught me Irish history, while my mother taught me to buy Irish, eat Irish, and from her I first heard Swift's famous diction concerning English goods.

Another great influence in my early life was one, Charles O'Farrell, an "unrepentant Fenian", as Robert Brennan, quoting Pearse, described him to me in January, 1957. O'Farrell was to have been my godfather, but the Administrator would not have him as he was one of Fenian Brotherhood, outlawed by the Catholic Church. He had been, I think, a member of the Supreme Council of the Fenians and had travelled extensively on the European Continent in the course of his Fenian activity. He spoke French fluently, and often I listed to his tales of strange cities, with their beautiful churches and galleries. He loved France but hated Spaniards, a hatred not unconnected with the Catholic Church's opposition to Fenianism. My mother rather disapproved of him, probably she was jealous of his influence over me, but in a recent letter (March, 1957) she described him as a "splendid figure - tall and dignified - and as honest as the sun".

Continuing, she wrote: "He was very fond of you, and I remember him admiring your eyes and hair when you were a baby." O'Farrell died in, I think, 1915. His grave in Corrig, near Enniscorthy, is marked by a symbolical broken column, which, I believe, will be completed when Ireland regains her freedom.

O'Farrell frequently discussed Emmet with my father. In fact, the gentle shade of the gallant Robert Emmet loomed largely in my life. My father and O'Farrell worked in Lett's Brewery of Enniscorthy - O'Farrell, the Manager, my father, the brewer and in charge of the mineral or aerated water department. Their discussions were nebulous to me, but in retrospect I can see that they were greatly concerned about the part one, Hevey, a brewer, took in Emmet's Rising. There was left with me the feeling that they did not believe that he was a very reliable person. In fact, in later years I came to the conclusion that he had in some way let Emmet down. But when Helen Landreth's book "The Pursuit of Robert Emmet" was published in 1949 or 1950, I rushed out and got a copy and immediately found out that the said Hevey had not been guilty of anything more than a slight indiscretion in giving a dinner party at a time when he should have been concerned with graver matters.

So far I have been concerned with a period ending in 1912, when my father took a job in Westport, Co. Mayo, similar to that which he held in Enniscorthy. Westport, after Enniscorthy, seemed somehow tame. There was no revered Fenian warrior, though my father and O'Farrell wrote to each other, and my father did not attend Gaelic League meetings as he used to do in Enniscorthy. Perhaps there was no branch of the Gaelic League for him to

attend. I do not know. But in Westport father seemed to get some kind of spiritual uplift from being in the vicinity of Croagh Patrick, or The Reek, as St. Patrick's Holy Mountain was called locally. He also got great pleasure in introducing me to the various small journals, such as "Spark", which the British described as seditious. The Diary of Wolfe Tone and Mitchell's 'Jail Journal' were also brought emphatically to my notice about this time. "Our Boys" was published by the Irish Christian Brothers and was the only "paper" I was allowed to select and purchase for myself. Anything published outside the country was forbidden until father had seen it. "Tales of Cuchulainn" and the old Irish legends were my main mental fare.

While my father was thus moulding my mind and those of my brother (born in 1907) and sisters (born 1909 and 1912), my mother took the more practical road and saw to it that as far as possible only articles of Irish manufacture were used in the home. She hated using coal. It came from England! But she hated burning Irish turf. It made too much dust. Coal only she had been used to in Wexford, but, nevertheless, from her advent to Westport it was turf only. Turf was an Irish product and, therefore, preferable.

Both parents were deeply religious and God was very real to them. He directed their lives and controlled their relations with their neighbours and their attitude towards all problems, but devotion to Ireland came next.

As I recollect, nobody outside ourselves - the family- seemed to care much about the country. There were men drilling with dummy rifles and talking about Home Rule, but it was all easy-going and no one seemed to take things seriously - at least not as seriously as they were taken

by my parents, who somehow seemed dissatisfied with the "Castle" and with England - a state of mind which quickly communicated itself to me and made me suspicious of everything English or near English.

At last, however, war came in August, 1914, and I remember father paraphrasing John Mitchell, saying something about the "death knell for the British Empire". Thereafter I found myself a constant ally and protagonist of Germany, ready even to die to help Germany beat England. Sometime after the outbreak of war, I recall my father being visited by two members of the Royal Irish Constabulary and warned by them to keep his mouth shut or he would be made to suffer. He emerged from the interview red of face and short of temper, but the Constabulary men left the house hastily.

Father's employers were Englishmen, not just Anglo-Irish, and they made it clear to their employees that they expected them to do their bit (to quote the contemporary jargon of the British Recruiting Agents) by joining His British Majesty's Forces, and several overtures were made in vain to father. Finally, in 1916, after the Rising, it was decided to close the Brewery and all the employees, including my father, were dismissed - to make it easier for them to join His Majesty's Forces.

Well do I remember that beautiful morning in 1916. My father on his way home from Mass to breakfast, with light step left the footpath opposite our cottage and joyfully sang out, "Tom, Dublin is out", and to my mother, "They are fighting in Dublin". Then no news - no radio in those days - no papers - and one afternoon in Joyce's newspaper shop while waiting for a paper I heard someone

say, "MacBride was shot to-day", after this silence and bitterness. I brought the news home and my father said exultantly, "It's grand to think there are men still ready to die for Ireland". My mother, I noticed, was silent.

As is well recognised now, the Rising had few sympathisers, or perhaps it would be more correct to say that few people were interested enough in Irish freedom and nationhood to exercise their minds concerning such intangible and immaterial things as the future of a country. The savage suppression of the Rising by the British and their Irish supporters did, however, turn the thoughts of the people towards a free Ireland, and the well-springs of human sympathy overflowed with pity towards the relatives of the leaders who were shot by order of drumhead courtsmartial. I well remember the horror with which my mother read for me the leading article in the "Irish Independent" which stated inter alia that "mercy at this time may well be misconstrued as weakness" (these are not the exact words but they are near enough). The result was the shooting the following day of James Connolly, arch enemy of the autocratic Dublin employers, whose leader was the owner of the "Irish Independent", William Martin Murphy. I have beside me as I write, the first "Independent" issued following the Rising. Its description of the affair is summed up in two words "Criminal Madness". I fear the Irish newspaper owners were not on the side of freedom. The contrary was the case. Few tongues and fewer pens found utterance on the side of the Rebels. The executions - or, as my father preferred to call them, murders - aroused the sympathy of the people, and not gradually but overnight as it were, the sympathies of the great mass of the people were aroused in favour of the shot leaders, who a few weeks earlier were unknown,

or, if known, were looked upon as cranks. "Rainbow Chasers" was a common term applied to them by the more mundane, who had their feet firmly on terra firma and who devoted their time only to the more important things of life such as making money, getting good jobs for their friends, or, where permitted by the Garrison, joining in a game of golf. In my young days, people took their hats off in the presence of the conquerors, called them "Sir", and generally preserved a respectful demeanour while one of the English was around. To counteract this, my father had warned me not to lift my hat to anyone save to a priest, and not to say "Sir" to anyone. To this day, the word "Sir" makes me a bit sick.

Such was the Ireland of my boyhood and such was the Ireland that my father, burning patriot that he was, had to leave to seek in enemy country the living denied him in his own. He, however, compromised. He did not go to England, but to Wales, to a firm of mineral water manufacturers named Keegan, an Irish family. To Holyhead we were all transported, mother, brother and three sisters. I remember being sick on the ship - the ill-fated "Leinster" - and resenting and repelling the kindly, well-meant efforts of an Irishman in English officer's uniform, to allay my misery. So well had I been indoctrinated that I could not accept help from the enemy.

One incident remains in my mind of the time spent in Holyhead. At the end of the singing lesson at school, "God save the King" was started and I backed out of the class. One of the teachers, noticing me, said to her colleague, "Good God, the child refuses to sing the anthem". The day's work finished with the singing of the anthem, and as the school emptied I was kept back by the younger of the two teachers, who, when we were alone, put her arms

about me and said a lot of nice things to me. I have an idea she was from Limerick. She spoke to me about de Valera and, if I mistake not, said she was his cousin. I have never tried to trace her since, though I have often thought of her and wondered what had happened to her.

In September, 1916, I was sent to school to the House of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, Belcamp College, Raheny, Co. Dublin, and shortly after my arrival there I had a letter from home telling me that my father had decided he could not conscientiously continue working in Great Britain and that he was returning to Enniscorthy where a temporary job was awaiting him. So when the Christmas holidays came that year - 1916 - to Enniscorthy I wended my way and there spent the three or four weeks of freedom - a comparative freedom only for the country was snow-bound, the weather extremely bitter, and huddled over a fire one spent the time reading a book, or war news, or some seditious leaflet or pamphlet which had surreptiously found its way into my father's possession.

A great change was apparent in the Ireland to which we had returned in 1916 compared to the Ireland which we had left earlier that year. There was now open hostility to the British Forces, which at the time consisted of the English Army and the Royal Irish Constabulary, the latter an armed semi-military police force recruited exclusively from Irish youth, officers in many cases being men who had seen overseas service with the British Army. This is not to say, however, that the entire population had become anti-British, or had any great sympathy with the Sinn Féin ideal or aim - the right of the people of Ireland to choose their own government without outside interference or influence. Rather, it meant that the expression of the Sinn Féin ideal

which culminated in the 1916 Rising, added to the ferocity with which the Rising had been suppressed, and had caused many people to realise the fact that there was an Irish nation, and youth, in particular, had as it were begun to emerge from a restless slumber.

The year 1917 is to me a dead year. I have no recollection of it much. I returned to college in January and spent the usual holiday periods at home in Enniscorthy with the rest of the family. I do, however, recall that sometine in 1917 de Valera won the Clare election for Sinn Féin, and later that year W.T. Cosgrave had a similar victory in Kilkenny over the Irish Party candidates. Raids and arrests were numerous during 1917, and I think it was in the autumn of the year that Tom Ashe died on a hunger-strike. The subsequent funeral was proof indeed, if proof was needed, of the changed attitude of the people towards the I.R.A., or Volunteers as they were at the time called.

It might be explained appropriately here that while many members of Sinn Féin were also Volunteers, the two organisations were distinct entities. Sinn Féin was a political organisation whose declared aims were: (1) to deny the right of the British Parliament and Crown or other outside authority to make laws for Ireland; (2) to use every means to render England powerless to hold Ireland in subjection by force or otherwise; (3) to secure international recognition of Ireland as an independent Republic; (4) to discourage emigration, promote tillage and suchlike activities, for the food situation was such, owing to the English Food Controller's demands, that a state of famine might easily ensue. The duties of Sinn Féin were the contesting of elections, propaganda, counter propaganda and the multifarious activities of any normal political

organisation. The Volunteers, on the other hand, were a purely military organisation, whose object, as expressed in the Oath of Allegiance which was administered in 1919, was to defend the Irish Republic against all enemies, foreign or domestic. Both organisations were to a great extent controlled and influenced by the Irish Republican Brotherhood, which had been founded in 1858 in the U.S.A. by John O'Mahony and other remnants of the 1848 struggle. The controlling centre of the I.R.B. was still in the U.S.A. It was responsible for the attempted rescue of prisoners in Manchester in 1865, as a result of which Allen, Larkin and O'Brien were hanged. It was responsible for the abortive 1867 Rising. It was responsible to a large extent for the 1916 Rising. In short, it was a militant oath-bound society restlessly seeking a vulnerable spot in Britain's armour.

