

**ORIGINAL**

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21  
BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21  
No. W.S. 1,692

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

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Witness

JOHN FEEHAN,

LEENANE, CO. GALWAY.

Identity.

DIVISIONAL QUARTERMASTER,

4th WESTERN DIVISION.

Subject.

Activities of West Connemara Brigade,  
and Brigade Flying Column, 1917-1921.

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STATEMENT BY JOHN FEEHAN,

Leenane, Co. Galway.

In August, 1913, there was a public meeting held after 11 o'clock outside Kilmeena Church. As far as I can remember, it was the late J.D. Bartley, Clifden, Co. Galway, who addressed the meeting and it was after this meeting that I enrolled in the Irish Volunteers. Shortly afterwards, the late Tom Tarmey, an ex-sergeant of the English Army, was appointed our instructor in drill and boxing at classes held every Wednesday night. Mr. Tarmey continued his instructions up to late 1915. By that time we were fit to carry out the instructions ourselves. In about September, 1915, I was appointed 1st Lieutenant. In October it was arranged to have field manoeuvres and a sham battle between Kilmeena and Westport Companies, under the supervision of the late John McBride. These manoeuvres covered the same ground, almost, as the Kilmeena fight with the Black and Tans in 1921.

At this time I was working for the late Willie Sammon, who was Q/M of the company, as a carpenter. Sammon went to Dublin and secured two rifles, which came to us in a crate of glass to the Old Workhouse, Newport, where we had a workshop, and I will never forget our anxiety and pleasure when we opened the crate and found the two rifles with the ammunition for same. I had a 16 bore shotgun at the time. This left us three rifles in the company, with three revolvers. The shotguns were plentiful enough.

About the end of 1915 I joined the A.O.H. (Irish-American Alliance) and all the old men in the parish were

in this organisation and were carrying out cattle driving etc., so they asked all the Volunteers to join. This helped very much to keep the Volunteers together as it was very interesting, and we then took part in the cattle driving as there were large farms in the parish which were badly needed by the small farmers who had only 3 or 4 acres of land each. We had a very good football team in Kilmeena, composed completely of Volunteers, and after one of the cattle drives the whole football team was arrested, including myself, in December, 1915, and lodged in prison in the Old Workhouse in Westport under a strong guard of armed police. When we were being taken from the Workhouse to the Courthouse in Westport, we were escorted by four bands who paraded the town to support us. When we arrived at the Courthouse, they had no evidence against us and we were released. This put more heart into the company and we drilled and carried arms openly in defiance when on parades. We had 120 Volunteers in the company at this time.

On the 17th March, St. Patrick's Day, 1916, we had a big parade of the A.O.H. from several areas to Westport. There were four bands with banners from each area. The O'Rahilly, in Volunteer uniform, addressed the meeting in the Town Hall. It was the first time I had the pleasure of seeing him; it was also the last!

During Easter Week we were prepared to fight but were completely cut off from any communications, and on Easter Tuesday night the company marched to Westport with all available arms we could lay hands on, including shotguns, gelignite and detonators which we had stored up previous to this. We marched as far as the top of Poundans Hill on the Newport Road overlooking the town, and got in

touch with the Westport Company. After about two hours the late Tom Derrig, T.D., came to us with word that the attack on Westport Barrack was called off and we had to return home very down-hearted.

After 1916 all was very quiet, but we managed to keep together with football matches, etc., which were prohibited, too, but we kept going. We got a teacher to give two classes a week teaching Irish and Irish dances. We ran céilis in Kilmeena and Kilmaclassar halls - the latter was the half parish of Kilmeena. We also held Irish concerts, and it was at one of those céilis that Ned Moane and his sister were arrested for singing songs. The hall was surrounded by police.

These activities continued successfully up to the conscription threat. Our company improved in numbers. Instead of close drill etc., we now trained in night scouting and skirmishing on dark nights, how to use pikes and other means of combat. During this time we organised a pilgrimage to Croagh Patrick of the Volunteers and Cumann na mBan from Lahardane, Newport, Kilmaclassar, Kilmeena and Westport, and 700 Volunteers and 150 Cumann na mBan took part. We marched all the way and waited on the top of Croagh Patrick all night from 12 o'clock to 6 a.m. as priests from each district were present. On the return home Volunteer John Rowland, Newport Company, got killed in a fall from a bicycle outside Westport on the Newport road. I am proud to have to state that not one of the Kilmeena Company emigrated to America to escape conscription, and when the threat of same passed over safely we still held the company together, continuing meetings, Irish dances, concerts and céilis and football matches to collect funds.

In the Spring of 1918, the 'flu was raging . On playing a football match between Kilmeena and Carnaclay both teams attended a concert in Kilmaclassar Hall, and members of both teams, all Volunteers, were laid up the following day with the 'flu, with the result that I was advised by my doctor to take a change of air. I went to Leenane to P.J. McDonnell with the intention of only remaining a few weeks. Now that Pádraig Ó Máille was 'on the run', I got very interested with the excitement of doing guard with other Volunteers for him, and I went working with P.J. McDonnell as coachbuilder and from my experience in drill etc., I helped him with drilling and organising in the Connemara area. Shortly after this, about August, meetings for the coming Sinn Féin election were arranged and we had to supply an escort for Pádraig Ó Máille. I happened to be one of the escort to be sent with him to Lettermore, Connemara, and it was my first long run in a motor car. On our return we were met by a Volunteer at Kilmilkin, notifying us that a destroyer had landed with troops in Killary Bay and had raided for the O/C, P.J. McDonnell, who was very sick in bed with threatened pneumonia in his sister's house. Pádraig Ó Máille left me at Kilmilkin and proceeded to his cave at Glenlas, and I went to Leenane and discovered that P.J. McDonnell had to be assisted by his three sisters out the back way and across the fields about half a mile to his uncle's house at Derryhada and again put to bed there, a very sick man.

On arriving in McKeown's motor car at the top of Lahill overlooking Leenane, I got out (my only weapon was a .45 revolver) and proceeded across the mountain and met my late wife, a sister of McDonnell's, in company with Patrick

Wallace doing sentry for her brother at Derahada. I took over from her. Wallace and myself did guard all night and kept vigil on the destroyer to make sure that there would be no movement of troops until the destroyer left Killary Bay next morning at 9 a.m.

The illness of P.J. McDonnell made things very difficult as we could not depend on some of the hostile neighbours. We had to do continuous guard very carefully as he, our O/C, was now a much wanted man and the R.I.C. were only a short distance away. The R.I.C. barrack was a  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile away. We had to keep constant watch on the movement of the R.I.C. until he was fit to be moved again. His recovery meant that we had to sleep away from his sister's home at Leenane and had to stay in houses in Gleannagimla village. We immediately took over organising for the Sinn Féin election, and this took some months' hard work as we had to do a house to house canvass on foot and bicycle. It would be now the end of August.

The election was held on the 14th December, 1918, and was a sweeping victory for Sinn Féin. The seat in Connemara was won by Pádraig Ó Máille. This again increased the work for the Leenane Company, helped by Kilmilkin Company, as we had to supply constant guard to make sure that a T.D. would not be captured in our area. The O/C, P.J. McDonnell, took full responsibility to see that this would be thoroughly done. On Pádraig Ó Máille being notified of the first meeting of Dáil Éireann, which was held on the 21st January, 1919, he had to be in Dublin the week previous and it was arranged to have him dressed like a priest. P.J. McDonnell and myself escorted him by car to Ballyglunan Railway Station, Co. Galway, a quiet country station, and got him on the train

for Dublin. We returned home again to Leenane. For the next meeting of T.D.s, which was held some months later, we again escorted him to Islandaddy Railway Station, Co. Mayo, a few miles outside Castlebar, and everything went perfectly.

Republican Courts were established over the whole area and all cases arising were brought before them and the British Petty Sessions were boycotted. P.J. McDonnell had a branch coach-builder's shop in Louisburgh and he had two men who were Volunteers running the business. It was arranged that I would go there to give them a hand. Pat Kelly and myself took over charge of the training of the Louisburgh Company, Kelly as captain, I as 1st Lieut. We held all meetings in the house of John O'Dowd, who was a great assistance to us. We made full arrangements for the capture of Louisburgh R.I.C. Barracks and put our plans before the O/C of the area, A. Moane. He came to Louisburgh, and after a discussion he thoroughly agreed with our plans. Being Volunteers in Connemara area, we had to notify our O/C, P.J. McDonnell. At the next brigade meeting, McDonnell notified the Brigade Staff in Galway and asked for a quantity of explosives for the execution of this raid. To our surprise, he was refused, because McDonnell, Kelly and myself, being Connemara Volunteers, would not be allowed to engage in any activities outside our battalion area. This resulted in the attack being called off.

The John O'Dowd mentioned above was a Petty Sessions Clerk in the local court, and as he was very friendly we kept his name in the dark. On one occasion a meeting was held in his house with Pat Kelly, the local Company Captain, and myself. He handed us two rifles, a Lee Enfield

and a Mauser. The latter was his own property. The Lee Enfield had been given him earlier by a friend who had been an officer in the British Army. We were naturally delighted with our first two rifles for Louisburgh Company. That night we gave them to a girl, who is now Mrs. Andy Hearney of Louisburgh, who put them under her mattress. The following night we wrapped them in canvas after deciding to take them to a friendly priest, a great friend of ours, Father Cunningham at Leenane. As it was late that night when we arrived, he took the rifles in through his bedroom window. I remember full well when Pat Kelly was handing in his rifle with the barrel first, Father Cunningham got cross and made him take it back, saying, "Now hand me your rifle right, with the butt first". Kelly quietly did so. Father Cunningham assured us they would be quite safe, and so they were until we needed them later on when going 'on the run'.

Work now in the coachbuilder's shop was indeed only part time. We were wholly engaged in arranging Sinn Féin meetings, Republican Courts, drill parades, and raiding for arms. This meant that we were out all night, so work in the shop was only part time and just served as a cover for our real activities. This continued up to October, 1919 when there was a large Republican Court held in Louisburgh Courthouse across the street from the R.I.C. barrack. James McDonnell of Cross was Judge of the court and he sentenced a man named O'Malley to three months' imprisonment on a serious charge. The defendant objected and refused to abide by the decision of the court. I was in charge of the Volunteers to protect the court and I placed the defendant immediately under open arrest, as the power of the courts was placed in jeopardy by this man's act.



The Volunteer guard outside notified me that R.I.C. reinforcements had arrived to break up the court. I detailed two guards to keep O'Malley under observation wherever he went, and the judge, myself and the Volunteer guard got out the back (only just in time) before the place was surrounded by R.I.C. P. Kelly and myself arranged for a car to meet us outside the town when the evening got dark to take us to Westport and give a report of what happened to the O/C. We had only gone two miles when we met another lorry load of reinforcements, but we passed them unrecognised. Arriving in Westport, we met Ned Moane, O/C, the late Joe Ring, Tom Ketterick, and William Malone. On hearing details, they got two cars, with some Volunteers fully armed, and followed us up the Leenane-Westport road, through Doughlough within two miles of Louisburgh. Kelly, Ketterick, Malone and myself proceeded on foot to investigate and we met the Volunteers who were keeping a watch on the defendant. They told us he was having tea in his own house. We raided the house and put him under arrest, took him to Leenane and hence to Glenlosh, our prison, and then the Mayo Volunteers returned home. We held a court on him the following day and gave him six months' hard labour for contempt of court. We proceeded the following Sunday morning with him to South Mayo and met Tom McGuire, O/C, outside Cross Catholic Church. He accompanied us to a farmer's house in the Castlehacket area outside Tuam, and we handed the prisoner over to a certain farmer to work as a labourer and serve his sentence. We notified the defendant that if he returned home he would be shot at sight. The abduction of this man caused a great uproar in Louisburgh as he was taken from under the eyes of over 30 policemen. This

action placed me in the position of being a very much wanted man and put me 'on the run' with P.J. McDonnell. We were now unable to do any work at all in the workshop in Leenane. Because of this we were able to devote all our time to parades, drilling of men and working of Sinn Féin courts. During all this time we had also to provide constant protection to Pádraig Ó Máille in his cave in Glenlosh.