During the year 1917 a subtle change had taken place in college. Instead of cricket and rugby, we now turned to hurling and Gaelic football. Anyone who knew any Irish was exhorted to speak it. Notices on the notice board appeared in Irish, and soon it was being widely practised throughout the place. Even English students were infected.

Rumours of compulsory military service were now rife. It had already, I think, been applied in England and some of our English students had been called up. England was now considering securing as many Volunteers as possible and scattering them widely amongst the regiments of the British Army - at least that was the rumour.

During the Christmas vacation of 1917/18, I learned that Republican or Sinn Féin Courts were being established, and the people took very kindly to them. The policy of non-co-operation was evolving. People ignored the

British Courts, and though the country was practically free of crime, the prisons were full of Sinn Féiners. During 1918, Lloyd George's "Irish Convention" was sitting - some kind of red herring devised by the subtle mind of the British Premier, ostensibly to devise a modus operandi for the future government of Ireland. When the Convention reported early in 1918, there was no publication of its report but instead a Bill was introduced in the British Parliament giving the British Government power to apply compulsory military service - or conscription - to Ireland. Even in the sheltered corridors of the college, the echo of the Irish indignation and determination to resist was heard. A document containing an anti-conscription pledge was placed on a table in the hallway, and we were told we were free to sign it or not, as consciences and wishes dictated. Needless to say, all but the English students signed, and here an incident occurred which is still clear in my memory. One of the English lads, Douglas Johnston from Liverpool, picked up the pledge and proceeded to wipe the seat of his pants with it. I hit him, rescued the paper and replaced it on the desk or table. For this Johnston was expelled.

About this time, April/May, 1918, one Dowling, a member of Brigade in Germany, was discovered on an island somewhere near Galway. This gave the British Government sufficient material to manufacture a German Plot, which it promptly did. This gave them the pretext to arrest large numbers and deport them to England, thus leaving Ireland leaderless in the struggle against conscription. Meetings were banned, football matches and concerts were raided and broken up by the R.I.C. and English soldiery, but in spite of all this, such was the will of the Irish people to resist, that concerts and

football matches and other activities carried on just as if there was not any chance of violent intervention by a bitter enemy. Many a man went to jail during this period for singing a song, and not only men but women also went to jail. During all this period Volunteers were drilling, pikes were being made; in fact, improvisation had reached new heights in the way of providing weapons to resist the enforcement of conscription. We in college were drilling with hurley sticks, our instructor Tom Collins of Clare, later a Chief Superintendent in the Garda Siochána. But, of course, conscription was not enforced - the war ended on 11th November and a few days afterwards the British Parliament was dissolved. A short time before this the power to vote and to be elected to Parliament had been conferred on women. That year I could not get home for the Christmas holidays as there was scarlet fever at home, and well do I remember the news of Sinn Féin victories coming in to the college, which I now had to myself except for the teaching staff, all priests. I remember Countess Markievicz being elected for a Dublin constituency. I remember de Valera beating John Dillon, the leader of the Parliamentary Party, by nearly two to one. These and other amazing results made Christmas a happy one.

Early in 1919 the first Dáil assembled in the Mansion House in Dublin and carried the Declaration of Independence - a copy of which was given to me by Father Willie Doyle, a brother of P.S. Doyle, T.D.

Sometime after this, while out on a walk near Coolock, Co. Dublin, we were carrying hurleys and suddenly we halted - about 35 of us - and started drilling, Tom Collins giving the words of command. We were approached by a Sergeant and Constable of the R.I.C. and ordered to desist.

We let them see, in no uncertain fashion, that we would brook no interference. We continued our drilling, and finally marched off in formation with our hurley sticks at the slope. During the week which followed, a British official from the Castle called to the college about our conduct. Collins, myself and some others were called in and asked to apologise, which we did not. The President, Reverend William O'Connor, did so. That, for the moment, ended the matter, though when we were breaking up for the summer vacation Collins and I were told not to come back. Correction here - Collins was told not to come back; in my case, a letter arrived just before college re-opened in September advising my father that as I had done well in my examinations, to put me in the Civil Service. The letter also said that I was "proof against discipline". It was written by the aforesaid Reverend William O'Connor, a native of Dublin. To suggest to my father that I enter the British Civil Service was just as if one suggested selling his daughter to a white slaver. Instead, I got an office job in Dundalk, where I joined the Volunteers, probably in September, 1919, took the Oath and was allotted to a company under the command of a Captain Paddy Brannigan.

I was now in lodging, freed of all parental control. My landlady, a Miss Walsh, was a daughter of an R.I.C. man. My two fellow lodgers, Ned Bailey and Mick Lynch, were also Volunteers, but belonging to a different company to mine. I forget Lynch's occupation, but Bailey worked in a butcher's shop, was always cheerful and ever ready to drop his knife and take up his gun. I remember an early morning raid on the principal post office for the purpose of getting mails. I waited some distance from the post

office. When the job was done, Ned cycled up to me, handed me his gun and calmly cycled off to his work.

The Black and Tans were about this time beginning to arrive. This was a force recruited in England to augment the R.I.C., whose source of manpower had dried up for various reasons. (A recruiting poster of the period bore the text: "Join the Navy and see the world"; someone further embellished the poster with "Join the R.I.C. and see the next world). The new force, paid 10/- per day, were a particularly vicious and dangerous type, criminals by instinct whose characters had not been improved by their war service. They were suitable for the job for which Dublin Castle required them - the terrorising of the population. When they first appeared they wore a mixed uniform of khaki and black, hence the name. Another force recruited at this time was the Auxiliary R.I.C. - recruited from ex-officers of the British Army and paid £1 per day. They came to be known as Auxies, were organised on a military basis - in companies - were not under the control of the British Army and were not subject to the Civil Courts.

The establishment of these two forces was a subtle move on the part of the British Government. Parliament would not vote money for extra troops for Ireland, but extra money for police duties in Ireland was readily granted. Another difficulty was solved for England by ridding the country - England - of a type which was rapidly getting out of hand.

A state of open warfare now existed in the country. On the one hand were the British Army, regular R.I.C., Black and Tans and the Auxies, with every type of modern armament; on the other side were the Volunteers, or

Irish Republican Army, almost unarmed, but inspired by a determination to free their country from foreign rule, and fortified by the support of the great majority of the Irish people.

Early in 1920 I saw my first Black and Tan - in Dundalk. He was drunk and making quite a show of himself on the sidewalk. Sometime, I was witness to, but not a participant in, an attack on a small R.I.C. patrol, which included one Black and Tan in his piebald dress. It was on a Sunday afternoon. The Tan was shot and, I think, another constable. The attackers quickly scattered - one of them was Seamus Hughes.

My family had now returned to Westport, where the brewery shut down in 1916 had re-opened under new ownership, and my father was offered his old job back again. He accepted with alacrity. He loved the West. Soon after the mid-year passed I got holidays, came home to Westport and did not return to my job.

Westport I found greatly changed, as a result of the measures adopted by the British following the shooting of Milling, the R.M., in March, 1919. These included the banning of all fairs and markets in and around the town, which had been declared a martial law area. The result was economic depression, with several businesses nearly ruined and many employees gone to England and elsewhere.

Much speculation was caused by the shooting of Milling and many theories were offered concerning the affair. One of the most persistent of these was that the shooting was done by the R.I.C. District Inspector of the period who was said to have established a liaison with Mrs. Milling. There is no truth in this.

Milling was shot as the result of an indiscreet remark he himself made in the bar of the Railway Hotel, then, as now, occupied by the Jeffers family, who were English. Joe Ring was at this time awaiting trial on some political charge or other. I think it was on account of his resistance, on the occasion of a political meeting, to the R.I.C. efforts to break up the meeting. A Sergeant or Head Constable Sheridan was injured in the melee and Joe was arrested. It appears Milling remarked in effect in the bar in the hotel that Ring would be before him, Milling, the following week and that Joe would get a good long rest. The remark was, of course, relayed to Joe's friends, and on a Saturday night before retiring - 29th March, 1919, I think - Milling, while in an upstairs room putting forward the clock to summer time, was shot from the far side of the road. Three men took part in the shooting, and, if my memory is correct, they were Joe Gill, Joe Walsh and Joe Ruddy, all Joes, and Ring was also Joe! The deed was probably decided upon by the I.R.B. We never talked much about it.

Mrs. Milling and her family were in due course and process of law awarded £5,000 compensation, the entire sum to be levied on the Urban District of Westport. The Urban Council, rather than strike a rate, resigned in body, so there was no statutory authority left to collect Mrs. Milling's award. The British Government, no doubt, paid the compensation.

About July, 1920, the West Mayo Brigade (later to become the No. 1 Brigade, 4th Western Division) was formed, the old unwieldy Mayo Brigade which was coterminous with the county of Mayo having been divided into North, South, West and East Brigades.

The first to command the Brigade was Tomás Ó Deirg, who at the time was on the teaching staff of the Ballina Technical School, teaching, probably, commercial subjects, as he had taken his degree in Commerce at University College, Galway. Tom's parents resided in Westport, and there he arrived each Saturday evening to spend the week-end in various activities connected with the organisations of the Brigade. A cool, clear-headed, calm man was Ó Deirg. His emotions perfectly controlled, he could at the same time lash with a caustic bitter invective anyone unfortunate enough to offend or displease him. I remember on one occasion a dispatch rider- a lady - had perforce to return to Brigade H.Q. and report that she had failed to deliver a message to Tom MacGuire, O/C South Mayo Brigade. Ó Deirg, having heard her report and her excuses for failure, merely remarked: "Could they not have found someone more willing and more intelligent than you, Miss ....., to send on such an important mission"? When it is realised that Miss ..... was a voluntary worker like us all, the bitterness of Tom's remark is really emphasised.

Who was Ó Deirg's deputy or Vice O/C of the Brigade?; I know not. Perhaps none was appointed, but that is scarcely likely, especially when it is considered that Tom was absent in Ballina at work. However, I cannot at this stage recall a Vice O/C.

In the early days of the newly formed Brigade, Ned Moane was Adjutant, and Tom Ketterick, Quartermaster. Of the latter, Ernie O'Malley once said he could be trusted to borrow a sword from the Angel Gabriel or the Archangel Michael and question its return. Ketterick was (and is in 1957) 'Duine ann Féin' the Irish phrase has it - a

personality all his own, not cut to any type or pattern, debonair, humorous, highly-strung and very brave. On one occasion when travelling from Dublin to the West with two suitcases of arms, the train arrived at Roundstone in Connemara - whence Tom intended to make his way to Westport via road - only to be met by a posse of R.I.C. under a Head Constable for the purpose of searching the train and, of course, the passengers. Tom eyed the Head Constable, sprang to the platform, walked briskly up to that dignatory, told him some story about a dying relative and a long trip from some outpost of the Empire to endeavour to reach the bedside in time. The Head Constable kindly detailed two of his men to fetch the traveller's luggage and carry it to a garage a short way from the station where a Ford Sedan was available for hire, and which was promptly hired and in due course deposited Tom and his precious cargo near Westport. Such a man was Tom, and it was a pleasure to work with him, which I did for a while.

Moane, the Adjutant, was serious-minded, much given to periods of reflective silence. A first-rate organiser, he tramped the brigade area night after night, and later on, day after day, appointing officers, promoting, demoting, altering this, patching that, until he had established a complete unit with its communications and intelligence services in good order. Moane had an almost pathological horror of being captured. He had already spent two periods in British prisons and he was determined never to return.

In the new brigade there were four battalions, based in Castlebar, Westport, Newport and Louisburgh, and numbered 1 to 4, but which bore which number I cannot remember. James Chambers covered the Castlebar Battalion;

Joe Ring the Westport, while Patrick Kelly and Michael Kilroy commanded Louisburgh and Newport respectively.

Summer was now about to give way to autumn in that year of 1920, and the brigade was on a firm footing, every post filled with understudies where necessary. I myself was, for instance, Ketterick's understudy and assisted him while around, taking over his duties when he was away on one of his frequent questing missions - with the object of improving our slender stock of arms.

About the end of 1920, a Brigade Council meeting was held in Kelly's of Brackagh near Newport. Ó Deirg, I recall, arrived late owing to engine trouble. The Brigade Council consisted of the staff with the Battalion Commandants. As I was not on the staff, only attached to it as it were, I was not at the meeting, at which the decision was reached to press ahead with the formation of a Flying Column or Columns and to adopt a more active and aggressive policy.

October and November of that year were mild and slightly misty, but with no signs of approaching winter apparent except perhaps the shortening days, but a gloom deeper than any winter shadows was cast over the Irish nation by two events - one the death of Terence MacSwiney on hunger-strike in Brixton Prison, London, and the other the hanging in Mountjoy Prison of Kevin Barry, a Volunteer of 18 years of age, a medical student who had been taken prisoner by the British during an attack on a British detachment in, I think, North King St., Dublin. Many efforts were made to save him, even by British politicians, but without success. It is perhaps worth recording here that some three years later Mrs. Charlotte Despard told me that she made a frantic journey from some European place or other to Dublin in an effort to use her influence with

her brother, the Lord Lieutenant (Earl of Ypres, then Sir John French) to have the execution cancelled. She told me that she was certain that if she had reached 'John' in time, the execution would not have taken place. Mrs. Despard, née Charlotte French, was, incidentally, a staunch upholder of Ireland's rights and a very outspoken supporter of the Volunteers, though she was, on principle, a Pacifist. The gloom and grief that followed the death of Barry and MacSwiney served only to stiffen the resolve of the youth to resist, to fight to the kill, to kill and destroy the evil British Empire, because at last it had appeared in all its ghastly barbarity naked and unashamed before the world.

And so it was that organisation and drilling went on apace, and one Saturday night Tomás Ó Deirg awoke in his father's home to find British bayonets at his throat. He was ordered to dress and before long he was on his way to Athlone British Army Barracks, en route for Park internment camp, where he spent the rest of the war.

Kilroy was now promoted - by selection - O/C Brigade. Ned Moane had some time previously been promoted Vice O/C, and Johnny Gibbons, Adjutant.

Just about this time Moane called me one afternoon, and after the usual formal greeting, when we were alone he said: "McGuire, the D.I. in Westport, has sent us a message that the Tans are arriving in force to-night to burn, flog and shoot". "Good", I said, "then we will be able to get a crack at them". "We want to know a lot more before we decide that" he answered. We arranged to meet that night, a short distance away. We marched to Tom O'Brien's in Moyhastin, where we spent the night. I did not know it at the time but I had set out on a journey which was not to end until the close of the civil

war three years later, a journey not one step of which I would willingly have missed. However, that is another story and I anticipate, as the novelists of the day were wont to say or write.

When Moane and I awoke next morning in Tom O'Brien's (Tom, by the way, had suffered imprisonment during the African troubles in the 1880-1890 period), there was a sense of anti-climax, nothing had happened during the night. There had been no arrests or captures, and no one had been shot or flogged. We had arranged a rendezvous with others of the likely victims, and thither we repaired. We had foregathered some ten or twelve of us on a high wind-swept hill from which there was an uninterrupted view of the country round about in every direction. All day long we remained there, nothing happened, no news came. It got colder, we got hungrier. At last I pulled out my Mauser pistol or 'Peter the Painter' and fired two shots in the air. (I had walked a bit away from the others). The result was amazing. Every man fell flat on his belly and got ready for the worst. Each one had a pistol or revolver. Rather shamefacedly now, I approached to apologise for my impulsive indiscretion. No good; I suppose I shouldn't have blamed them if they had set to and beaten me with the butts of their weapons. Only Moane remained serious. He started by asking me did I not understand that I was giving the position away. I said I didn't agree, that we could see for miles around and that anyone within range of our vision could see us. The net result was that we retired to the warmth of a turf fire in Hughes's house at Lark Hill or Lank Hill. My conduct, I know, is indefinable, but consider it was now afternoon and from a light breakfast in the early morning I had

nothing to eat. We were standing all day on a wind swept height, up to our ankles in water - for the place was a marsh without suitable dress. Moane only was suitably dressed for the occasion. He was a farmer and his normal working dress included breeches, leggings and good stout boots. This was his dress on this day, but the remainder had only their townsmen's shoes. Several times during the long weary hours while waiting for some dispatch or some news from Westport, it was urged on Ned Moane to seek shelter in some house, placing guards. Ned refused, and at last, in exasperation, I walked away and acted in the irresponsible fashion I have just described. I give this affair in detail so as to show in its proper perspective the attitude of my superiors towards some of my subsequent deeds.

When nightfall came and still no news from any source, we crossed the valley to Curvey Mountain on the slopes of which we spent the night in the home of the Mulroys. During the following day news came to us from Johnny Duffy, O/C Aughagower Company, telling us of the arrival in Westport, not of a large party of Black and Tans but three Intelligence men, who visited each of our homes and acted towards our people in a rather puckish and mischievous fashion. This left us guessing; we knew not what to expect now. During the day we were joined by another refugee, Charles Hughes, a middle-aged businessman from Westport who was looked upon as a likely target for a Black and Tan attack. He had been an outspoken supporter of Sinn Féin and the Volunteers and was probably a member of the I.R.B., and had been arrested following the Rising. In the course of the evening we held a conference and decided that anyone who could safely do so should return to his home, whereas anyone who was thought to be in danger should remain 'on the run'. For myself, I was detailed to accompany Moane on a tour of the

battalions H.Q.s, and, accordingly, on the following morning we set off for the Louisburgh Battalion H.Q. where we met the O/C, Patrick Kelly (now a prosperous businessman in Westport) and the Vice O/C, Andy Harney. Both these men, like Moane, were married and had responsibilities. I remember commenting on this fact and contrasting their position with my own gay and cheerful condition, and suggested that any fighting should be left to fellows in my position. After some days round Louisburgh, Ned and I set off for Castlebarbut, but we never reached it as on the way we were intercepted by Michael Kilroy, the new O/C of the West Mayo Brigade. (Before we met Kilroy, Ned had left me at the foot of the high wall surrounding Westport Union Hospital to act as sentry while he scaled the wall and made a stealthy visit to see his wife and day old daughter.)

Kilroy, Moane and I put up for a few days in the home of Jim Kelly, the Captain in charge of Ballinsleva Company which was attached to Newport Battalion. It was decided to speed up training and I was detailed to attach to myself one Gannon, a British ex-soldier, or, rather, an Irishman who had spent some years in the British army. He had seen four years of war service, and together we toured the brigade area, visiting all companies with a Lee Enfield rifle, spending a few nights at each point and giving as many Volunteers as possible an intensive, if not extensive, course in the rifle. In this way we gave a goodly number of keen Volunteers an intimate knowledge of the mechanism of the weapon and made them familiar with its "feel", so that if at any time a Volunteer managed to get his hands on a rifle he would know what to do with it.

Sometime after Christmas of 1920, Gannon was taken from me and I have never seen him since. He was reared, if not born and reared, in England and had a powerful Cockney accent, and many considered that he was a British Agent. There is, of course, no truth in that; he was solidly on our side and imparted his knowledge to us without stint.

There now set in for me a period of inspections of arms, combined with instruction in the use of the rifle, grenade, revolver and semi-automatic pistol, of which there were quite an assortment in the brigade. I travelled most of the area taking a census of the various weapons and examining their condition, although the main strength was in Westport Battalion which had 12 Lee Enfields in good condition. One did not feel depressed at the scarcity of weapons; one always felt that there was always the chance of getting more, I suppose. The other battalions, as far as I remember, had scarcely any Lee Enfields. Westport's preponderance was due to the enthusiasm of its members, who subscribed generously to the arms fund, and to the generosity of men like Charles Hughes (whom I mentioned before) and Myles Hawkshaw (another shopkeeper in Westport) who were at all times ready to supply our Q/M with any funds he required for arms.

Our Q/M, Ketterick, made several trips to England and Dublin in an effort to get weapons, but the largest consignment he imported was confiscated by G.H.Q. and diverted to the South because he had infringed a G.H.Q. regulation which forbade the purchase of arms abroad except through "proper channels". 'Red tape', it seems, early on permeated our organisation; we saw other instances of it later.

Having finished my tour, I 'lay up' in the Aughagower Company area where I soon became friendly with Paddy Duffy, brother of the Company Commander, Johnny Duffy. Paddy was, and is still, a natural soldier, a splendid shot and the most modestly brave man I ever met. I was present one night in an outhouse of Duffy's near the dwelling-house with Johnny and Paddy cleaning our revolvers. Paddy's went off; the soft nosed .45 bullet entered the centre of his left hand. After a hurried discussion we decided to say nothing until the household had retired, when Johnny and I would render what first-aid we could. In the interval Paddy was to keep the injured hand in his pocket and say nothing. We entered the Duffy home and sat at the fire in the sitting-room for a considerable time, until at length Paddy fainted. The story had to be told then to the family and someone was sent five or six miles to Westport for a doctor, not so easy with enemy patrols about, but eventually Dr. Moran arrived, extracted the bullet and fixed up Paddy. We moved him next day to a place of safety. That was the only treatment that Paddy's wound got for months; no wonder that for years he had great trouble with that neglected wound.