We organised raffles, céilis and concerts to secure funds for arms. The area was very poor and it was only in that way we could secure any cash. Those concerts were well supported by Volunteers from outside areas. As long as it was known that the funds were for Volunteers, distance did not count. The same applied to McDonnell and myself. We often cycled 26 miles to Carnaclay, Kilmeena, to such concerts. It was in December, 1919, that Dick Mulcahy came to Westport area to a small hall off the Leenane/Westport road, three miles from Westport, to give the oath of allegiance to officers of West Mayo and West Connemara. P.J. McDonnell and myself were representing Connemara. The oath had to be given by a G.H.Q. officer to officers in the area, and those officers could give the oath to officers and men in their own areas. It meant a lot of work for we had to cycle to company parades throughout West Connemara to give the oath to all the companies in the area.

The Volunteers at this time had a lot of police work to carry out. For instance, some time previous there was furniture stolen from Kylemore Castle and the R.I.C. spent months trying to find it, without avail. McDonnell and myself, with two car loads of Volunteers, raided two farmers' houses on information we had received. We

discovered the furniture locked up in an attic in one house. We fined the farmer £30 and gave him to understand that the case would finish therewith as we did not want the R.I.C. to know where it was discovered, fearing they would arrest the culprit. The £30 was added to our fund for securing arms. We returned the furniture to Kylemore Castle and received great praise from the manager who was in charge of the place.

Wholesale sheep stealing was prevalent throughout Connemara at this time and the R.I.C. were taking no action. We made a round-up of the Twelve Pins with a force of Volunteers and farmers concerned, and collected the sheep into one area where the farmers could collect their stolen sheep. This action was very effective and it wiped out sheep stealing in the district as they were afraid of the Volunteers. This action of ours commanded great respect and support later in collections organised by us for the buying of arms, which were generously supported. This action was carried out in Spring, 1920.

Owing to the growing activities of the I.R.A., all small barracks were evacuated by the R.I.C. Leenane and Letterfrack were closed and the men drafted into Clifden and Maam Barracks. This left eight men and a Sergeant in Maam Barrack, and the O/C had made arrangements for the capture of this building. On Sunday morning the police used go to Mass at Kilmilkin, 3 miles away, and only leave two men in charge. The building was strong, being built in the Fenian times, windows had steel shutters and a steel door, and it was situated on high ground which made it impossible for attack by rifle fire. We held that a surprise attack would be our only means of

success. The plan was that a party of men armed with revolvers and shotguns were to hide the night previous in a growth of trees adjacent to the barrack and to remain in position until the arranged signal would be given after the party would leave for Mass. A car carrying a Volunteer in <sup>BRITISH</sup> uniform was to drive up to the barrack door. The Volunteer would get out with a letter held in his hand. On the barrack orderly opening the door, the Volunteer would produce the letter, and on the barrack orderly taking it, he, the Volunteer, would order hands up, producing a revolver, and the building would be immediately raided by the Volunteers waiting outside. When P.J. McDonnell put the plans before the meeting of the Brigade Staff in Galway he was told that he should supply plans and sketch of barrack showing number of rooms and the number in the garrison, and that this would have to be sent to G.H.Q. for sanction. This was our second planned attack that was turned down by Brigade H.Q., and we were very disgusted. After this we had meant to carry on as an independent battalion, as it was evident that those officers wanted no trouble in Galway.

After this I went to Belmullet on the request of my cousin, the late James Kilroy, who was captain of Ballyglass Company, eight miles outside Belmullet. He had a very good company but they were backward in drill, especially arms drill and the use of arms. I had a 38 revolver; they had a few 22 rifles and some shotguns, and I immediately set to, helping him to train the company. As I had only a fortnight and could not remain any longer, this meant that we had drill every night.

There was a very large coastguard station at the entrance to Broadhaven Bay, also there was Ballyglass

Lighthouse. While I was there the Coastguards were evacuated, except two members who were left to guard the building. It was reported that the military were taking over, as during the 1914-18 war it was known that a German submarine got supplies of petrol and other provisions locally on a beach on the other side of the harbour known as Rossport and they expected us to have a landing of arms here. As there were only two Coastguards in the building, we decided to raid and burn it, and at the same time we thought it might be an opportunity to obtain some arms. We raided the building and captured the two guards, but we were disappointed in obtaining only one .45 revolver and 20 rounds of ammunition. We also obtained two field glasses. We burned the building and also two boats belonging to same. I had to leave the area that night as I would be arrested. Two sisters of Seamus Kilroy accompanied me and we got outside Belmullet to a friend's house in Tallagh that night at about 2 o'clock, and cycled the following morning, which was Sunday, a distance of 40 miles and arrived in my own native place in Rossow, Newport, late Sunday night. About 11 o'clock on Monday morning I received a telegram from Belmullet: "Seamus arrested and taken to Galway Jail".

I was horrified and, in my anxiety, immediately cycled to Maam Cross Station and took the train to Galway City. I went direct to the jail and asked to see Seamus Kilroy, a cousin of mine. After some delay the warder returned and said "Yes", which naturally I did not expect. On meeting Seamus, our conversation was very limited as the warder was present all the time. Seamus managed to tell me that himself and another Volunteer went back to the Coastguard Station to see how it was burning and were surrounded by a party of police who came by boat from

Belmullet. What actually happened was that Seamus Kilroy and another Volunteer returned to the scene of the burning to ascertain that all was destroyed and were surprised by the party of police. The .45 revolver which was seized in the building was found close to Kilroy when he tried to hide it before capture. Seamus and the other Volunteer got 5 years' in Dartmoor Prison. After leaving Galway Prison I was informed that a Volunteer, Quirke, was shot dead at the railway station the previous Saturday night. I had to be very careful of my movements going through the city, and went through all the backways I could to St. Patrick's Avenue, about 300 yards from Galway Station, to Bartley Heneghan's house. He was a porter at the station. I remained there until it was time to take the train to Maam Cross.

I must mention here that Bartley Heneghan was our key-man at the railway station. He often endangered his life while passing arms by rail from G.H.Q. to our area, and saved my life at a later stage (when I was coming from Dublin with a consignment of arms) while I was in Galway Station, which I will explain later in this story.

On my return to Leenane, I was told by P.J. McDonnell that Dick Mulcahy, Chief of Staff, was in Kilmilkin under an assumed name, resting after an illness and overstrain. He sent for McDonnell. They discussed organisation and lack of activities, and he decided to make a brigade of all Connemara west of the Corrib, known as Connemara Brigade, with P.J. McDonnell as O/C. On the suggestion of McDonnell to have Connemara made into two brigades, West and East Connemara, P.J. McDonnell to be O/C West, Michael Thornton, N.T., Furbough, to be O/C East, the suggestion was favourably received and they

divided the area as follows: from Costelloe along the main road to Maam Cross and Maam along the north shore of the Corrib to Clonbur, all west of this line would be West Connemara Brigade area.

P.J.. McDonnell, O/C, immediately called a meeting of the principal officers from Leenane, Rosmuck, Roundstone, and Clifden to attend a conference in Leenane, and the following officers attended: P.J. McDonnell, Brigade O/C; T. O'Malley, M. Joyce, M. Conneely, J. Feehan, Leenane; Colm Ó Gaora, G. Stanton and P. Nee, Rosmuck; J. King, J. Dundas, D. Keane, Roundstone; G. Bartley, C. Breen and M. Joyce, Clifden. The position was explained as outlined in discussion with Dick Mulcahy. The boundaries of the brigades were pointed out and areas portioned out to four battalions: No. 1, Leenane, T. O'Malley O/C; No. 2, Rosmuck, C. Ó Gaora O/C; No. 3, Roundstone, J. King O/C; No. 4, Clifden, G. Bartley O/C. Instructions were given to Battalion O/Cs to complete battalion staffs from the best men in their areas. A drive to collect funds was also got underway so as to send inactive columns into action.

The Brigade Staff was appointed at this meeting also from the following: P.J. McDonnell, already appointed Brigade O/C; Gerald Bartley to act as Vice O/C; J. Feehan, Brigade Adjutant; M. Conneely, Brigade Q/M; J. Connolly to be Brigade I/O. This last appointment was made because Connolly was an ex British Army Sergeant. He was one of the very few Volunteers to follow Redmond's advice and became an active Volunteer on his return from the war and was now working as a mechanic in the Leenane Hotel. We thought he would be a useful man for the position. Owing to this he never associated with us publicly

and later we found him invaluable in obtaining information re the movements of troops. We also had the hotel car driven by him which was also available for the removal of arms and Volunteers later on. The Brigade and Battalion Staffs worked well and by October we had £120 in hands. At this time there was a communication from G.H.Q. confirming the appointment of the O/Cs and requesting a report to G.H.Q. at an early date. It was decided that the O/C would go to Dublin and take the money to see what arms he would get, and also to give the Q/Ms name at G.H.Q. for his next visit to Dublin. Immediately before the O/Cs trip to Dublin we got word by a courier named Louis Faherty that all income-tax books in the brigade area were to be destroyed that night. We had completed this before daylight next morning. The O/C proceeded to Dublin the following morning with his £120 in his pocket, and after spending most of a trying week in Dublin he had to return home with two rifles (one Canadian, one Howth), 10 rounds of ammunition for the Howth rifle and 100 rounds for the Canadian rifle, a few maps and 96 manuals. A full report of this he has given in his own "write up". H.Q. had promised to send a consignment of arms inside a week, but it never arrived and we got tired of waiting. A brigade meeting was called at the end of November to see what could be done and it was decided to send M. Conneely, the Q/M, to Dublin, but he refused to travel. I volunteered to exchange ranks with him, he to be adjutant and I to be Q/M, and so travelled to Dublin. The O/C accompanied me because of this change of ranks so as to introduce me to H.Q. We travelled about the first week of December, 1920, and on getting to Mullingar Station we got a newspaper and saw that Joe Howley, Oranmore, was shot dead outside Broadstone



Station the evening before on his way to the City. The following day we attended <sup>FOR REMOVAL OF THE</sup> the remains of Howley from Berkeley Road Church to Broadstone Station, and on arriving there P.J. McDonnell spotted the C.I.D. man who was on the train with him on his previous visit to Dublin and it was evident that he had us under observation.

On arriving at the Red Bank Restaurant for lunch, we spotted the same C.I.D. man looking at us from the office window in the restaurant and there was no doubt left in our minds but that he was on our trail. Our problem now was to shake him off as we were on our way to G.H.Q. in Brunswick St., now Pearse St. To make sure that we would not be followed, we made direct for Tara St. fire station and reported the matter to Joe Connolly and Austin McDonald whom we knew to be officers in the Dublin Brigade. They advised us to remain where we were for some time and set a watch on all streets leading to Brunswick St. Our C.I.D. man must have gone to Detective H.Q. which was around the corner. We succeeded in eluding him and getting to G.H.Q. Dick Mulcahy and Seán McMahon, the Q.M.G., were present. We explained that we wanted to get away the following day, and they promised to have a consignment of arms ready and delivered to Broadstone Station which was to be put on our train. We were now informed that Mick Collins wanted to meet us in Vaughan's Hotel at 8.30 p.m. the following evening, and we left G.H.Q. well satisfied. Vaughan's Hotel was on our way to Blessington St. and we had no trouble in getting there. We met Michael Collins at the appointed time. He was in charge of intelligence and organisation, and in discussing everything referring to his department he laid plans for routes of information

and communication and couriers etc., from Connemara to G.H.Q. It was almost 10 o'clock when we parted from him.