One night before that incident occurred - a Sunday night - Paddy and I were returning on foot through the village of Aughagower from some mission or other. A chance acquaintance was walking between Paddy and me. The night was unbelievably dark, when suddenly khaki-clad figures sprang out at us with fixed bayonets, ordering us to put up our hands. I did not comply immediately for the very good reason that my Webley .45 was in my left-hand trouser pocket, a bad place for it. Another yell to put up my hands rang out and somehow I managed to ease the gun

out of my pocket, drop it on my foot and kick it to one side. I was wearing a trench coat with slit pockets, otherwise I could not, unseen, drop the gun. The feelings of the other two with me, who knew I was armed, may be imagined - Paddy, with a bayonet at his throat, waiting for the sound of my shot. We were asked our names. I gave mine. Paddy gave a false one. We were told to proceed up the street where the main body of troops were halted and where a light of some kind could be seen. We had hardly moved off when Paddy and I, as if by pre-arrangement, made a dive across the graveyard wall and ran for dear life for the open country, which, fortunately, we reached. At daylight I retrieved my gun, none the worse for its night in the open. I omitted to add that a few shots were sent after us, but without effect.

I called into Father McHugh for breakfast. He was the Catholic Curate in Aughagower. I told him my tale of the night before and was very warmly congratulated on "my presence of mind", because, as he said, "If you shot one of them the village would have been burned and we would all have been shot". I was again to meet Father McHugh who, unlike his elderly Parish Priest, was a whole-hearted supporter of ours.

The P.P. of Aughagower, Father Flatley, was a supporter of the British regime and corresponded with an Under-Secretary of Dublin Castle. We did, in fact, intercept a letter of his to the Under-Secretary in one of our raids on the mail train, in which he denounced his Fr. McHugh as a supporter of the rebels and as one accustomed to consort with them and who attended them regularly, hearing their Confessions etc. It was my opinion that Father Flatley should have been shot as a spy. My opinion was not, however, accepted.

Early in January, 1921, I called to home one evening. My mother was startled to see me as she told me that a few nights earlier she had found a Black and Tan hidden in an angle of the porch, apparently lying in wait for myself, Moane or any other "game" who might come the way. (Moane's house was just across the road). She collected all the slops and greasy water she could find, and having given it a quick boil she went out and "accidentally" threw it over the Tan. The news perturbed me as I feared retaliation. She had also news of various outrages carried out by the R.I.C. and Tans, particularly in the Newport area where the D.I. of the R.I.C., a man named Fudge, was very active and perpetrated numerous atrocities on the civil population, even old men were not safe from his attentions. I left the house, about ten minutes walk from the town of Westport, went into the town and called at Walsh's of Barrack Hill. Walsh was an officer in the town company. As luck would have it, he had just heard that Fudge and a party were enjoying themselves in the West Hotel. I told him I was going to join the party and asked him to accompany me. "Jobber" Walsh, as he was nicknamed, declined, saying that he did not want to have anything to do with a job which he rightly described as "unofficial" like another "job" I did the previous December when I held up and stripped two British soldiers on the Castlebar-Westport road.

I left the "Jobber" hurriedlyand made for the West Hotel, some 400 yards away. I had to walk through Bridge St. to get there and on the way down I made my plan, decided which way I would enter the hotel and made up my mind that in all probality Fudge and his party would be in the front room just off the hall. I wished I had a grenade, because then the job would be easy as it would only mean tossing

the bomb through the window of the room the party was in. I halted outside the bar door in Bridge St. and listened. All seemed quiet inside, and I went round the corner to the entrance and entered the building by the hall door. There was light in the room where I fancied the party would be, and there was a door leading into that room on my right. I passed this door and entered the tap room, as a door from the tap room also gave access to the room I wanted. I had made up my mind to push in the door and start shooting immediately, so I threw the door open and found the room empty, with smoke curling up from an ash tray with cigarette butts on the centre of the table. I now felt nervy and shaky, went to the bar, had a glass of port and told Mick Feehan, the proprietor, that I was looking for Fudge. He seemed startled to see me and told me to take things easy. I again asked about Fudge. Mick thought the party was still in the room and seemed very relieved when he learned they were gone. He gave me another glass of port and I returned to my billet, a few miles out in the country.

The news travelled swiftly and I was summoned to the Presence. I marched to Ballinacorriga and listened for half an hour to Moane and Kilroy telling me how irresponsible they considered me. It appears I did not realise that an attack of the kind I attempted might interfere with other plans, might even endanger life, etc. etc. I said I thought it my duty to rid the country of a blackguard, that I felt I would be doing a good deed in killing him, and that anyone who got the chance to kill him and didn't, shared in his crimes. No good! I was confined until further notice to the Ballinasleva Company area.

Dawn raids were a feature of enemy activity at this time and I had made it a practice to be up and about before dawn. So it was that one dark morning I saw a figure coming towards me along a path, noiselessly. I called "Halt"; no reply; I fired and the figure fell. Cautiously I approached and found a man in a long dark overcoat groaning. I found he was hit in the left shoulder. I brought him to Michael Murray's of Ballinacorriga where his wound was dressed. It appeared that the poor fellow had decided to emigrate and at that time one had to have a permit from an I.R.A. officer not below the rank of Comdt. or Battalion Commander, I think, and it was looking for a Battalion Commander the man was when I shot him. He got his permit and went to the U.S.A. He applied in due course for a disability pension and for all I know, got it. His name - Moran. Of course, I had another interview with Moane, but the sentence of confinement was remitted.

Sometime towards the end of February Joe Ring came the way. He told me he was forming a Flying Column in the Battalion and asked me would I care to join it. I said I would gladly as a buck private. I wanted no more work, and so it happened that 12 to 15 of us paraded one showery winter's night at Carrowbawn under James Malone, Captain of Westport Company. (He was later known as Bruddy Malone). We marched along the Leenane Road, turned west at Brackloon Wood and finally finished up in Teevenacroghy National School where the Brigade Staff were to meet us. Fitful showers of sleet alternating with periods of brilliant moonlight had been our experience during the march. Now we were drenched and miserable, sitting in the dark, waiting, no sign of "Brigade" turning up.

There was great grumbling and grousing and finally someone suggested that we would cease to recognise the Brigade. Joe Baker's calm voice was then heard to say, "Who could recognise the Brigade since Moane took Kilroy's moustache"? Ned, who had been clean-shaven, now wore a moustache, while Kilroy had shaven his off. Paddy Duffy added to the enjoyment by his impromptu parody on Clare's Dragoons - "Feeble was the old Brigade, feeble is the new one too".

It was some days later when Brigade finally arrived. We were then further west near Louisburgh. The object of our concentration was to prepare to knock out a convoy of troops in tenders which occasionally plyed between Louisburgh and Westport. Our numbers had now been augmented by new arrivals.

On 17th March we took up positions on the south side of the road east of Murrisk. Showers of sleet made our position unpleasant; it was a damnable day; we were stretched along, I should say, 400 yards of road, a man here and there, a group of 4 or 5 occasionally, no cover, only the sod fence bordering the road.

There were in all about 25 men with 12 good serviceable Lee Enfield rifles; the rest had shotguns, rook rifles and an assortment of weapons difficult to describe; home-made grenades were plentiful, but their efficiency had not been tested and no one knew how they would function. In fact, at one stage I said that if they were all thrown together there would be no survivor on either side. However, in the West they were not tested. The day wore on and the weather got more bitter towards evening. There were no meals as no commissariat existed and no enemy arrived to dispel the tedium. The position was fine if the first blow was a knock-out blow, but if not

and the issue had to be fought out, we were hopelessly held - the fences all ran perpendicular to the road and there would have been no chance of an easy withdrawal.

At dark we pulled out and marched to Duffy's of Prospect, who, with the help of neighbours, billeted us. Jim Duffy of Prospect was the local Company Captain who was later killed accidentally by a bullet from my automatic, a parabellum pistol, fired by Jimmy Flaherty. The whole affair was bad for morale, and in the morning some of the fellows, those who could do so with safety, returned to their normal avocations.

It was clear that something was wrong. Intelligence was poor and the only bright spot was the loyal adherence to the cause and the unbelievable generosity and hospitality of the population, "the peasants", a hardy stock who had wrested their possessions in their own warfare from the landlords. The help and succour they gave us at this period and subsequently cannot easily be depicted. Their homes, their beds, their livestock were at our disposal, and this despite the fact that harbouring us had become so dangerous as to merit death at the worst and imprisonment at the best. When we arrived in an area in the small still hours of the morning, as we always marched at night, households were disturbed and the beds vacated and handed over to us without a complaint. In fact, we were welcomed. In retrospect, the most wonderful thing about all this was that the people on whom we quartered ourselves went about their everyday work, sending the children to school and doing their own arduous day's toil without showing any signs of strain or giving the enemy any hope of co-operation. This is a thought to be dwelt upon. We were secure, we were safe,

the children did not discuss with their friends what they had seen that morning. Such a spirit, such loyalty can only seldom in the history of mankind have been produced, and one felt humble in its presence. The generosity of these people on the West Mayo countryside cannot be described adequately. They shared their frugal rations with us; they went further - they provided us with such food as fowl which they normally reserved for Christmas and other notable occasions. Nothing was too good for us, and in all the weeks and months I lived in their country houses I do not recall one incident which could be described as ungracious.

We lived according to a routine now. Joe Ring had taken permanent command. We rose at a fixed hour, washed, breakfasted, and paraded with arms, did certain drills and training practices and lived much like soldiers in garrison, except that we were on constant guard against surprise. The extent of our security precautions was determined and decided by the nature of the place we were in and its proximity to the enemy posts. At night guard duty was done by local Volunteers, though again, if we felt that extra precaution was necessary, regular column men would be detailed to stiffen the guard. As I said previously, we always marched at night, with a couple of local Volunteers as guides, who were replaced by relays of other Volunteers as we proceeded.

A few days after the St. Patrick's Day debacle, the Brigade Staff again joined us at Clady, a village or group of houses overlooking the Leenane road near Cushlough. On the evening of March 22nd, 1921, I was ordered by Ned Moane to proceed to Derryherbert, a few miles westward, there to interview the local Company Captain, John Hastings

of Cushlough, and get all the information I could from him about enemy patrols, both on the Leenane-Westport road and the road linking that road with Drummin, where the last isolated R.I.C. barracks in the area was situated. The Brigade Staff were, I understood, to undertake a reconnaissance of the area at once with the intention of selecting a good ambush position. Before I left for Derryherbert I had a chat with Kilroy. I stressed the scarcity of rifle ammunition and said that if we encountered any considerable force and failed to end the fight at once, we were defeated. I remember, in particular, saying that even a small body of men with plenty of ammunition could hold us until reinforcements arrived. We got down to figures and found we had less than 20 rounds per man, notwithstanding Ketterick's efforts to get supplies. Kilroy held that five of us, with ten rounds per man, in an ambush should account for 50 enemy. That silenced me, so I set off for Capt. Hastings with an uneasy mind.

I finished my business with Hastings and started back on the long, lonely trek to the main road across the bog. Johnny offered to accompany me and scout the route. I declined, saying there was no need and I would keep a keen eye for trouble, which, indeed, I did. Just as I emerged out on the main road at Cushlough R.C. Church, I was startled by the sudden apparition of a woman who said: "The R.I.C. are just gone ahead of you". She pointed in the Westport direction. I asked her whether they were cycling or walking. She said they were walking, wheeling their bicycles. I peered in the direction in which she pointed but could not see anything, although the night was very bright. I turned to ask her some question but she had vanished, where or how I know not, but she probably slipped noiselessly into the yews around the church.