On coming to Blessington St., at J.J. Walsh's Corner (it was known as such as Walsh had a barber's shop at that corner) we saw a D.M.P. man standing there. This was at the junction of Berkeley Road and Blessington St. We remarked that it was rather strange and decided to go to my uncle's house at St. Michael's Road, Glasnevin. We had only gone as far as Berkeley Road Church when we heard the noise of a lorry and the sound of shots. We saw, coming around the corner at the Mater Hospital, an armoured lorry. It was coming towards us, so we immediately returned and went around the corner of Blessington St. and got into our digs a few hundred yards away, in Mrs. O'Brien's, 39, Blessington St.

The door was immediately opened by Michael O'Brien, her son, who was just in before us. We told him about the D.M.P. man and this armoured car. He said that we were lucky, that we could have been shot down as it was curfew and that no one was allowed in the street after 10 o'clock. We retired to our bedroom and had hardly undressed when we heard loud knocking at the front door. P.J. McDonnell had got into bed; I was undressed all to taking off my trousers. Before we realised it the room was filled with soldiers, the Lancashire Fusiliers. Having enquired our names, we were both arrested, and on being taken to a waiting lorry we found Michael O'Brien who was also arrested with seven others, all Volunteers, the same night. We were taken to the North Dublin Union and landed in a room, like sardines. There were about 90 prisoners in the room

and we had to sleep on the floors, which were walking with vermin.

We were there almost a week and prisoners were taken out at all hours of the night, interrogated and beaten, for information, but the seven prisoners taken by the Fusiliers were not allowed to be tampered with as it was the Fusiliers who were in charge of this building. By about Thursday we were taken out in batches of twenty and paraded before some women for identification over the Mount St. shooting which had happened the week previous.

P.J. McDonnell had given an assumed name as Peter Quinn. He was a much wanted man and there was a thousand pounds reward on his head. Lucky for both of us I gave my right name. I was identified by a woman as being in the shooting in Mount St., but I did not mind so long as P.J. McDonnell was not identified as I thought to myself, with the connections I had - through an uncle and brother in the R.I.C. - that I would have a better chance of proving my innocence. I underwent a severe interrogation for over half an hour with a batch of detectives, and I think they thought that I was innocent as I was put in the next batch of prisoners that came out and paraded again with those men before the women, and for the second time I was not identified. This meant more interrogation and one of the detectives challenged me that I came up to Dublin for the week-end shooting. He said to me: "Wasn't that what brought you to Dublin?". It was then, and only then, that I stated that I had come to Dublin to see my uncle who worked in Dublin Castle and a brother of mine who was an R.I.C. man in

Mullingar. He appeared nonplussed and asked me what I meant. I said: "My uncle works in the Lunacy Department of the Local Government Board". He asked me was he there presently, and I repeated that I did not know as he had told me that their offices were to be changed from the Castle to Mount St. the day I was arrested. From the description I gave him of my uncle he said he knew the man. I was then asked to take off my boots and they looked for a wound, as the man they were looking for, whom I resembled, had been wounded in the foot on the night of the shooting in Mount St. He went away from me and returned in about a  $\frac{1}{2}$ hr., and I was told to get back to the other prisoners. The statement of mine must have satisfied them and it supported the letter sent out by P.J. McDonnell, demanding our release, stating that we both had no connection with any political party, and that if they wired District Inspector R.I.C., Newport, Co. Mayo, he would confirm this, as it happened that he was a good friend of both families, Quinn's and mine.

The following morning our names were called out at 9 o'clock and we were told to dress. We were taken along to the Adjutant's office, asked again for our names and, to our surprise, he told us we were released. In fact, he apologised for having detained us so long. When he was so nice, we asked him for a permit for us to remain in Dublin for a few days. He said he could not grant same and said that he had orders that we were to leave Dublin by train that evening, and that if we did not abide by this we would be arrested again and detained.

We went at once to my uncle's house at St. Michael's Road and had learned from him that he did not go to work at all that week as he knew that we were arrested when we did not turn up before this. He was afraid of being questioned and would not know what excuse or names we had given. From there we went to Blessington St. and gave news to Mrs. O'Brien of her son and held out hopes that he would be released soon, but instead he was sent to Ballykinlar Camp and was not released until the Truce.

I wish to state now that Billy Pilkington, Brigade O/C Sligo, was arrested the same week as us in Dublin and released the same day. Just imagine, two Brigadiers and a Q/M to be released to wage war against the Empire and they holding innocent fellows instead! It shows the poor intelligence organisation they had, even with all the manpower they had in this country.

We now went along to Gleeson's in O'Connell St. We collected two pairs of breeches and puttees which we had ordered the week before, and on our way back to our digs we ran into a raid in North Frederick St. When we were half way through, a lorry halted at the north end and military jumped out and started searching everyone. We turned to go back but found the same thing going on at the other end of the street. There we were after being released from custody as being harmless, and now, on the same day, we were likely to be taken back again for having breeches and green puttees in our possession. We went into an upstairs tea shop which was just beside us and left the parcels in the hat rack. We then got a table as far away as possible

and ordered tea, and when we had finished the tea the raid was over.

After this we went to G.H.Q. and contacted Jackie Dunne, Supplies' Officer, to see what had happened to the box of arms that had been packed for us. He told us that the box of stuff was packed for us all right, but on hearing of our arrest they diverted the arms to Tipperary. We were in for a disappointment as they had no more arms available for us, so we had to go home again with promises of some as soon as there would be any stuff available. The active service unit that we had intended to put in the field had to be cancelled for the time being due to the failure of obtaining supplies. Still, we had all arrangements made with the battalions to have the men available for this unit as soon as the arms arrived. They would be advised immediately for mobilisation. Some weeks elapsed, and getting disappointed when the stuff was not arriving we decided that I should travel again to Dublin.

I set off to Dublin about the end of February. I remember well it was Saturday evening. My intentions were to get off at Maynooth and cycle to Dublin. With this in mind, I wrote a letter to Mick Rabbit, a Volunteer who worked in Maynooth as coach builder, as I intended staying over the night with him. Owing to the shooting of Joe Howley coming off the train and our arrest on the previous visit to Dublin, it was no use taking any chances and the G-men would surely recognise me.

I had only stepped off the train on arrival at Maynooth Station when a volley of shots rang out on my left, and looking around I saw an R.I.C. Sergeant topple

over, dead. What was I to do in such a position? The train was moving off again, as it only waits a few minutes. I was the only stranger on the platform. Certain death was awaiting me. It was just then that I heard "Jack, Jack", this way, quickly". On my right, on the Dublin side of the platform, my faithful friend, Mick Rabbit, was standing. We lost no time in getting to the end of the platform and scaling the wire fence into a field. We went along at the back of houses, which offered good cover, until we got opposite the workshop where Mick worked. We went in the back door and I had to remain in this workshop all night. Mick managed to get me some tea. My luck held, although there was a terrible uproar in the town, raiding and shooting all night. The man whom Mick worked for was very old and a great friend of the R.I.C., and Mick's house was the only house on the street that was not raided during the night.

Early on Sunday morning Mick came again with tea to me. He told me that he had sent two boys with bicycles to be left in a certain place about  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile outside Maynooth on the Dublin road. We waited until the people were coming from 8 o'clock Mass before we set off. We would not be noticed on the road among the crowd. We cycled that Sunday morning to Dublin without any further trouble. The experience of that night is something I will not forget.

Once in Dublin, I was safe enough as I knew the run very well and could get through the back streets while avoiding the main thoroughfares. I had no difficulty in getting to Brunswick St. (now Pearse St.) to Fitzgerald's, who had a little shop right near the

Queen's Theatre. From there I got in touch with Jack Dunne who was in charge of the arms dump in an old disused building at the far end of the street, where he worked as a carpenter.

I met Jack in his own house that Sunday night and he arranged to meet me the following morning at his house. It was a nice quiet place, but I couldn't delay as I had to get back to Dominick St. before curfew, where I had arranged to stay. Next day Jack took me to the Q.M.G. Headquarters. I met Seán McMahon, Q.M.G., and D.P. Walsh, supply officer. This headquarters was also in Brunswick St., not far from the Queen's Theatre. They both seemed to be very interested and honest about trying to give me arms and ammunition, but they had not much on hands and said that Seán MacEoin was up looking for some stuff too. D.P. Walsh said that he had arranged through a certain source to obtain ammunition and that if I went with him we might pick up something. We travelled all the publichouses in the back streets from Brunswick St. to Berkeley St., and from there to the Coombe, arriving back in Kirwan's publichouse in Parnell St. about 4.30 p.m. We met two fellows, also Volunteers, from Tipperary. D.P. Walsh was a Tipperary man. We were taken into a room at the back and D.P. Walsh and myself were loaded down with ammunition (.303). All our pockets were filled, and how we paid for it was to leave a few drinks in each publichouse, for the parties, I suppose, who had left it there. He at once got a courier to have the stuff delivered to Jacky Dunne, and when counting it out, after all our load, we had only 500 rounds of .303.



Now D.P. wanted to give me some instruction on the use of hand grenades. He produced one, wherever he got it, but this was easy as all the shopboys in Kirwan's employment were staunch Volunteers. He took the grenade asunder, firing pin etc., and had left it on the table when he heard a volley of shots in the street outside. A Crossley tender coming along by the Rotunda Hospital was fired on from the hospital ground, and here we were in a trap. D.P. gathered up all the parts of the grenade and ran for the stairs. The three of us went for the front door. There was a big crowd rushing up from the pub, and right outside there was a poor woman lying on top of a child, shot dead by a stray bullet. I got to my digs without any mishap. Next day when I met D.P. Walsh he asked why did I not follow him. I asked him where he went. He said he went out the trap door to the roof, pulled up the ladder and lay down until all was quiet, and laughed enough at me. This was Tuesday, and still there was not much hope of supplies.

I went to Brunswick St. Fire Station. Joe Connolly and Austin McDonnell, both in the Fire Brigade and both officers in the Volunteers, had the day off and invited me to dinner at the Exchange Hotel in Parliament St. I went to the barber shop next door while waiting for dinner, and was coming out when I came face to face with a detective from the Castle, a marked man by the I.R.A. His name was Hopkins. I happened to go to school with him. He did not question me much but asked me how I was with the firemen. I said I met them on holidays in Connemara and they met me on the street and asked me for lunch. We did not wait to take lunch, but skipped as quickly as we could. We heard

afterwards that the hotel was raided a short time after, looking for us.

At Q.M.G. Headquarters the following day I was told by D.P. Walsh and Jackie Dunne that Seán MacEoin was just after leaving and that he would be travelling home by train on the following day with a box of stuff. It was arranged that my consignment would be ready so that I could be with him, but when I came to collect the firearms the following day I was informed that the rifles they were expecting had not arrived. I would not be ready to leave until Friday. Luck was with me still, for the train on which MacEoin travelled was searched and he was arrested, but on taking him to the barrack he made a dash for liberty down the first side-street. He was fired on, severely wounded and recaptured.

It is only fair that I should explain here that all boxes of arms and ammunition were handed over in the dump, big or small, and you had to make your own arrangements to get them to the station, on the train for its destination, without any assistance from G.H.Q. The following day I got the box handed over to me, with whatever stuff was available. As I could remain no longer, they promised me faithfully that a further supply would be sent to our covering address as soon as they got any supply on hands.

This satisfied me and I got the evening train to Galway. It was Friday, and well I should remember the day, for my troubles began. The box was addressed to a man that never existed. I handed it over to the guard on the train, to be handed over to Bartley Heneghan at Galway if anything happened to me. He was a porter

at the station there. The guard was a brother-in-law of Joe Howley, who was shot leaving Broadstone Station before Christmas, the day the O/C and I were on our previous visit to Dublin.

On leaving H.Q. I took a small automatic, fully loaded, and put it in my coat pocket, as I meant to lose my life rather than lose this precious stuff, and everything went well with me until the train pulled up at Mullingar, the first stop. The train seemed to be alive with Auxiliaries. One boarded each carriage and started to search everyone. I stood at the carriage door, wondering what to do. An Auxiliary approached me. I kept my hand on my automatic, safety catch off, and was on the point of firing through my pocket and making a run for it when I heard a familiar voice shout, "Hello, Jack". I could not look. I had my eyes fixed on my man facing death. Next thing I saw a hand beside the Auxiliary and there stood my brother, Tom, beside him, with his hand out to shake hands with me. The Auxie said to him: "Do you know this guy"? "Certainly I do, he is a brother of mine", replied Tom, "and he has come to visit me". "Well get him to hell out of here" was the next thing I heard. Tom and myself went down town and it was the second time he saved my life, as explained in my previous visit to Dublin - when I was identified in the North Dublin Union as being one of the boys who did the Mount St. shooting. Tom was in the R.I.C. and was transferred a few months previously with eight R.I.C. to Mullingar. They were staying in a publichouse with private house adjoining. Here I was in Mullingar, taken to the publichouse by my own brother and introduced to my

enemies. I was taken into a room by the girl of the house to get some tea. Tom came in for all the news. I had written him before leaving Dublin to be on the look-out for me passing on the train so that we would see each other for the few minutes stop. I then got the chance to hand him my automatic, fearing that by any chance I might be searched.

The night I spent there is something I will never forget. They drank whiskey all night, up to the small hours of the morning, almost shoving port down my neck. I kept drinking it and spilling it until we retired, but, lucky for me, Tom had arranged that I should sleep in the rooms left to the family of the house.

In the morning, Tom had a small handbag packed with tobacco and cigarettes for myself and my father. My automatic and a .45 revolver were in the bottom of it. Tom was very genuine and on our side all the time. A month later he was transferred to Castlepollard, where he resigned. During the Civil War he went to America.

I took the train for Galway. Nothing happened until I arrived at Galway Station. The incoming train always pulls up on the left-hand side opposite the entrance to the station. What I saw made my hair stand on my head. There, where the Clifden train pulls out on the opposite platform, were ten Tans. What was I to do? I could not go across, so I sat in the carriage where I was. Bartley Heneghan, my friend, the railway porter, came along looking for me, as he had taken possession of the box of arms on the

night previous from our friend the guard. If it were not for those men, our task of getting arms through from Dublin would have been hopeless. All railway employees were very genuine and helpful to the cause.

He told me to remain in the carriage. He got the box of stuff in with me and had the carriage shunted from the station out on to the bridge and had the Clifden train shunted after it and my carriage connected to it, so I was on my way to Maam Cross. My trouble was not yet over. On arriving at Maam Cross, on the right-hand side were R.I.C. The night was very dark and no light except from the carriage. Mr. Kelly had to check the tickets here for Clifden and came into my carriage. I pointed to the box and asked him to secure this and, as luck would have it, the carriage was opposite the store. This he opened and put in it, my box, bag, and myself, and locked the store. There I remained until he came and opened the store and told me that the police were gone up the Maam/Leenane road towards the barrack at Maam, four miles away.

There was no car available at Maam Cross and my only hope of getting to Leenane was on a new bicycle, still in its crate, addressed to O'Malley, Rosmuck. I, with the assistance of Kelly, got the bicycle pumped up and got ready to cycle 13 miles to Leenane. I got the loaded .45 revolver out of my bag, as I was expecting to meet the R.I.C. patrol at Maam. On coming to Tiernakill Bridge, quite close to Maam Barracks, I heard a man's voice ahead of me. He seemed to be driving cattle. It was very dark. Just then I saw a large bunch of black objects which I recognised as cattle. I hurried on, got off the bicycle and told the

man who was driving them to take it and give me the stick. He did so without question. I held the stick in one hand and my gun in the other. We met ten policemen, fully armed, filing along on each side of the road. They took no notice, thinking we were two innocent farmers, and they let us pass without any questions.

I was a complete stranger to the farmers at Maam and did not know anyone, so I asked this man for his name. He said he was Mr. Keane of Maam. I warned him to say nothing of meeting me, and cycled the remaining eight miles to Leenane, arriving there at 1.30 a.m. The O/C, P.J. McDonnell, and his two sisters (one of them my late wife) were waiting for me and were wondering what had happened, as I was to arrive the previous night. I stepped into the room and no one could speak for a few minutes. I was just about "all in", but I was able to tell P.J. that I had left the stuff at Maam Cross with Mr. Kelly, and that the small bag was still on my bike. Peadar, as we called him, acted at once and went to the hotel at Leenane, knocked up Conneely, the I/O, and got the hotel car and proceeded to Maam Cross through Maam Valley, passing the barrack along the same road as I came, and returned with the precious box of arms and ammunition. On checking the box it contained the following items: 3 service rifles, 1 Mauser, 3 Martini carbines, 300 rounds of ammunition (.303), 2 Colts .45 Automatics, a few miscellaneous revolvers, 80 rounds of 7.9 ammunition for Mauser, 150 rounds Howth ammunition, 25 rounds Colt ammunition, 2 coils of electric cable wire, 1 electric detonator, 1 exploder,

1 coil inch tape. A brigade meeting was immediately called at Peadar Ó Máille's house, Mounterowen. It was unanimously agreed by all present that a flying column should be formed at once. On a check up of all arms in our possession it was found that we could put 20 men in the field, but the most of them would have only shotguns.

It was reported to Gerald Bartley, the O/C Clifden, that a lorry load of Tans and R.I.C. travelled each day, for three days each week, from Galway or Oughterard to Clifden, and returned again the same evening. It was decided to make immediate preparations to attack this party. Each Battalion O/C was instructed to pick their best men to form the first column. There was an old deserted farmer's shack in a valley called Áille na Breagh at the back of the Diamond Mountain, three miles from the nearest road or village, which was the little village of Letterfrack on the Leenane/Clifden road. We sent Volunteers with Pádraig Ó Máille, who had plenty of time on hands, to try and get the shack roofed and put in good repair for the housing of our column, with the intention of using this for our first camp and as a striking base for our future activities. The old building was of crude construction, walls built of stones without mortar. It had no window, only one door, and consisted of one large room. It had a clay floor. The roof was completed and our bed was one-foot deep of heather piled on the floor. Arrangements were made by the Company Captain, Patrick Connelly, Letterfrack, 1st Lieutenant Val. Conneely, and the I/O, Steve Joyce, to have food delivered to the camp and to be ready to have a fresh supply delivered

there every night while the column would be there. The ambush position was decided on by the O/C, P.J. McDonnell, and the O/C Clifden, Gerald Bartley. It was to be Derrylea Lake on the Recess road, about three miles from Clifden, a lovely position for our first venture. At the end of the lake there was a sharp turn, and on the Clifden side of the turn, immediately on coming around it, there was a 50 ft. high cliff right over the road and continuing for 200 yards. On the other side the lake was right up to the stone wall bordering the road. There was a splendid cover for our men in the shelves of rock which ran along the cliff, and here our shotguns would be very useful. We had hand-made grenades and a road mine, and an exploder that I had taken from Dublin on my last visit there.

I would like to make it clear at this stage the difficulties we had to contend with. There was a Mission held in Leenane that week and the Retreat was held in Leenane and Kilmilkin Churches. It seemed that some Volunteers must have mentioned in Confession that they were going out on active service and we discovered that two of the men were officers of the Maam Company, with the result that they were told by the priest giving the Retreat that he could not give them Absolution if they went out on active service. They were lectured on the serious sin it was to shoot policemen, with the result that these two officers failed to report when the column was being formed. To confirm this, both the O/C and myself were refused Absolution when we knelt down to Confession, although I was a stranger to the priest. He asked me my name, and on hearing it he told me I was one of the officers in charge of the



I.R.A. and that I was going out to shoot police. I asked him who told him this, and he replied that he knew it, and that P.J. McDonnell was the other. I listened to a terrible lecture, which I will not repeat here. I listened in silence, and when he had finished I said: "Father, I came to Confession, not to be lectured. I am going out to fight the enemy of my country. I came here on good intentions and if you cannot give me Absolution I must go", but before I left he laid his hand on my head and gave me his blessing: "May God bless you and save you" he said. The O/C, P.J. McDonnell, being the leader, got it much harder than I, and greater pressure was put on him.

The 10th March, 1921, was the day appointed to mobilise at the camp at Áille na Breagh in the Twelve Pins at the back of the Diamond Mountain. All during the day parties of men arrived from Leenane, Cornamona, Maam, Clifden, Cleggan, Renvyle, Roundstone, Rosmuck, and Lettermore. Twice the number turned up to what we expected, and each man had his own small contribution, such as a shotgun, gelignite, cartridges. They obtained the gelignite while working for the County Council. It was sad to turn some of these men away, for we had only accommodation for 20. They were asked to return home and to be ready to be called to active service, but first we had to get more arms. They were asked to do what they could to help the cause in their company area and to keep in touch with the column, and to give us all the information they could gather on the movements of military in their respective areas.

On our first morning we got up about daybreak and got the men out and put them through some drill movements, especially the loading, unloading and reloading of rifles, but, needless to say, we could not fire any shots as the noise would betray us, and anyway we had no ammunition to spare. I am almost certain that until they had their first fight, not a man, with the exception of the O/C and myself, had fired a shot out of a service rifle. We had our breakfast and after that went to the ambush position and posted our men as look-outs to warn us of the enemy approach. We waited all day until dusk and then returned to our camp across the mountain, through swamp patches which we could not see in the dark. You would hear a shout and the next thing some member was being pulled out of a boghole, where he was up to his chin. We were hungry when we arrived at the camp and our guards had a roaring fire and a plentiful supply of hot tea ready. This continued for four days and not an enemy passed within all that time. The food supply was getting difficult, as it was hard to get enough food for 20 men, and it was a difficult way to bring it over the mountain from Letterfrack. The O/C called a meeting of the officers concerning our position, as we were afraid our men were getting discouraged. We decided that four days under such terrible conditions was telling on the younger men. We decided to go into Clifden and have a crack at the R.I.C. patrol of eight or ten which patrolled the town every evening. We could not wait any longer. Immediate action was called for when Thomas Whelan, a Dublin Volunteer, was executed in Mountjoy. He was a native of Clifden. We felt it our duty to avenge his death.

Gerald Bartley, O/C Clifden, a man always dependable in any emergency, was sent to Clifden to arrange the action, to arrange scouts to watch the enemy, and to have guides to meet us. We started off at once. The night was very dark. We got to the meeting point and had not to wait very long. The scout and guide arrived. The scout reported that there were eight mixed R.I.C. and Tans in the town. So delighted were we that night, we never thought of danger to ourselves. We had to depend on our guide - it was so very dark and there was a deep fog down over the town. After stumbling and falling for over an hour, we landed back where we started. We went on again and landed on the Leenane/Clifden road about 200 yards from the R.I.C. barrack. We went to a house of a family friendly towards us and sent a scout to locate the patrol. He returned and told us that the patrol had, after one round of the town, returned to barracks.