I got a kind of eerie feeling as I started at the double after the R.I.C. patrol, which the girl had told me consisted of a Sergeant and three constables. To explain the feeling I got, I thought I had seen a ghost but to-day I have a more mundane explanation. I think it was a girl waiting for her lover and they had to avoid being seen by the patrol, who would probably have asked awkward questions. As silently as possible, keeping to the grass margin along the road, I trotted after the patrol. I had no plan, and as I was wondering what to do the silence of the night was shattered by several volleys of revolver shots somewhere ahead. I trotted on and finally met Kilroy, Ring and Bruddy Malone just emerging from the Drummin by-road. I didn't have to ask what happened. Joe Ring, who was in ebullient mood, gave me a graphic account of the affair; the other two were silent.

It appears that the three of them had started on their "recce" shortly after my departure for Derryherbert, that they had examined various positions and were walking in the direction of Drummin when they were overtaken by the patrol which I had so narrowly missed. The R.I.C. sprang from their bicycles, calling on the lads to halt, which they did, swinging round and pulling their guns. Soon a battle at point blank range took place. It was all over in a few minutes. Sergt. Coghlan was killed, Constables Maguire, Love and Creedon were all wounded. Some of the local people were asked to go for assistance for the wounded. The lads then took the arms of the enemy and left the scene, walking into me as they reached the main road. The four of us then marched in the direction of Clady to rejoin the column. We soon saw the Verey lights rocket skywards from Drummin barracks and knew that succour was on the way to the wounded and re-inforcements

getting ready to capture us. After a meal the column 'fell in' and marched several miles towards Aughagower, finally arriving in Ardagh before dawn, where we slept until we were aroused in the afternoon. I jumped from bed and saw a tender full of Tans flash past, followed by others. We dressed and fell back on the mountain for safety. We were not spotted and no engagement ensued.

I remember the previous night as I plodded along by Kilroy's side, with the column on the march. Kilroy remarked to me: "It's very hard to kill a man, Tommy". This recalled to my mind some doubts which I had entertained at one time about the moral aspect of killing and which I had to resolve for myself. I had at the time given the matter a lot of thought and finally reasoned that the killing of English groops and R.I.C. was justified as they were in the country against the wishes of the inhabitants, and that it was similar to a householder using violence against a burglar, that the troops and R.I.C. were acting immorally by trying to coerce the Irish people and that anyone who did not resistwas acquiescent by default. Such was my boyish reasoning.

Enemy reaction to the above fight included the burning of several homesteads in the vicinity, the burning of Charles Hughes's drapery premises in Westport. Hughes himself was in hiding. He had two nephews with the column - Johnny and Paddy Duffy. Charles Hughes and Owen Hughes of Lank Hill were sterling supporters of ours. The Hughes' home in Lank Hill was a clearing house for our communications system and was at all times at our disposal until it became too dangerous to use owing to the attentions of the enemy.

Shortly after this scrap with the R.I.C., Brigade again left us to our devices and there followed a period of

frustration. We marched, we slept, we ate, we drilled, we had a dance cum concert every night, but to some of us it seemed that there was no thought of fight. For a month we did nothing except wait in ambush positions during the day, then plenty of dancing and singing at night. I began to feel ashamed of being quartered on the people, some of them who had scarcely enough for themselves and their children. I tried to get some of the boys to break away with me, but they very sensibly refused. Finally, on about the 21st April, I think, I succeeded in persuading Dan Gavin, Jack McDonagh and Mick (Bully) Staunton to join me in a foray on Westport, about five miles away. So it happened that late that evening we slipped away and into Westport, reaching the town at the railroad station where we thought we might meet an R.I.C. patrol, but we didn't. Openly we moved through the town, casually we sauntered into the shops to see people who fervently wished us in Hades, but no patrol appeared. Eventually we went to Mick Staunton's house for a meal, after which we proceeded to the top of James St. and fired a few volleys at the R.I.C. barracks, but failed to get a reply from them. We then left the town and returned to where we had left the column, only to find that when we were missed the previous evening Ring had held a Council of War, which correctly surmised that we were gone to attack Westport. They decided that in that case reinforcements would be directed from Castlebar , where, in addition to a couple of hundred regular R.I.C. and Black and Tans, there was a battalion of Infantry and some Cavalry. The Infantry was the 2nd Battalion, Border Regiment. Their O/C was Colonel Packenham. (Months later I met this officer. On a Sunday evening in February, 1922, one of our G.H.Q. staff officers, Staff Capt. M. Rynne on the Evacuation Staff,

(now Irish Ambassador in Spain, 1957) called to the barracks in Westport, produced his credentials and said he had come to take over Castlebar Barracks and wanted an officer of the local brigade to accompany him. I at the time, as Brigade Adjutant, was the senior officer in the barracks, so we drove to Castlebar, and on presenting ourselves at the British occupied barracks I was objected to on account of being in uniform. Capt. Rynne entered the barracks. I went to the local hotel. After a while a British officer arrived and plaintively said that they had orders to leave on the first train the following morning, but that they could not do so without handing over to us, which they could not do unless I agreed to take an inventory of the barracks and give a receipt. I said I wasn't worried about their difficulty, but insisted that if I was to enter the barracks it would have to be in uniform, otherwise I was going back to Westport. I said I would wait half an hour for a reply, and some 15 minutes later he was back to say I could enter in uniform, which I did. We did our job that night, slept in Paddy Carney's and took over the barracks next morning. Rynne remakred to me: "I'm glad you acted as you did about the uniform.")

To intercept these reinforcements on their way to Westport the column forced marched to the Castlebar-Westport road and spent a very miserable night waiting for reinforcements which never came. All this did not serve to sweeten Joe Ring's disposition towards us "mutineers", especially when he arrived at our billets to find us still indulging in a sound sleep. A speedy courtmartial was set up consisting of Ring, John Duffy, O/C of the Aughagower Company, and Bruddy Malone, the sentence - dismissed from the column, reduced to "disarming",

and, finally, before the day was very old we were let off with a caution. Johnny Duffy has since told me, in 1956 in fact, that he has always regretted that he took any part in the courtmartial, that in retrospect he considers we were justified.

The evening of the day on which we were courtmartialled we fell in as usual for our march to another billet. I got the post of honour that night, in that I was appointed leading man with the advance guard. As we swung along the grass margin which bordered the road, Joe Ring came up the line and fell in beside me. I sensed there were no hard feelings over my escapade. We reached the Newport-Clogher road and turned right in the direction of Westport. Suddenly from Westport direction appeared the lights of two motor vehicles. The column had not at this stage reached the main road. On seeing the lights Joe Ring and I dived across the wall on our right, followed by Jack McDonagh and Johnny Duffy. The vehicles came nearer. I saw Joe take aim with his rifle. Up went my rifle, and not a word was spoken. The first vehicle reached us, a Ford Tourer. It passed. The other we now saw was a Crossley tender full of uniformed men, some of them smoking cigarettes as we could see the glow from the burning tips. As the tender came abreast of our position Joe fired at a range of about three or four yards. So did I. I got four rounds into the lorry before the driver extinguished his lights and passed into the darkness. Both vehicles pulled up, the crews dismounted and the situation was very confused. Firing continued for some twenty minutes and finally the enemy pulled away in the direction of Newport. The British official report admitted two wounded, and claimed that two of us were hit - which was false - none of us was hit. The date was 23rd April, 1921.

On the following morning we held up and searched the morning train from Westport, hoping to get an escort taking the wounded to hospital. They were not on the train as they had been sent by road from Newport the previous night. Our information was that there were six wounded.

Things were beginning to liven up now as the raids and attempts to surround us were getting very frequent. In fact, we were not getting a lot of rest, so it was with some glee we heard in the beginning of May that a South Mayo column was engaged in a major encounter in the Partry Mountains near Tourmakeady, and that all available enemy forces were now concentrated in and around Ballinrobe. It was decided to go to the aid of South Mayo. So accordingly on 3/5/21, on a scorching May day, we raced across moor and bog from near Clady towards the Partry Mountains. Before we reached Glenmask we got word that the engagement was broken off, so we returned to the Westport-Castlebar area near Islandeady. Here it was that Capt. Jim Duffy was killed accidentally. It happened in this way: Jimmy Flaherty, a British ex-soldier, was cleaning a parabellum revolver while we were resting one afternoon. I had a similar weapon, which I asked Jimmy to clean for me and left it on the table. Jim Duffy was standing up leaning on the mantlepiece. Flaherty had re-assembled the gun he was cleaning and left it on the table beside mine. A few minutes later he picked up my gun, thinking it was his own unloaded one, pulled the bolt, pressed the trigger and sent a bullet into Jim Duffy's heart. Jim died almost at once. We improvised a coffin and buried him on a hill-top that night. When the Truce arrived we had him re-interred with full military honours in his family burying ground in Aughawall near Westport.

It was decided to attack a convoy which frequently, if irregularly, plied between Westport and Castlebar, so Islandeady Company were asked to cut the road after the trucks had passed towards Westport on 7th May, 1921. We were in position at the Big Wall at Islandeady which we had loopholed. A lorry came in sight, halted, turned and made off for Castlebar. It was now obvious that we had to pull out or wait and be blown out, so we retired some miles away that night. As we started to move off a message came in to say that the road cutting party had been surprised that morning by the truck which had unexpectedly turned back, that two of the Islandeady Company had been killed and two wounded and captured. The news gave me a sinking feeling, and as we marched through the night I could not blot out from my mind those awful words of the "Dies Irae" which, such a short time before, I had chanted in Belcamp choir - "Ne Me Perdas Ille Die". However, the feeling soon passed and the next afternoon I was very disappointed, indeed, at not being chosen to go to Westport and attack the R.I.C. patrol. Ketterick, Joe Baker and Bruddy Malone were chosen, and a good job they made of it. From the Red Bridge at Westport they bombed and shot up a large patrol in extended order, rendering nearly everyone a casualty. I was told I was too young for the job.

The following day we again raided the mail train but got nothing.

About now Joe Walsh and Willie Malone, both of whom had been working in England, threw up their jobs and returned to fight. They jumped on the train one day at Islandeady and soon met us.