Disappointed, we had to withdraw about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles outside the town to Mr. Joyce's house. His son was a Volunteer and we got a warm welcome. After getting a cup of tea and some bread we left and made for the Recess/Clifden road and took a vacant house about  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile from the town. We slept there for the night. We could not get supplies of any kind owing to our proximity to the enemy and we had to keep to the house more or less. We had to be content with 2 loaves of bread and four tins of bully beef for 20 men for the day. There was nothing to drink but water. When it got dark we moved into the town and contacted our scout. He told us that there was a patrol of 6 R.I.C. and Tans standing at E.J. King's corner and publichouse about 200 yards from the barrack. It was decided to pick

six of the best shots. We thought it was fair enough - man to man, 6 enemy to 6 I.R.A. The rest of the column under Jim King, O/C Roundstone Battalion, were to open fire on the barrack on hearing our first shot.

The six of us walked up the main street, three abreast and the other three ten yards behind. It was arranged that the front three would wheel around on passing the patrol, with revolvers in coat pockets, and would open fire. The three at the rear would at once step off the footpath on to the road and would also open fire. This would give us the position so that we would not be hit by our cross fire. This worked perfectly, but when fire was opened by the first three they discovered that only two R.I.C. were there and they were killed. We captured 1 service rifle, 2 Webley .45 revolvers, 5 rounds of ammunition for same, and 45 rounds of .303. The remainder of the column opened fire on the barrack. The Tans replied with grenades, rifle fire, machine-guns, but not a shot went near our men. When we returned to our appointed meeting place, one man was missing from our 6-man attacking party. This left us in a very dangerous position, for we could not leave this man behind as he was very likely wounded. Four of us returned to the ambush position, the O/C, P.J. McDonnell, G. Bartley, D. Joyce, and myself. We went right up the middle of the street and I tripped over a dark object lying on the street. On stooping down, I found it to be a .45 revolver, which was probably hit out of the hand of one of the R.I.C. There was no trace of our man and we searched almost straight up to the barrack for half an hour, but we made sure that we were out of the line of fire. Next day he turned up without a scratch.

We learned that two Tans had gone into King's publichouse just before the firing started, for a drink. They lay down behind the counter until the firing was over and, cowards as they were, they stayed there for hours. Two other R.I.C. had only left for the barrack when we arrived for the shooting.

It was time to get to the column, and arriving there five of us, we found the missing man had not arrived as yet. Our column had only fired a volley of ten shots at the barracks, and an hour after the attack the enemy were still raking the town with bullets. We retreated on to the Twelve Pins to our camp, and on our way through the mountains we saw the lights of a train down below speeding to Clifden with reinforcements. Shortly after they arrived in Clifden we heard the sound of grenades and explosives and saw the fires of blazing houses. One man was shot dead through the mouth, and they burned 13 houses that night. They sent the message for reinforcements through the Marconi wireless station, for we had cut all telephone wires prior to the raid. A strong force of Auxiliaries were left to augment the garrison in Clifden after this. Our retreat that night from Clifden to our camp at Áille na Beagh was a most trying experience. The hardship that the men experienced is difficult to put in writing; only the men who went through it could adequately express themselves. We went into the attack on empty stomachs. Dry bread, a little bully beef and water is all we had for the day, and our only concern after the attack was to get as far away into the mountains, and that as quickly as possible, before reinforcements arrived. The route was long and tortuous, over marshy boggy land and over jagged rocky cliffs, and that was traversed

in the dark. At intervals a halt had to be called and an officer detailed to go back along the line to count the men, fearing that one may have slipped into a boghole or that he may have become detached from the column. To be alone and to have lost ones way in these mountains on such a night would be to court death from exposure. It took some hours to reach the camp. We were a pitiful sight when we reached there, and we just threw ourselves down, dog-tired with the sleep. Most of the men took off their boots to dry their stockings and just lay there in their bare feet. The guards at the camp got ready the tea, and one tin of boiling water turned over and scalded the feet of two of our men, Wallace and Keane. We had to have them treated and bandaged and had to send two men with them the following morning to take them home.

There was not much use in us remaining much longer in this area, so we decided to move through the Twelve Pins to Pádraig Ó Máille's house at Mounterowen in the Maam Valley. It was the 17th March when we started on our long trek through the mountains, just the day after the raid on Clifden. We were four miles from Leenane. There were two fairly well-to-do farmers in the valley by the name of O'Neill who were very friendly disposed towards us. We got tea, and in a large barn our men were allowed to sleep until the following evening. Refreshed and fit for anything after our sleep, we set out the following day for Ó Máille's house across the last ridge between Glencroff and Mounterowen, and arrived that night in Ó Máille's. This was now set up as our H.Qrs. I sent word by Willie King, a young Volunteer who was always at hand and very willing, to Mrs. Cuffe, a sister of the O/C,

P.J. McDonnell, to have a supply of bread and provisions sent daily. This she did. My late wife, Margaret, another sister of the O/C, took this personally on hands and made arrangements to send the supplies each night so that they would not be noticed. It was arranged to send the supplies out the back way and through the fields instead of by road. There were a number of loyalist families in the Leenane village and they were not dependable.

After a few days when our camp was established it was decided that Pádraig Ó Máille should visit Colm Ó Gaora, who was suffering from facial paralysis. I was to accompany him. We set out across the mountains of Maamturk, after crossing Glenlosh, and then across the mountains of Oorid, arriving at Gortmore just as it was getting dark. We called on Mr. Connolly, N.T., as his house was right on the junction of the three crossroads, one leading to Screeb, one to Rosmuck, and the other to Carna. After having much needed tea, Joe Conneely, who acted as bodyguard to Colm during his illness, was sent for. He resided at Inver, about a mile and a quarter down the Carna road. He was introduced to us in Irish, as he knew no English, and was told to take us to Mrs. Flaherty's of Inver, a sister of Colm. Colm was in bed there. It was not safe for him to stay in his own house as he was 'on the run'. We had a lengthy discussion on the whole position. He gave us information of a patrol of between 6 and 10 R.I.C. visiting the area twice each week from Maam Barrack, and that they came for certain a few days after the first of each month to pay the pensioners of the R.I.C. There were three such pensioners in the area at that time. Joe Conneely took us across by Pádraig Pearse's cottage to Michael O'Malley's

where we slept that night.

We returned to our camp at Mounterowen the next day, after halting at Patrick O'Malley's (later Dr. O'Malley) of Oorid for refreshments. We made our report to P.J. McDonnell and Gerald Bartley. They listened in silence. The O/C then said that it was always his intention to attack Maam Barrack, but with the little arms and ammunition they had it would only be waste of ammunition and effort against such a strong and well fortified building. The barracks was well nigh impregnable. It stood on high ground and had a commanding view of the countryside around. All its windows were steel shuttered and it was surrounded by barbed wire. It was almost a physical impossibility to approach it without being seen, as there was no cover near the barrack. The O/C decided that he would cancel the attack on the barrack and that he would concentrate his efforts on this patrol visiting the Rosmuck area. The O/C and O/C Bartley decided that they would set out at once for Rosmuck and see Colm Ó Gaora, O/C of that area, and that they would get the Company Captain, P. Geoghegan, to make arrangements for the food supply for that area. They would also arrange for the transfer of Colm to Mounterowen before the attack got underway.

I was left in charge of the column until the return of the O/C, J. King, O/C Roundstone, was in charge of the guard. It was now drawing near to the end of March. Our O/C and Gerald Bartley returned to the column on the 2nd April.



On the 1st April, 1921, I received a box at our covering address at Maam Cross. It had come to Leenane as provisions. The box contained four .38 revolvers, 200 rounds of ammunition for same, four bags of high explosives - weighing 7 lbs each - which came as flour. They just arrived in time for our next engagement.

Everything was ready and we had the column on the march again. Our first delay on our way across the mountains of Maamturk was at Oorid, where P. Ó'Máillie's wife was dead. He had only two young sons. We made tea and, as there was a scarcity of bread, we had a baker in the column who set to and made some. We proceeded across the Oorid Mountain towards Screeb and paid our first call at the Company Captain's house at Screeb. We got him to collect some local Volunteers as there were only two houses in this village and we needed guides to take some of the column across to the village of Glentrasna, about 2 miles away, and to have them billeted there. Pádraig Ó Máille, Dick Joyce, and Johnsie King were billeted in the next house to Geoghegan's where P.J. McDonnell, Gerald Bartley and myself stayed. All men got instructions to report to the Company Captain's house at daybreak the following morning. The area was flat but you could see men moving three miles away. This was one of the reasons why it was necessary to get the column moving early to Screeb before the natives awoke. The O/C, Gerald Bartley, and myself went to the Cross, where the road to Carna and Rosmuck branched off from the Maam Cross road. There was only one position which was of any use and this was on rising ground when coming from Maam Cross - a small hillock

of granite rock on the east side of the road, and on the west side of the road was a small Protestant Church partly hidden by a grove of trees.

R.I.C. coming from the Maam Cross direction could see us in this position two miles off unless every man lay under complete cover and remained under that cover for a long time, a hard thing to do. We decided to let them pass through to Rosmuck or Camus. They had to go to Camus to pay ex-Sergt. Mullaney, and on their return we were to ambush them. We had barely reached our decision when our scouts brought word that five R.I.C. were approaching from the Maam Cross direction. We were away  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile at the Company Captain's house, both the O/C and myself. We watched them through field glasses. We let them pass on to Camus and immediately they had passed we took up our positions and awaited their return. All men were placed in the grove and around the granite rock, with the exception of three men given to me. My party had two rifles, one to myself and one to another man, P. Wallace, and the other two had a shotgun each. We four took up positions in a clump of rocks about 400 yards from the Maam Cross side of the grove and about 30 yards from the road, right on a slight turn of the road. We were to shoot or capture the leading man and, probably, the second, if he came our way. We had the road blocked with a cart which we commandeered from a man coming with a horse and cart. We gave him back his horse and told him to go back the way he came, towards Maam Cross. We would not risk letting him through to Rosmuck. I could see all our men in their positions clearly. O/C McDonnell and O/C Bartley were in the rear of the column and were the first the R.I.C. would pass by. We were sure that the R.I.C.

would not be extended more than 400 yards. This would mean that the Sergt. would be 100 yards in front of the second man, and three cycling in the rear. Immediately the three in in the rear came in sight of P.J. McDonnell and Gerald Bartley they would open fire, thus giving my party the opportunity of having the two leading men right in the sights of our rifles, and if we missed, the cart would block their way and force them to dismount.

At last the first policeman came on the scene, passed the rear men of the column and came on for 100 yards. Then another followed. To my horror, I heard a shot from the grove side, and some distance nearer to me where the O/C placed men behind a large rock, I heard another shot, and yet another, and smoke coming from behind this rock. I realised that our ambush was a failure. The first policeman had only come to 200 yards from our position. He was the Sergeant, and he jumped or fell off his bicycle and rolled into the side of the road and opened fire on P.J. McDonnell's and G. Bartley's position. Luckily for them it was only a revolver he had, as he had them right under the sight of his gun. I acted at once, since the plans made could not be adhered to. I tried one shot for range. A spurt of water rose one foot from his head. My second shot seemed to get him in the shoulder, for he stopped firing. I went along the rood, keeping him covered, and when I got as far as him, he pretended to be wounded. He had his gun all the time held in his hand. I kicked it out of his hand and pulled him out of the water on to the road. He cried for mercy and said he was not prepared to die. I made him say an Act of Contrition anyway.

When I took up his revolver, I found one live bullet in it, and I said to him: "I suppose you held this one for me if I was fool enough to let you use it".

I searched him and got a cheque made payable to an ex R.I.C. Sergeant in Rosmuck for £28, whom they had not gone to until some later day. He had two bottles of poteen in his haversack and a gold watch. I broke the bottles of poteen later that night. Going up towards the column I met the local curate, who asked me how many were wounded or killed. "None" was all I could say. The poor curate had to leave the district that night, or the same fate would have been meted out to him as Fr. Griffin of Galway received.

We collected 2 Webley revolvers, 1 service rifle, 14 rounds of .45 ammunition, and two haversacks. We destroyed the two bicycles and seven bottles of poteen. We kept two bottles of poteen, one of which we divided among the men as they were very dry, and the other we kept for medical purposes.

Three R.I.C. had escaped on bicycles towards Screeb Lodge. One of them was shot through the lung, having got two bullets. We started off again on our long journey to Mounterowen, and we insisted that Capt. P. Geoghegan and his brother should come with us. After hours of marching we landed in P. Ó Máille's of Oorid, and, as previously, we got some bread baked by his sons, John and Pádraig. We delayed there an hour for tea, and as we were only a mile across from the main Galway/Clifden road we decided to cross it before daylight, fearing a round-up in the morning. We continued on across Maamturk Mountain and arrived at J.R. Walsh's of Maangowna just at break of day. We had a great sleep

after having tea, and we slept in a hayloft as few of us got beds. This was within two miles of Maam Barracks. On checking the amount of ammunition fired, I asked each man how many rounds he fired. The answers went like this: two rounds, none, two rounds, 1 round, none, eighteen rounds. "What in Hell did you fire at?" shouted the O/C. I wanted to polish off the Sergeant and the Sergeant had not got a scratch when I pulled him out of the drain, but I did not say so as we wanted to find out who fired the shot which came near to spoiling the ambush and a handy capture of arms and ammunition, and now I had my man caught in a trap.

We stayed on in Walsh's, Maamgowna, all next day. We spent the time cleaning and oiling our rifles. We had a good dinner and when it grew dusk we set out up the valley for Mounterowen. Next morning a scout brought the paper, the 'Independent', and in it we read an account of the ambush and about the number of houses in the area which were destroyed as reprisals. A number of lorry loads of Tans and Auxiliaries arrived at the scene that night and burned a number of houses, among them the two Geoghegans, Co-op. Store, the teacher's, the curate's, Colm Ó Gaora's, and Pearse's cottage.

Thomas Geoghegan, a brother of Capt. Pat Geoghegan, was standing outside the house, and in coming in he read in the paper about the houses in his own locality being destroyed, among them his own house and his uncle's. It was too much for him and he lost his mind and went berserk. It took four men to hold him until he was tied up to prevent him from doing harm to himself or to the house. We sent a dispatch-rider immediately to Leenane for Dr. Brien, and when he arrived

he gave him an injection of morphia and we were able to put him to bed. The doctor visited him every day and advised that it was better to send him home when he got better. We sent another man and his brother with him on his way home. He never recovered from the effects of this, and years after I was in his house and saw that he was not yet well. He died some years after that, a young man.

We made our H.Qrs. at Mounterowen House.

It was situated on rising ground facing north on the side of a very high mountain and about 250 yards from the main Maam/Leenane Road. The land between the road and the house was flat marshy bog, and the mountain behind the house was 300 to 400 feet high and was a mass of small hillocks and large rock which rendered it ideal for defending the house. On getting over the mountain you dropped down into Leagh Valley, and the other side of the valley was bounded by another mountain, 1,400 feet high. Between the house and the road there also ran a river. We at once made preparations for defence in case of attack. Positions were formed and camouflaged. Rifle men were shown their positions and defensive drill was carried out several times a day. The column was gathered into the house and told to take up their positions, enemy sighted. Immediately all the men would scramble off to their allotted positions. In one week all the men were familiar with their duty in case of a surprise raid. We got information on a few occasions that a large body of Tans were searching the Maam Valley, but it did not trouble us for we were determined to make a stand and this added to our ardour to make our preparations all the more perfect. We

were anxious for a fight and wanted to justify our existence as a fighting unit. We got in a good deal of rifle practice. We had a .22 repeating rifle and plenty of ammunition for same, as the O/C had a .22 rifle of his own and gathered .22 ammunition over the years. Each man became proficient with this rifle, particularly at a range of 200 yards which would be the range if we were attacked.

A guard was placed every night, with an officer in charge. Instructions were issued that if the enemy were sighted, the column was to be roused at once and take up their positions immediately. No shot was to be fired until the O/C gave the order. It was planned that the enemy were to be allowed to cross the river by the stepping stones into the flat marshy land, which was coverless, and then we were to open fire. This plan was explained so often that we did not expect any snags.

We were informed that a Colonel Clifden, who had taken up residence in Kylemore House, was almost certain to have some guns as souvenirs, and we made up our minds to raid the house. Either Gerald Bartley or Jim King was the officer detailed to go along with me and four Volunteers to make the raid. Among the Volunteers were Tommie Madden and Johnsie King. We set off in a thick fog early one morning. It was a journey of eight miles in a straight line across mountain and roadway. The fog helped us in that we could move along without being observed. We remained in Glencroff until dark that evening, as we had to cross the main road and to travel a vast expanse of open bog on which we could be easily seen in daylight. We arrived at the house at one o'clock and entered through the kitchen window. One of the servant girls in the house was very

friendly disposed towards us. We knocked slightly on the door leading off the kitchen and this girl opened her door. There was another girl in bed there with her. She was very excited. We assured her that she would come to no harm. Our friend got dressed and told us that the Colonel was not at home as he was gone to Clifden to visit some friends and would not be back until late. We warned the guards outside that the Colonel might return and, if he did, to hold him. We searched the house from top to bottom without result. We then climbed to an attic in his bedroom, where I found a Peter-the-Painter wrapped up in flannel. Now we knew that he had ammunition somewhere for this gun and we redoubled our efforts, but without result. In the library there was a large quantity of boxes of tobacco and a goodly number of pipes. As cigarettes were scarce, I handed out a pipe for each man in the column, twenty-three in all, and as I handed out box after box of tobacco I noticed that one was a lot heavier than the rest. I opened it and, behold, there lay snugly inside a gleaming new .38 savage automatic and two magazines filled with ammunition. We renewed our search of the tobacco and found another box with 100 rounds for the same gun, but nothing for the Painter. We collected a supply of shirts for each man and also a few top coats. We next visited the cellar, and there before our eyes were barrels of whiskey, rum, brandy and beer, while around the walls were stacked bottles of wine of every description. We liked the French ones laced with straw best and took a dozen bottles with us for the boys to drink the old Colonel's health. Whiskey was not allowed in camp, so we had to leave it after us. We were well loaded down leaving the house that morning at 4 o'clock.



We arrived back at Mounterowen that evening at dusk. When giving out the shirts we found them all labelled M.C., which made us laugh later on. The wine was never drank, for it tasted like strong black tea without sugar and so we left it in a press at Mounterowen for the Tans to get later on.

Before going any further I should have pointed out that the O/C and myself left a young apprentice named Maloney in our workshop in Leenane, and had left him instructions to try and finish some side-cars, traps and a horse cart that were left unfinished. We got word that he was unable to get some tyres welded for shoeing some wheels. I decided to go and get this done, as it would only take a few hours and it was better that I go and do it than let the O/C.

I arrived without anyone seeing me and I got my work finished at 3 o'clock. I sent young Maloney to Mrs. Cuffe's, sister of the O/C. He had only just landed at the house when a lorry load of Tans arrived in the street with the Vice O/C, Michael Joyce, under arrest and in the back of the lorry. He was only home for a day from the column to make a visit to his aunt. He was taken to Galway prison and held there until the Truce. Young Maloney was arrested but was later released as he was considered too young. My position was serious. Mick Ribbon, an old workman who was passing and who knew I was in the shed as he had been giving me a hand earlier, said: "Lorry of Tans in the street, Jack". I left the door still locked and jumped for a window in the back which opened out, and landed into a shallow hole of muck where I stuck up to my armpits, with my revolver held aloft. I was afraid that I might go down altogether, although I was safe from the Tans. I could hear them talking on the road about 20 yards from me.

They had satisfied themselves with cheap whiskey in Cuffe's which they had not paid for. Next I heard the lorry go over the bridge towards Westport and the voice of Maloney and Ribbon say: "I wonder where did Jack get to?". "What in hell made you go in there"? they laughed. "I would not go into that hole for all the Tans in Ireland". They threw a rope to me, which I tied around my armpit, and they pulled me out. I had to change everything to my skin and remain in the O/C's house until after dark. I then rejoined the column in Mounterowen. They would not believe the lucky escape I had.

The camp was going in great steam at this period, but we were getting annoyed at G.H.Q. when they did not send us more arms and ammunition to enable us to carry out a good attack, because as yet we had insufficient arms to do this. We held a meeting and discussed this and were of the opinion that perhaps they would not send us more arms without cash, so we decided to make a collection of the Maam Valley and Leenane farmers. We levied a certain sum on each farmer, knowing that he could afford the amount levied. A few of the column, with an officer in charge, were sent to make this collection, and, as far as I remember, Tommy O'Malley of Kilmilkin gave £50 without a question. A certain farmer quite near us was called on for £10, which was the levy laid on him, but he refused point blank to subscribe. He had a fine big pig killed and salted in a barrel. Comdt. King said: "Alright, we will take this instead", and each man took two pieces of the pig and marched away with it, leaving him only a few pieces and the head for himself. The levy party arrived in camp and laid the

meat on the table. The rest of us thought that they had gone mad, until Comdt. King explained that that was the levy of £10 in value which a farmer had refused. We sent to G.H.Q. £150 from the collection, and all we got from them was ten times paid for.

We had a fairly bad accident now, for one night while Willie Conneely was on guard duty he was carrying his Bulldog .45 stuck in his belt. He stooped down to put turf on the fire and the revolver fell on the ground between his legs and went off, wounding him on the shin bone fairly seriously. We now had two invalids on our hands, the other being Colm Ó Gaora from Rosmuck. Dr. Brien was a constant caller to see the patients and made things easy for us.

On April the 22nd, Mick Conroy, Battalion Q/M, took over charge of the night guard from P.J. McDonnell who was not feeling well. The O/C was put to bed, after first getting him to take a cup of hot whiskey, which he resented taking but we made him do so. In a short time he was asleep. I would share the bed with him later that night. I thought I was not in bed more than an hour when I felt someone shaking and calling me. There was Mick, and he informed me that there was a bunch of black objects moving along the road towards us from Maam and if they were not cattle they must be policemen. We both jumped out at once and put on our clothes, our boots, without lacing, and minus our puttees which we stuffed in our haversacks; which were always left ready beside the bed with our revolvers and rifles. We went carefully out the front door, which was shaded by trees from the road, and got to a position where we had a clear view of the road. It was the 23rd April, 1921.

There we saw on the pathway, about 100 yards on the Maam side of it leading to the house and to the stepping stones, what we estimated to be about 25 R.I.C. men, apparently in a group discussing something, probably planning the best means of attack. We returned to the sitting-room and all the men were in the kitchen, fully armed and awaiting instructions. The O/C detailed the men in small groups of two and three, naming a man in charge of each party to take up defensive positions along the fence which ran both sides of the house, one east and the other west. These positions were already prepared with other positions higher on the hills to cover our retreat should the attackers become too strong for us.