On the 13th day of May, 1921, the first big planned operation took place. We advanced on the town of Westport on each of the main roads leading to the town and selected an hour about 8 p.m. when young children would be off the streets and the R.I.C. patrols on their beats. I had the honour of being the first to enter the town on our particular route; the remainder of the section halted at the railway bridge at the top of High St. With a "Tin Hat" taken in a raid for arms, khaki coloured great coat, Lee Enfield with fixed bayonet, I must have been a good, if unconscious, imitation of a British soldier. At any rate, when I reached the top of the hill which is High St., the population rushed for cover; mothers grabbed their children and doors were slammed to. According to my instructions I halted at a certain spot. As I stood there rock-like, a civilian native of the town, an ex-soldier of the British army, came up to me on my right side and said: "This gravel crushing is a bitch, I know it, mate. I did 15 years of it". No answer from me, then, "But your job is worse, chasing these B.....s round the bogs, it's a rotten life. The town here is full of the bastards". No comment. I then heard the even step of my comrades behind me filtering over John's Row. My interlocutor was apparently learning something. His chin dropped uncertainly. He turned and slowly left me and made for his front garden gate. His pace increased progressively as the distance from me grew greater, but he became more and more stooped until reaching the gate, which he flung open and, bent double, raced for his front door. We now started out on a search which lasted all night looking for any R.I.C. patrols, but we failed to find them. We took over the town completely until long after midnight. Not a shot was fired at us and we failed to find any patrol.

Months later we learned they had been given shelter in the house of Dr. O'Rourke of Altamount St., a British ex-R.A.M.C. It was then too late to punish O'Rourke.

When all was over we assembled in Ardygormon Wood, where Jim Marley was accidentally shot dead while arms were being cleaned. He was buried then and there and later re-interred in his family burial ground as Jim Duffy had been.

The Brigade were at this time spending alternating periods with us, the Westport Battalion Column, and a larger body composed of men from Castlebar, Newport and Louisburgh Battalions. On May 19th a member of this latter party, Jim Moran from Newport, was detailed to snipe Newport R.I.C. post. Jim, a splendid shot, killed Sergt. Butler during this one-man operation.

It was now decided by Kilroy to set an ambush at Kilmeena, halfway between Newport and Westport, for a Crossley tender of R.I.C. and Tans which daily travelled between the two towns. So on the 20th May, 1921, the composite body referred to lay in ambush from an early hour. We (Westport Battalion Column) were in Corrig about four or five miles away and at no time during the subsequent action were we called in. I have always felt, and, in fact, I know, that Michael Kilroy had an antipathy towards us Westport fellows. We were a bit too tough, Rabelaisian and irreverant for Michael's puritanical mind. In fact, some of them <u>even drank</u>, and in Kilroy's sight nothing could be expected from a drinker. It is impossible to exaggerate Kilroy's horror of alcohol in the belly of a human being. At any rate, I believe that Kilmeena was planned to show us what could be done without us. As

events occurred, three lorries arrived on the scene, evidently forewarned and prepared. One ran through the ambush position. The crew got out and mounted a machine-gun to the right rear of the column and played havoc. It speaks volumes for Kilroy's coolness and courage that he succeeded in getting anyone away that day. Of the thirty or so men with whom he started the engagement, four were killed, five wounded and captured, and one captured unwounded. On the enemy side, a constable killed and a Head-constable wounded were the only casualties. It must be remembered that our men were armed mostly with shotguns and that their armament and equipment of every kind were greatly inferior, (improvised, almost primitive) to the splendid arms and equipment of the enemy, who had all the implements for modern war at his disposal and the resources of a great empire to sustain him, truly a case of David and Goliath.

Having escaped from Kilmeena, Kilroy led his men north westwards, finally arriving in the remote townland of Skirdagh. The enemy, however, had no intention of giving him any respite, and so it was that at dawn on the 23rd or 24th May the survivors found the enemy closing in on the houses in which they were resting. Hurriedly scrambling from their beds, half naked men dashed desperately from their billets for cover, taking care to hold on to their precious arms and equipment, none of which was lost. Fighting was confused, but early on we lost one man named Browne, while on the enemy side they had a Constable Maguire killed and D.I. Munroe wounded. The decision was then taken to divide up and make a dash for it. As a result, all the men got clear eventually, but Kilroy with Moane, Ketterick, Dr. John Madden and, I think, Johnny Gibbons were compelled to fall back on a hill, being forced to the summit where it seemed they

were trapped. In the meantime, we of the Westport Column had followed up to a point north of Newport, but the terrain was such that with the large numbers of the enemy present we were helpless. Towards evening a troop train was seen approaching. The troops dismounted and marched towards the hill where the men were trapped, and bivouacked there. The stage was now set for the coup-de-grace. During the night, however, Kilroy and his companions essayed the descent of the hill, slipped through the cordons and joined us. Other survivors of Kilmeena who joined us at this time were Jack Connolly, Jim Moran, Jim Kelly and Joe Doherty from the Newport Column, Paddy Kelly, Jim Harney, Salmon and McNamara from the Louisburgh area, and the genial Paddy Cannon (known as Big Paddy) from Castlebar.
It was essential now that we shake off the enemy, get some rest and prepare for the next phase. We managed to reach Tallavbawn, south of Louisburgh, unknown to the enemy. Here we rested a few days.

On Wednesday, 1st June, we sallied forth again and marched eastwards towards Drummin, As we neared the place, a detachment, which included Kilroy and Johnny Duffy, set off for the R.I.C. post which had been evacuated shortly after the encounter with its garrison the previous March. The remainder of the column moved ahead to Derryherbert, where we halted. Meanwhile, Johnny Duffy had entered the R.I.C. post through a window and removed booby traps from the front and back doors, then threw them open to assist the fire. Very soon a strong column of smoke started to soar from the building and Kilroy and the others crossed the plain to join us. We reformed and proceeded to Clady, where we spent the night, a beautiful calm summer night it was. I spent part of it on sentry duty; thus it was that I was asleep the next afternoon when someone woke me to say: "The 'Tans are gone out the Leenane road".

The Carrowkennedy Ambush:

There was a hustle of activity, dressing and getting ready for the scrap which we now thought inevitable and to which most of us eagerly looked forward to because we were now sore suffering from the effects of Kilmeena. To our amazement, rumour spread that we were not to attack. We all knew the Tans would have to return soon because Erriff Bridge between us and Leenane had been blown up. Joe Walsh and Paddy Duffy marched up to the Brigade Staff and asked were we to attack. The answer was not satisfactory, and Joe, in very plain terms, said that he hadn't come from England to muck about the country, etc., etc. Paddy Duffy supported him and eventually the decision to attack was made. We knew we had little time to prepare as we were a good mile from the main road. The Westport section took the place of honour. That was the point of attack on the leading lorry. We were not yet in position and word came that the convoy was in sight. Fortunately it stopped at Darby Hasting's publichouse. We knew we had a little more time, so we made loopholes in stone walls, picked vantage points and proceeded with all the usual arrangements for attack after galloping wildly across the country to the road. At the same time a section of about ten, comprised of Newport and Louisburgh men, were rushed across the road to take up positions at the school. Another section with Jimmy Flaherty, Paddy Cannon, Tom (Nigger) Ainsworth and one or two others took up a position in a thicket on our left. While this was taking place, Madden, Ring, Moane, Gibbons and, I think, Ketterick were out looking for favourable positions. In any event, the attack opened without warning and most of them were caught on the wrong foot and were immobilised for the duration of the fight.

Hardly had we made ourselves comfortable when a shout warned us they were coming. In our section, under Bruddy Malone and Johnny Duffy as understudy, we had all Westport Battalion men. Soon the purr of engines was heard and swiftly into view glided an armoured Crossley tender. At least ten rifles were trained on the driver, whose attention seemed to be drawn towards our position for he partly turned his head and looked in our direction. Sharply Malone said: "Let the bastards have it, boys". Ten rifles blazed, the tender lurched, laboured, stopped, and the fun began. One tall Tan took a flying leap over the side of the tender. He was probably dead before he hit the road. The rest of the crew, however, tumbled out, took up what positions they could find and started plastering our position. Rifle grenades, too, were coming our way, but we knew we were out of range. It was now about 6 p.m. I was watching the tender closely. I had a feeling, a hunch, and suddenly I yelled: "They are getting out a machine-gun". Sure enough, one of the fellows in the tender managed to chuck the gun out through the back of the lorry. It fell on the road and was grabbed by an invisible hand, and shortly its horrible notes made hideous the evening which until then had seemed so grand. All rifles in our section were now trained on the spot where the gun was judged to be, and, sure enough, it was soon silenced. A second gunner took over. He, too, was killed. Then the performance was repeated once more, and after that the gun was silent for the duration of the fight. The party on our left, meanwhile, had beaten off an attempt to turn our left flank, and the ex-occupants of the second tender and a touring car, who had made this effort, eventually sought shelter in McGreal's cottage near the school. This could not have happened had the

section covering the Drummin road under Jack Connolly held their ground. Whatever happened, this section pulled out of the fight, ten men in all, and the Westport men with Paddy Cannon had to finish the job on their own. After the Lewis gun had been silenced for the third time, sporadic firing continued for a long time. There were lulls during which we passed the time singing or hurling taunts at the enemy, who answered us in kind. After three hours or so it had become clear that a position of stalemate was reached and that something had to be done to effect a capture. If we failed to capture the enemy's ammunition we were finished, because we had none of our own left. Kilroy eventually strode coolly into our position and said the stage was set for the use of bayonets to capture the lorry if they didn't surrender soon. Following some discussion it was decided to send two parties to attack the lorry at close quarters from front and rear and, if necessary, charge with the bayonet. I was one of the unfortunate possessors of a bayonet and so was Johnny Duffy. Cautiously I proceeded, covered by Joe Baker and Jack McDonagh, until I came within stone's throw of the back of the truck, the tail-board of which was down. I could see at an angle into the vehicle. One figure lay still, the arm of another could be seen. I fired two or three rounds into the tender and I noticed that Duffy was firing also. Suddenly there was an explosion in the tender and almost immediately a white handkerchief fluttered. I still lay in cover but stopped firing. Duffy, on the other hand, fired more rapidly than ever. I knew he was thinking savagely of the treatment his mother had received a few weeks earlier at the hands of the R.I.C. As it turned out, the hand which held the flag of surrender aloft was the hand of the man who had viciously buffetted Mrs. Duffy

to try to wrest information from her. He was Sergeant or Head-Constable Cregan. At last all firing ceased and our fellows converged on the truck. The important thing now was to capture the party in McGreal's house and get away as quickly as possible in case a relief force arrived. We need not have worried. A very cautious relief force did, indeed, arrive about dawn next day. It was now after 10 p.m. The fight had lasted four hours. Most of the crew of the tender were dead. Only Cregan, Constable Cullen and an English Tan were alive; the Tan was slightly wounded, and Cregan very badly. It seems that he was preparing to throw a grenade at either Johnny Duffy or me when he was hit by a bullet and dropped the grenade out of which he had pulled the pin. The Tan begged us not to shoot him. We told him not to worry. Personally, now that the fight was over, I had no personal animosity against any of the enemy. I was just curious to observe them and to get a good rifle and as much ammunition as possible.

It was decided to take the wounded Cregan to Mrs. Salmon's cottage on the hillside, but she who had suffered already at the hands of English agents refused to allow "any black bastard into her house". We took her door as a stretcher. The wounded Cregan was taken carefully by Johnny Duffy and placed on the door. Johnny took up the front of the improvised stretcher and Ring took the rear. Cullen and the Tan were rounded up and marched towards Salmon's house. On the way a volley from the enemy in McGreal's made us take cover. The Tan was then called for by Kilroy, who sent him with a message to his comrades telling them that we would shoot the prisoners unless they surrendered. They had earlier refused our request to let the women and children leave the house. At length they

surrendered, coming out with their hands up. We searched them, collected all their arms, ammunition and equipment, including the Lewis machine-gun, and removed them to a safe place, then took whatever was loose and serviceable out of the vehicles. Soon three columns of smoke rose into the summer sky. Kilmeena was avenged. The prisoners were all very nervous, particularly the Englishmen. One of the latter, however, was still full of fight. He took off his tunic and threw it into the burning tender, saying: "That's the fifth ..... rifle I surrendered since I came to Ireland". Total casualties by the enemy out of a force of about 25 were 6 killed, 4 wounded. (Two of the enemy died later on).

We had some difficulty in disposing of the captured rifles and ammunition. Many men had now two rifles. There were plenty of beautiful revolvers and stacks of grenades and, more wonderful still, thousands of rounds of .303. At last all the captured stuff was loaded on our backs and shoulders, and having commandeered a bicycle which we gave to Constable Cullen, we sent him off along the road to Westport, about eight miles away, to get help for the wounded.

As for ourselves, we marched across the hill to Clady in full view of the prisoners, and after a hurried meal we instructed the inhabitants to say, if questioned, that we delayed for a meal and then hurried off eastwards, taking all our arms and equipment with us. This would be consistent with the observations of the prisoners and it would tend to protect the people of Clady from reprisals if they appeared to co-operate with the English, and that was exactly what happened. On leaving Clady, we proceeded towards the east, but when darkness fell

we turned south and shortly afterwards west, and soon we were silently crossing the Westport-Leenane road a few hundred yards from the scene of the fight. Very weary we arrived in Durlas before dawn and had a peaceful day.

As news came filtering in during the day it became clear that our ruse had succeeded and the enemy's attentions were directed eastwards of the ambush position. The good people of Clady had co-operated wholeheartedly in putting the "black fellows", now accompanied by "khaki fellows", on the wrong scent. Aeroplanes were used to assist in the search, but we were left in peace. The planes were operated from a more or less level field near Castlebar, consisting of about 7 to 9 acres. It bordered the main Castlebar-Balla road and was, I think, known as the flying field. To have opened fire on these aircraft would, of course, have defeated our whole purpose and given us away to the enemy whom we had so successfully deceived. It was a question now of how long we could stay where we were. We surmised correctly that our possession of the Lewis gun would be an added incentive to the English to have us wiped out, but at the same time it would make the raiding parties more vigilant and cautious, also they would probably be increased numerically.

This surmise of mine was confirmed to me months later in a conversation with Donnelan, a D.I. of the R.I.C. in Westport. He said that they would have given many times the price of the gun to get it back.

The ten men of the section which had let us down, we later learned, had to put up with all the rigours and hardships of the round-up for some days. When eventually they did rejoin the column they were courtmartialled, but no punishment was meted out.

After some days - beautiful long days of brilliant sunshine followed by clear, starry nights - it was decided to go towards the coast. Assembly, as usual, was at nightfall. A beautiful, clear, calm night we 'fell in' in the valley and started off to a marching song under Joe Ring, who himself started the song. Some of us grumbled a bit at the idea and I remember "Rick" Joyce (Willie Joyce) saying it was not good enough. Suddenly out of nowhere, it seems, a furious figure appeared and shouted "Halt". We halted. It was Kilroy, and for the first time ever I saw him in a temper. He was normally a man who never hurried, never raised his voice, but now he was furious. He attacked Ring in our presence for allowing the noise, asked Joe to hand up his weapons, which Joe refused to do. He hit Joe with the barrel of his revolver. In fact, I thought he would shoot him. He then asked someone to help him disarm Joe. "Rick" Joyce stepped forward to do so, when Joe said, "No need" and handed over his weapons to Kilroy. Not a very edifying spectacle and one which should not have been permitted to show itself. Kilroy can't be blamed for being furious. After all, our lives depended on security which was based on silent mobility, and here was Joe behaving like a schoolboy, but Michael should have had it out with Joe later and not in the presence of the Column.

Before we started out on this night we had dumped the Lewis gun and surplus arms, etc., but we were now festooned with bandoliers full of lovely .303, too much, in fact, and in the warm weather it became a great burden.

We marched towards the Galway border and put up for some days near Leenane, which is at the head of a

beautiful fjord carved, it is said, by glacier action. Here one night John Madden and I (Madden was called George for some unknown reason) unfolded a plan for mining British naval craft which frequented the harbour. The plan was, roughly, to moor a buoyed cable firmly to one shore, lightly to the other, with contact mines attached, and as the ship progressed up the fjord the prow would eventually pull the mines against its side. It was a pipe-dream! We had not the material to attempt such a feat. The mention of the sea brought from Madden a tale of a German submarine which in 1918 was thought to have landed arms near Belmullet. Madden didn't think much of this story.

We now got information that a big round-up was being prepared and that an attack on us might be expected at any time. So, by a series of forced marches, we eventually reached the slopes of Mount Nephin in North Mayo Brigade area but close to the borders of our own area. One night before we reached Nephin we halted in Crimlin just outside Castlebar. At dawn the alarm was given by some of the boys who had discovered a poteen still. We got out and, sure enough, the Tans were on the road in the valley below us. One of the lads had had too much poteen and had been left behind. I was detailed to go and fetch him. I did so, but had to commandeer a donkey, place him on the donkey's back, hold him there and retire back to the Column. Why the Tans didn't open fire can only be explained by the fact that they thought that we now carried the Lewis gun around with us, so they thought it better "not see us". After all, a good policeman uses his eyelids as well as his eyes!

A result of this near encounter was that the pledge against strong drink was administered to us all by Kilroy for the duration. Hardly had the pledge been taken when we were lined up in the dark ready to move off, when a messenger

came up with a parcel containing cigarettes and a bottle of whiskey. While the cigarettes were being distributed, someone asked what was to be done with the whiskey now that we all had the pledge, when in a fierce whisper from Ketterick came the words: "Give me that bloody bottle".

While in the vicinity of Nephin, Jack Leonard, brother-in-law of Michael Kilroy (Kilroy was married to Jack's sister) visited us with his camera. He took a photo' of the Column late one evening. The group included all the Carrowkennedy men except Joe Baker and Paddy Duffy who were on guard, and "Nigger" Ainsworth and Jack Keane who were absent for some other reason. Included also in the group are Jim Rush and Paddy (Butch) Lambert who were absent through illness on the day of the Carrowkennedy ambush.

About this time G.H.Q. was informed that we intended capturing Lord Sligo of Westport and holding him as a hostage in case the enemy captured any of us. We were peremptorily ordered to leave Lord Sligo alone. We learned afterwards that Sligo was co-operating with Lord Derby in trying to bring about peace. Derby had been converted to a peaceful path after his mansion in England had received the attentions of the I.R.A., and Sligo had experienced a similar change of heart after receiving a kick in the bottom from a Black and Tan for failing to remove his hat whilst the funerals of Black and Tans killed in action were passing through Westport.

The first G.H.Q. reaction to the Battle of Carrowkennedy was a dispatch complimenting us on our success but criticising our failure to deny use of the house of McGrail's to the enemy, and informing us that

an operation was not to be considered as complete until the operation report was sent into G.H.Q. "Red Tape" had reared its ugly head.

Strangely, this did not annoy us. Instead, we laughed derisively - "How the hell could Dick Mulcahy, sitting in comfort in a Dublin office, know that we hadn't time to plan anything? Did he think that we should have occupied the house? Not bloody likely! That would be the height of madness; we might well be pinned there and never get out alive. To occupy a building was contrary to our tenets. We had done all we could to deny that building to the enemy, but we could not foresee that the section in whose line of fire that building stood was going to pull out and leave us the remainder to fend for ourselves. Paradoxically, the section of the enemy that occupied McGreal's immobilised themselves by doing so, for once they had reached its shelter they dared not come out; whereas, had they remained in the open they had plenty of space in which to manoeuvre and constitute themselves a threat to our flank. So it was the best thing that could have happened that they ran into McGreal's and stayed there, and to hell with Dick Mulcahy and his operation reports and his attempts at centralised command!" Such was the way and the direction in which our thoughts and expressions ran.

Of course there was no such thing as centralised command. The very nature of the struggle was against control by a G.H.Q. Lines of communication linking brigades in the country with G.H.Q. in Dublin were flimsy affairs generally, however reliable their operations were. It follows, therefore, that G.H.Q. had no controlling influence, or, in fact, any influence over a particular

engagement. In fact, the engagement was over and done with before G.H.Q. heard anything about it. Further, as the struggle developed, each man tended to think for himself, to become his own officer (to coin a phrase), and in the end I think it is fair to say that most of the Column men could be individually trusted to command the Column in any given set of circumstances. We were enthusiastic, self-trained, set on a certain course, and each day we improved our training just a little bit more. To exemplify this I can state that years later when I became a cadet in the University College (Dublin) O.T.C., I found I had nothing to learn about the service rifle or the Mills grenade or many other matters on the curriculum of the corps.

An interesting side-light to the action at Carrowkennedy and something which, perhaps, affected the outcome was the fact that Stephenson, the officer in charge of the Tans, on leaving Darby Hasting's publichouse, insisted on taking the wheel of the first tender himself, an act which was contrary to regulations and which his superior officer in Westport later informed me would have resulted in his dismissal had he survived the fight. Stephenson was a British ex-army man, a Great War veteran and son of the Chief Constable of Glasgow. He did not hear the shot that killed him. He was hit right in the centre of the forehead and had three wounds in the left breast and two in the right shoulder, as we examined his wounds after the fight. I remember thinking he was quite old. I now know he was 24 at the time. I was just short of my seventeenth birthday and I suppose at that age anyone over 20 seems ancient. Stephenson had family connections in Ballina, a fact which perhaps explains why he was buried here and not in Glasgow. I have to-day visited Stephenson's

burial place and photographed his grave. Cut in limestone are the words:

> "This stone was erected by the officers and men of the City of Glasgow Police Force in respectful sympathy with their Chief Constable in memory of Edward James Stephenson, District Inspector, Royal Irish Constabulary;
>
> Third son of John Verdier Stephenson, Chief Constable of Glasgow and Helen Halliday Stephenson, daughter of John Little of Ballina;
>
> Killed in an ambush at Carrowkennedy along with a Sergeant and four Constables on 2nd June, 1921;
>
> Aged 22 years.
>
> He served as Lieutenant in the Black Watch in the Great War and was wounded in France.
>
> "Faithful unto Death".

The foregoing is the epitaph on the tombstone over Stephenson's grave in Ardnaree, Ballina, Protestant Cemetery.

Captain Briody very aptly commented that it was strange that it was the Glasgow Constabulary who erected the memorial, not his own comrades, and then went on to remark that, of course, it would be a rash man who would attempt to start a fund based on subscriptions solicited from the Black and Tans.