The orders were given in sincere and determined words by the O/C. All men were instructed that no shot was to be fired until the R.I.C. grouped to cross the river at the stepping stones. Immediately the O/C gave the order "Fire", three rapid volleys were to be fired. Our men were now in their positions. The party of men started to move. Some jumped on their bicycles, came along the road and made for the path. One got to the stepping-stone and then I heard a shot and saw a puff of smoke coming from the main body of police along the road. The next was the echo of a rifle shot from one of our own rifle men, the identical man who fired the shot that spoiled the ambush at Screebe. The group of police on the road rushed for cover and we opened fire into them, but we were too late to do them much harm. We later learned that one man was killed on the roadside and one wounded, and one man at the river wounded. Shots were exchanged for some time and we got the impression that the R.I.C. on the road were only sent to pin us down while a stronger party went to our

rear up the Lee Valley to cut us off. The O/C ordered John Dundas, Adj. Roundstone Battalion, to get up and across the hill as soon as the R.I.C. fired the next volley. He was one of the most fearless men in the column. He was to fire a warning shot from the top of the hill if he saw R.I.C. coming at us from the back. Dundas succeeded in doing this, although one or two enemy bullets came quite close to him. Now we were safe from any attack from the rear.

After this there was a complete lull in the firing. It was evident that both the R.I.C. and we were sparing the ammunition, and we were ordered to fire no shot unless we saw a head popping up. Hours passed in this way, without progress on any side, until 10 o'clock in the day. We decided to withdraw up a sheep path into the Lee Valley and from there to go higher up the hill, fearing reinforcements would come before we could do this. Mrs. Eamon Ó Máille and Miss K. Ó Máille, who retired to an outhouse when we took over the house, made tea for us in this outhouse and it was easy enough to get bread and butter from the kitchen of the house. We had a fine feed, which we badly needed, and then set out up the sheep track.

When we retreated around the shoulder of the mountain, we checked our rifles and ammunition. In all makes, we had 11 rifles and they comprised 5 service rifles, 70 rounds each, one Mauser, 70 rounds for same, 1 Winchester .44, 41 rounds, 1 Howth, 40 rounds, 3 Martini, 30 rounds each, 10 shotguns, 20 rounds each. We now allowed that of all the arms from now on 7 rifles would only be used. The ammunition was collected from men holding Martinis, leaving them a few shots each for

protection. The rest was divided amongst the 5 service rifles, as from then on we were to change our line of action. There was no cover between the house and the R.I.C. Four men were picked out to try and encircle the enemy position - Gerald Bartley and Dick Joyce to go to the Maam side, and myself and Jim King to go to the left or Leenane side. Each of the four of us knew the ground very well. Our routes meant a big circle across flat bog so as to remain outside the range of the enemy fire until we crossed the river and the main road.

We were about 800 yards from the house when we spotted a Ford car travelling along the road from Leenane towards the entrenched R.I.C. on the roadside. It was out of range for us to try and stop it, and we did not want to give our positions to the enemy. We discovered later that it was the Joyce's car from Leenane, driven by their son, Frank, and carrying one of their workmen and wire and poles for their lands at Kilmilkin. We knew nothing of what subsequently happened when this car passed the R.I.C. on the road. One of the Tans jumped on the running board and put a revolver to Frank's ear and told him to drive like hell. Bartley and Joyce had already reached the other side of the road, for they had not as wide a circle to make as we had and were eye witnesses to what had happened at the car, seeing the Tan holding on to the windscreen with one hand, brandishing a revolver in the other and urging Joyce to drive faster. Firing on the car, they failed to stop it and one bullet went through the Tan's wrist and smashed the windscreen, but the Tan held on grimly until he got to Maam P.O. and phoned Galway for help.

Jim King and I crossed the road and got in position north west of the enemy at about 300 yards range and we were only about 150 yards over the road. We saw a second car coming along the road from the Leenane direction, and this we were determined would not pass. As it approached, I recognised it as McKeown's car, driven by our I/O, with Fr. Cunningham as passenger. We let them come in line ahead of us and we fired three shots over their heads to stop them running into the ambush, but they could not pull up until they were within 50 yards of the R.I.C. position. I saw Fr. Cunningham getting out. I fired over his head and he had only just ducked for cover when shots rang out from our men on the other side. They mistook him for a policeman. Still another shot came, but Conneely, the I/O, had just taken cover. There was a lull for a while and we made for a sheep pen across from us and 150 yards right over the enemy position. We had to cross open ground to get there, but we chanced it and made it. It was a great improvement on our previous position. We were now entrenched high over the road and over a quarry the R.I.C. were in. We were only just in that position when we heard a shot from the bank of the stream right under us. We fired two quick shots at that spot and for the rest of the day there was no other shot from there. The enemy now knew that we were at their back and made sure to keep their heads down. From now on all was quiet. The only sound was an occasional shot from our rifles on the other side. Gerald and Joyce had at this time withdrawn as we could see no sign of them any place. We fired, off and on, at the position of the enemy. We found our bullets were landing in the water across the road and I said to them that it was no use wasting any more ammunition as the hill seemed to be covering them

and that only a rifle grenade from our position would be of any use. Now along the road came Rainey and his wife, two Knights of the Road. They passed by the police positions without seeing them. It shows how well the police remained under cover. The two were walking in the middle of the road and were only 10 yards from where Fr. Cunningham was lying under cover, and they had just passed a Tan who was lying in a drain 30 yards from the priest, and with pure fright this Tan had not fired a shot all during the ambush, so that no one knew that he was there. A shot rang out and, with sudden fright, Rainey's wife gave poor old Rainey a push and landed him in the drain alongside Fr. Cunningham. A row started when Rainey beat the wife for knocking him into the drain. Then he looked up and saw the priest, and the wife, when she saw that she had support, started to lay into her husband. The Tan, fearing the commotion would draw our fire on him, shouted down at them: "Shut up, down there or I'll put a bullet up your a...s". Old Rainey turned on him and shouted: "Come up, you dirty b....., to the priest and get Confession to clean your dirty tongue", Fr. Cunningham later relating this amusing experience to me, although he had to keep his head down to keep from getting shot at by our lads. He could not help laughing as the Tan and Rainey glared at each other with the vilest expressions.

Jack Connelly, who was beside ~~me~~<sup>HIM</sup>, was enjoying this to his heart's content and said to Fr. Cunningham: "I'll soon stop them", and moving along the drain he got beside the Raineys and with a piece of stick he held his cap aloft and told Rainey to watch it. He held the cap in this way over the bank for a few minutes. A shot rang out and passed through the cap. "The Lord save us" was



all that came from Rainey, and this finished the bad language. Fr. Cunningham also told me that a rug that was in the car had three bullet holes in it not a inch from each other. Fr. Cunningham, later Canon, told me of this experience about a month before his death in 1952.

Jim King and I did all we could to let our rifle men know that this car was not an enemy one. I even fired a shot and put a piece of cloth on top of the rifle pointing towards the car, but it seems they did not take much notice of it. We got up and left our position so that they could see us leaving. We knew nothing at all at this time of the Tan lying in the drain 30 yards from the Rainey's, or of the Tan getting away in the car to Maam P.O. We tried to get at the R.I.C. from another angle, but found that not a scrap of cover could be found between the R.I.C. and us. We decided it would be foolish waiting and trying any further, so we retreated back the way we came towards Leenane. There was a steep mountain raising 1,000 feet on the north to our right and no rock to give us cover. We had to travel along the butt of this for about  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile alongside the Leenane road, 200 yards away, and could not attempt crossing it in such a wide exposed valley, fearing that reinforcements would come from Clifden by Leenane. We had to get to the Mounterowen Bridge where we intended going along the river bed to keep under some cover.

We went into a small farmer's house, Seán Ó Máille's, about 100 yards still north of the bridge. It was 4 p.m. now. As we were having a cup of milk and bread we heard very heavy machine gun fire.

Reinforcements had arrived. We could easily have retired up the valley as there was plenty of cover, but we decided to get to the column at Mounterowen, if at all possible, for we did not want to be separated from the column who were now probably engaged in fighting the reinforcements. We had to cross the road to the south to get to Mounterowen. We were only outside the house when a lorry load of Tans passed along the road 100 yards from us, then another, and still another, three of them altogether from Clifden. Were there more to come? We waited for half an hour and got into the river. There was not much water but plenty of rough stones, right through under the bridge. We got clear of the road and rushed along the valley as fast as we could. We could at all times see our old positions at Pádraig Ó Máille's house and could see parts of the road as far as Walsh's publichouse in Kilmilkin some two miles away. There were military and lorries everywhere. We got up on the Mounterowen Mountain and counted 10 lorries and an armoured car on the Maam side of the R.I.C. position and three lorries on the Leenane side that had come from Clifden. We had a splendid view of the enemy. It seemed to us that as the armoured car came in sight of Pádraig Ó Máille's house at Kilmilkin, almost a mile away, they opened fire and moved on towards the house slowly, continuing the fire and raking the hillside with machine-gun fire. The lorries came along after it, letting out the Auxiliaries and military all along the valley to advance upon the house. The valley now seemed a nest of military and police. The three lorries on the Leenane side carried out a similar action. When the armoured car came in line with the house, a withering fire was directed on the house, supported by rifle fire from police and military entrenched along the road. After half an hour of firing

and slow advance they succeeded in getting near enough to throw grenades into the empty house, through the windows. They waited half an hour before rushing and capturing the building, hoping, I suppose, that all the "Shinners" would be dead by that time. All they captured were two women and children left in an outhouse, as already mentioned. To loot the house was their next task, taking all silver ware, shirts, clothing, and whatever was left of the pig. One Auxiliary, seeing a shirt with the initial M.C. on it, shouted in his cockney accent: "This belongs to Michael Collins. The bloody man is here and we looking for him in Dublin all these months". Over the discovery of the initialled shirts the two Ó Máille women went through a very hard interrogation and were questioned as to Collins's whereabouts and how long he was here. They said he was there for the past six months. The shirts referred to were Colonel Mark Clifden's - M.C.

The women and children were removed in a lorry to Leenane without ever getting a chance to get clothing or blankets. All articles of any use were taken away in another lorry and the house and outoffices were then set on fire and destroyed. The enemy went off very satisfied men.

They would not have taken possession of the house so easily but for the fact that our ammunition was scarce and we were unable to keep up sniping at them. No man had more than 10 rounds left after the day, and we needed that for our own protection until we could get more, either by raid or from G.H.Q.

The Clifden lorries returned by Leenane, but they were escorted by two Galway lorries, fearing attack on their way. They drank everything in the two

publichouses in Leenane. Taking courage from the drink, they decided to burn Cuffe's publichouse, owned by the sister of the O/C, and also his workshop, but this was prevented by the District Inspector, Golden, who it seems was a Sergeant in the area at one time and was friendly disposed towards us.

Jim King and I proceeded up the mountain to a position higher up which was the pre-arranged spot for all the column to gather after the fight. It was getting dark and we had not long to wait for the whole column to arrive. With the exception of Gerald Bartley and Dick Joyce, we started off for the village of Cuillaghmore. There were only two houses there. I got two men, Patrick Wallace and Thos. Coyne (Butcher). We started off along the side of Cuillaghmore and Leenane Mountains and landed in a garden at the back of Mrs. Cuffe's house. We would now be standing 20 feet higher than the roof of the house and 50 feet above the road so that we would have a chance of getting away if anything happened. I got in touch with the O/C's sister, Margaret, my late wife, and got her to get us in a few bags - bread, butter, tea, sugar. We had all ready to go when the three sisters of the O/C, Mrs. Cuffe, Agnes, and Margaret, stole up to the cliff and wanted all the news of the fight, for it was reported that several of us were killed. It took me a long time to convince them that their brother, Peadar, our O/C, was safe and not wounded. When he was not with me they feared the worse. It was then that Mrs. Cuffe explained to me about the Tans deciding to burn their house.