It appeared to us now in mid-June that the news of the round-up was false, so we decided to move back to our own area to have a crack at the Auxiliaries recently arrived in Westport who were publicly boasting what they would do to us if they could meet us. They were quartered in the Railway Hotel and various private houses in the town.

We crossed the Castlebar/Westport road near the town in broad daylight unhindered. Shortly after crossing

the road we heard that two 'Auxies' on bicycles had earlier that day passed towards Castlebar. Ketterick, who was marching beside me, nudged me. We fell out, let the Column pass on, then went back to the trunk road where, in a hedge, we waited hours for the Auxies to return. They didn't do so while we were there.

We were billeted in the vicinity of Aughagower in Mount Browne, I think, and I got permission to go to see Father McHugh, taking only my pistol with me. I got a great reception from him and he defied me to find the place in which he had hidden his shotgun. I failed to find it and was just about to clear off when we both saw an armoured car (Rolls Royce type) pull up at the gate. It was a Crossley tender escort. "The wardrobe in my room" says Father McHugh. "I'll try to talk them out of searching the house". There was nothing else for it. So into the wardrobe I got, where I waited, Mauser in hand.

Voices could be heard from the room across the corridor. The heat in the wardrobe was unbearable. At length I heard the door of the sitting-room open, voices and footsteps. Tensely I waited, the hall door opened, slammed shut, and His Reverence came, after an interval, calling: "It's all right, come out, Tommie". The most welcome words I had ever heard.

The occupant of the armoured car was none other than Divisional Commissioner Cruise of the R.I.C., himself a Catholic, who had come to warn Father McHugh of the possible, nay probable, consequences of his continued association with the gunmen. He told Father McHugh that they had specific information that he visited us in our billets and said: "Remember what happened to Griffin in Galway", thus threatening Father McHugh with Father Griffin's fate.

He added: "I am powerless to prevent these things, even if I wanted to".

One Saturday night towards the end of June we marched to Boheh near Lanmore, a high plateau on the Leenane road, where we hoped to get a convoy of Auxiliaries who were reported to be passing this way frequently. At dawn the following morning we were hastily aroused, assembled and given orders to break up into small parties, dump our rifles, retaining our revolvers only or pistols, as the big round-up was upon us and we were right in the middle of it.

From our scattered hide-outs in the various corners we had selected for ourselves we could see the star shells bursting, turning night into day, and we listened to the explosions of the shells which fruitlessly fell on the barren sides of Croaghpatrick. For a short summer night the barrage continued, and during the following day we heard two more explosions. These last explosions may have been some form of delayed action shell or perhaps near duds that failed to explode when fired but erupted later. A few months later - to be exact, on the last Sunday of July, 1921 - I met pilgrims from the mountain who had seen and described two shell-craters not so far from the oratory on the summit.

Sure enough it came - horse, foot and aircraft; aye, and some artillery too, from a gunboat in Clew Bay. Croaghpatrick was shelled to flush us out. We were not, however, in Croaghpatrick.

For the next fortnight Johnny Gibbons and I kept on the move, sleeping out in the open, snatching a hurried meal here and there, often going without food. Systematically the countryside was cordoned off and searched, all men rounded

up and detained until identified. While the men were detained, infantry and cavalry searched fields, hedges, houses, hogholes and what-not, while aircraft circled overhead. The weather, brilliantly clear and warm, helped the searchers, but not one of us did they get and so the big round-up failed. It ceased as suddenly as it began.

The officer in charge of it stated to the Press on the morning it started that he hoped to make an end of one of the most dangerous murder gangs in Ireland, a grand compliment surely and one I have always treasured.

News and rumours of peace now reached us, but did not, strangely enough, seem to concern us greatly. At any rate, the Truce arrived at noon on 11th July, 1921. Johnny Gibbons and myself marched to Lecanvey, where we were overpowered with hospitality and which makes the following few days too vague in the recollection to report.

Thus ended the 1920/21 campaign of the West Mayo Brigade, which became No. 1 Brigade of the 4th Western Division when that unit was established later in the year by Eoin O'Duffy, Assistant Chief of Staff. Kilroy became O/C Division; Moane, O/C Brigade; Johnny Gibbons, Vice O/C; myself, Adjutant; and Paddy Duffy, Q/M. The Adjutant of the Division appointed by G.H.Q. was Christie Macken. We thought the choice should have been Johnny Gibbons in view of his experience and service. However, to quote Wolfe Tone: "'Tis but in vain for soldiers to complain".

I would like to add some more information with reference to our capture of the Lewis gun. We expected it would add greatly to our difficulties. We felt that the enemy would work tirelessly night and day to recapture the gun or wipe us out. Our possession of the gun, as we

learned later from enemy sources, changed the tactical outlook of our opponents. Hitherto the enemy was faced by an unknown (to him) number of men indifferently armed, but now, as his silent patrols moved through the streets of, say, Westport, from any window that fatal muzzle might be thrust, sprinkling death, wholesale and instantaneous. Similarly, his motorized columns ranging the countryside were exposed to a danger hitherto undreamed of, and never far from the minds of the occupants of the Crossley tenders was the thought that at any bend or from behind any innocent turf bank a splutter from the gun might at any moment blaze forth. This is no fanciful surmise on my part. It was all said to me by District Inspector Donnellan of the R.I.C. following the Truce, when he told me that, following the loss of the gun, patrol activity was reduced to a minimum, and then only in strength. He explained also that the reason the relieving column of British failed to reach Carrowkennedy until daybreak following the engagement, was that they feared a disaster on a major scale.

This may be said to end the soldier's story, his sufferings, his fears and his hopes, but there is another tale to be told concerning the people who had to face the brutalities of the English forces. My father had decided to face anything that was coming his way, but after the Carrowkennedy affray he had perforce, and on the advice of the clergy, to spend his nights in the open, accompanied by my mother, my two brothers and three sisters, all of tender age. The empty house was visited and wrecked. Food was supplied to the family by sympathetic neighbours, but shelter was a different matter, for if my people were found in another house, the owners of that house would have

been in grave danger. Of course other families, such as Moanes and Kettericks, suffered in like manner.

Many experiments of varying kinds were undertaken from time to time for the purpose of increasing our offensive power, and every encouragement was given to anyone enterprising enough to attempt to solve our problems. One such attempt should perhaps be recorded here. A small gun which had been brought ashore by Humbert in 1798 and which had lain unnoticed for generations near Killala, was procured by Madden. Kilroy, who in civil life ran a foundry, had some steel balls made to fit the bore of the gun, which loving hands had carefully refurbished, scraped and polished until it had almost reached its original glory. The big moment for the test had come; powder had been rammed down the barrel and a fuse trailed from the touch-hole, a ball was forced down the muzzle; finally a lighted match was applied to the fuse and all withdrew to cover, silently waited, watching a thin spiral of smoke rise from the hissing fuse. The smoke ceased, nothing happened. "Blast it", said Madden, "the bloody thing has failed". We broke cover and were advancing to the lifeless gun when it suddenly lifted up into the air with a deafening explosion and as suddenly returned to earth on its side with its muzzle pointing towards us. Later that day when the pressure of Castlebar water supply was noticed to be dropping, an examination of the plant at the reservoir showed the damage had been caused by some mysterious missile. Very few connected the damage with the explosion which had been noticed earlier. The steel ball from the cannon had actually hit the power house, a distance of about two miles away.

On the eve of the 36th anniversary of the Truce, I met an old native of Westport, Thomas Hoban, in his nephew's house in Dublin. It was necessary to introduce me to him as he had forgotten my existence. When, however, he did recollect me and to emphasise the fact that he remembered me, he said: "My sister met you one night at Cushlough chapel and told you to go back or the Black and Tans would get you". Thus evolved an explanation of the mystery which had puzzled me since that November night in 1920. It appears that Mrs. Darby Hastings, wife of the inn-keeper of Cushlough, was on the night in question in her garden locking up her fowl or engaged in some such occupation when she saw the R.I.C. patrol leaving her husband's premises. At almost the same time she saw my figure clearly in the distance outlined against the dark bogland in the brilliant moonlight, heading for the road. The patrol passed on. I did not see them but Mrs. Hastings thought it wise to warn me. She did not know me but guessed from the cautious manner in which I advanced that I was a Volunteer. When she saw me pause before moving on to the road she felt sure. She left the garden and waited in the shadow of the yew trees which surrounded Cushlough churchyard, and when I emerged from the bog and stood on the grass margin of the road she left her shelter and spoke to me, saying that the R.I.C. had gone ahead and, as already described, when I turned to speak to her after looking in the direction she had indicated, she had disappeared, gone back into the shadows and made her way back to the garden by a path which was concealed from my view by the yew trees. So it was not an apparition after all.

This ends my story. I had intended rewriting it and correcting it as it was only to be a very rough draft, but I found I had more to write than I expected, a lot of it

of no interest from a military point of view. Accordingly, it is submitted to Captain Briody in a very rough state, without attention to spelling, grammar or aught else. Having started with a reference to St. John, I am tempted to paraphrase him in the end by saying that numerous other little incidents of varying importance have for one reason or another been omitted. They could not all have fitted in. I conclude with a quotation from P.S. O'Hegarty's book "The Victory of Sinn Féin": "In the rest of Ireland, outside Dublin, Clare, Tipperary, Limerick and part of Mayo, there was very little real activity...... sustained activity", and also the attached song.

Signed: D. Stenny

Date: 31/8/57

Witness: [signature] (Investigator). Capt

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1,668

The Men of Mayo.

The sickle is rusty and idle,
The smithy stands silent and cold;
The harvest is low and deserted,
Neglected the flock and the fold.
Far away on the hills and the mountain
And down in the valleys below,
Fighting for freedom and glory
Are the brave-hearted men of Mayo.

When England's great chargers came dancing
With spears and lances so keen,
To conquer and banish for ever
The Orange, the White and the Green;
The ranks were thrown back and disordered
For many a day were laid low,
That evening found riderless steeds
The brave-hearted men of Mayo.

When the blue smoke of battle in clouds
Over far Tourmakeady arose,
Says Maguire to himself with emotion
"Before you do-day are your foes;
Remember the devilish deeds, boys,
Strike hard though your heart's blood may flow",
And victory gladdened that day, boys,
The brave-hearted men of Mayo.

One day as they lay on the hillside
And the sun shining bright overhead,
Resting their limbs tired and weary
With fragrant white heather their bed;
They sprang in surprise to their feet, boys,
At a bugle sound hushed and low,
Three hearty cheers for old Ireland went up
From the brave-hearted men of Mayo.

That morning for murder and torture
As the Black and Tans carried along,
The hills and the valleys surrounding
With curses, wild language and song.
Surrender ye rebels they shouted,
Carrowkennedy's answer was "No",
And victory gladdened that day, boys,
The brave-hearted men of Mayo.

Never, oh never could England
Such a brave-hearted people destroy,
Or keep them in slavery or bondage
With warriors like Ring and Kilroy.
They may claim the wild waves of Clew Bay, boys,
Or the deep winding Moy stops to flow;
But they never could crush the wild spirit
Of the brave-hearted men of Mayo.