The dear woman took from out of her dress a bottle of whiskey that she had hidden from the Tans, and gave it to me, saying that I might want it.

We did in fact need it later that night for our two patients. While talking to Mrs. Cuffe, Agnes and Margaret had got tea and cold meat prepared and we were refreshed. The boys were fed in the houses of Paddy Wallace and Michael Coyne, and John Coyne started to sing the "Boys of Shamahever" as if nothing had happened that day. We rested for a few hours and decided that it would be better to move out of the area and away to a quiet spot until we got more ammunition. We crossed the Leenane road and went north to Seán Ó Máille's house which I mentioned earlier, in the townland of Townaleen, west of Shanafaraghan overlooking Lough-na-Foey. It was quite a lonely place. It was dark when we arrived. There were plenty of welcomes for us. We got the column billeted for the night and slept well into the next day. We were not long out of bed when we got word that lorries of Tans were coming our way from the Finney direction. We were in houses situated at the end of a long valley and could see the lorries coming up along the road. They came as far as Shanafaraghan School and turned back. Perhaps they were afraid to go on the zig-zag winding hill to the Maam road.

We were anxious to get across Killary Bay to the Mayo Mountains and we sent a dispatch to Tommie Joyce, Gleannagimla, to have John Coyne's boat ready on the 25/4/21 on this side of the bay to take us across that night. We arrived at the spot where the boat was moored and the two men took us across in two runs and we were safely on the Lettras side of the bay. At Letteras we had provisions delivered by Mrs. Cuffe and a tea was prepared by Sarah Wallace, a sister of the two Wallace brothers who were on active service with us.

A large tent had been left there. J. Conneely had it delivered for us from the Leenane Hotel. With our tent and provisions we set out across the hill to a small valley at the back of Bengorm, on the shores of Lugacauragh Lake. The poles were missing from the tent, so it could not be erected. There was nothing for it but to collect dry heather and pile it a foot deep on the dry shore. On top of this we spread the tent and each man got in under it and slept with his head sticking out. We rested that way for the night. We left our two patients in the dug-out we constructed in the hillside over Wallace's house about 500 yards up the hill. It was a good, safe position and we left one of the Wallace brothers to look after them. This dug-out was soundly constructed with concrete walls and iron roof, camouflaged on top and with an iron door and lock and key. We used to store all our arms there before going on active service. The next night, 26/4/21, the O/C and myself went to Leenane and got poles for the tent and pegs in the workshop. We removed a mahogany sideboard and dining table which we had left finished in the workshop and which the O/C and myself took a pride in as beautiful pieces of craftsmanship as it was the first furniture made for his new house in Leenane. We regretted not having them removed before going on active service, but the anxiety of going made us forget everything. My late wife, Margaret, had secured a key of a small store which was owned by Mr. Tynan of the village but was little used by him. We knew he was friendly with the police and we knew his place would not be raided. We managed to get the furniture removed there without anybody seeing us. We had tea in Cuffe's before setting out again for our camp. We crossed to Killary by boat and we were only

just up on the Louisburgh road and getting ready to climb the mountain when we heard the rumble of lorries. We could see no lights, as they were travelling in the dark near Leenane, but we knew they were on the Clifden-Leenane road coming from Clifden. We got higher up the hill to the dump and, although it was dark, we had a good view of the Leenane village across the bay. Suddenly we heard a loud explosion and flames shot high into the sky over the village; another explosion and more shooting flames. All Peadar's work of his youth and his manhood went up in flames that night. We could see plainly three lorries stopped in the street and Tans moving around them. Peadar's place was a new house which he built for his intended marriage in a month's time. It was with a heavy heart that I told Peadar when we reached the camp. He looked grim and said we would pay them back in their own coin, and perhaps before very many days. It relieved us very much when we saw they had not burned his sister's house. If they did, we would be absolutely stuck for getting food supplies, as this house and shop were our means of getting provisions for our men.

We joined the column late that night and in the morning got the camp erected. It was small enough, 12' x 8' for 18 men to sleep in, including our equipment, but it was easy to please us. The first night under our new home was comfortable. All day we busied ourselves by covering the camp over with heather to hide it from prying eyes. On the 28th April, 1921, a consignment of stuff arrived at Maam Cross for us, packed to resemble whiskey case. The I/O, driving visitors from Leenane to Maam Cross, was informed by the Station Master that the stuff had arrived. They took

the label off the package and put it into a small lorry which was a converted old car, got a girl passenger, a girl coming to the hotel, and set out for Leenane. She took the front seat with the driver. When passing Maam Barracks a Tan held them up and requested a seat to Leenane. The I/O said he had none to offer but if he cared he could sit on the box in the back of the lorry. The Tan was so anxious to get to Leenane that he sat on the box and so escorted our precious cargo all the way to Leenane.

The box was delivered to us across the Killary and I was there to check its contents that night. It contained 4 Lee Enfield rifles, 2 .45 revolvers, 10 grenades, home-made Mills type, 120 rounds of .45 ammunition, 105 rounds of .303 ammunition, 19 electric detonators, 200 shotgun cartridge cases. If we had this stuff earlier we would have been in a much better position. This consignment put new life into us.

We stayed in the valley about a week. While there the men expressed a desire to go to Confession and Patrick Wallace and the O/C went to Fr. Cunningham to see about it. It was arranged that all the men would be at Wallace's house in Letteras at midnight on the 4th May and Fr. Cunningham would hear our Confessions and distribute Holy Communion to us. I instructed Patrick Wallace's sister, Sarah, to have a good supply of tea in and some provisions for 20 men.

Fr. Cunningham came as arranged and every man went to Confession and Holy Communion. Fr. Cunningham was taken across the bay by our men and afterwards escorted home to his own door. The men had tea in



relays in Wallace's house and left afterwards for the camp in the valley. Gerald Bartley, the O/C, Patrick Wallace and two of us who escorted Fr. Cunningham were left behind at Wallace's finishing our meal when a Volunteer rushed in and told us to come out quickly and watch the Westport road back behind Ashleagh. Our eyes widened with what we saw. There was a long string of lights coming along the Errif Valley, stretching back from Ashleagh Wood for fully a mile and a half.

As we watched them we wondered what road they would take. If they took the road to Louisburgh we would be in a perilous position as we were right on the side of the hill 500 yards up and like sitting ducks, up over the road. Just as we were considering what to do, the lights of the vehicles went out and there was complete darkness, but the hum of the engines, to our relief, drifted off up the Leenane road. We were fascinated at the long line of dark shapes humming along the road, passing Gleannagimla and on to Leenane. They were only half a mile from us across the bay. Gerald Bartley was sent immediately to take charge of the column and get the tent taken down and hidden. It was obvious that a big round-up was underway. A great big armoured car stopped directly across the bay from Wallace's house. Men got out and were shouting and running around. Thank God it was dark. We moved under cover to a higher ridge on the mountain and we hoped against hope that they had not spotted us. We kept their movements under observation and were in an ideal position to see what area was going to be combed in the round-up. From this vantage point we could with a little luck escape the dragnet and remain outside the area of operations of the troops.

The column of lorries now were all strung out along the road from Gleannagimla to beyond Ashleagh Wood, over a mile and, directly opposite, with half a mile of water between us until it was bridged just at the wood. We did not want to shift Colm Ó Gaora or Jim King from the dug-out as they were both very sick men. Patrick Wallace was minding them. Then, after watching the commotion around the armoured car for a while, we realised that it had broken down. There was a large gullet in front of it. We feared that if the boys in the armoured car spotted us, they would rake the mountainside with fire and pin us down until the troops from the other lorries crossed the bridge and combed the mountain for us. At long last, lorry after lorry started up and moved off towards Leenane. It was now dawn. At Leenane the British military divided up into two columns, one went on towards Clifden and the other down the road to Maam. The direction of their comb-out was revealing itself. Every man of the column was instructed, on his very life, not to fire a shot.

It was now five o'clock. We could see plainly in the early morning light what was happening. The Tans and R.I.C. were like bees, swarming up the hillsides and knocking at doors and arresting every male member of the households and bringing them down to the waiting lorries on the road. They were later taken to Maam Barracks. The pattern of the round-up was now clear. They covered an area of 11 square miles of mountain from Leenane, in line with the southern shore of the Killary Harbour, as far as Kylemore crossroads and down to the left to Recess, on to Maam Cross and back again to Leenane. One can imagine the number of troops required for this job, while we on the opposite shore

of the Killary, just outside the ring, watched them and congratulated ourselves on our position. Leenane was the centre of the area of operations for the British that day. Of all the men arrested, those for and against them, they only got one young Volunteer who was at home for the day to help his aged uncle. The R.I.C. at Maam recognised him. He was questioned and beaten at Maam Barracks with the butts of rifles, but they got no information out of him. He was let go with a broken ankle. In the round-up the I/O was taken to the barracks at Maam, but the Sergeant there recognised him and said to him: "What in hell did they bring you in for?". The Sergeant took the interrogation of the I/O in hands himself and wanted to know where the bloody I.R.A. got all the rifles from. Jack Conneely replied that he did not know but, as far as he could gather, they could only have a few old and rusty rifles. The Sergeant got mad at that and said: "A few old rifles, by G., they held us down in Mounterowen with more than that. Perhaps they are getting them in by boat". He asked Jack did he ever see any strange craft in the Killary. Jack said no, that the only boat he saw in there was a boat bringing furniture about eight months ago. The Sergeant seized on that point and exclaimed: "That's the way they got them, sent over the country as furniture, to arm the bloody b.....s." He was very satisfied at that and Jack was sent home in the next lorry.

We spent a very anxious time watching the movements of the military all day. An aeroplane appeared on the scene and flew very low over the mountain tops and dropped notes to the troops below and to the barracks at Maam. As it headed for the Killary Bay it flew

over the range of mountains where we were concealed. P.J. McDonnell and I had to run for cover over an over-hanging bank of heather, and in doing so I lost a brand new hat which I got as a present. It was carried away down the mountainside and for many weeks I lamented the loss. The plane glided along up the Killary not 20 yards from us. One volley from us would have put paid to the pilot and plane, but to do so would give away our position and leave us with the attention of all the British military down on top of us. Connemara's active service unit would be wiped out in one sweep. We estimated that the number of troops engaged in the comb-out numbered up to 2,000 men, quite the largest round-up in Ireland at that time.

The movement of troops continued up to the 6th May. The officers were billeted in the Leenane Hotel. It took them nearly two days to regroup after the round-up. Several units got lost and some got bogged down. We decided to break camp, as supplies were cut off from Leenane and a watch had been placed on Cuffe's in particular. We moved two miles due north of the road between Drummin and Doolough into the Glanumra Mountains. The men were billeted in the few farmers' houses in that area, five in each house. Some insisted on sleeping in haylofts so as not to disturb the farmers too much. They were very kind to us and we were well fed before retiring for the night. I was sleeping in Michael Coyne's house and there were three of us in the bed. We were not asleep very long when I heard a tap at the window. I jumped out with surprise. It was my late wife Margaret who was at the window. She had travelled 11 miles across mountain and bog to reach us, and that at night. She was

accompanied by the I/O, who had rowed her across the Killary in a boat. They brought the dreadful news that the round-up was starting at this side of the bay in the morning.

The men were mobilised at once and informed of the position. We decided to get to the top of Glenumura, in the Doolough Mountains, while it was still dark. There was not enough time to get across the Killary in the dark. We consolidated our positions in the mountain top amidst showers of sleet, which froze hard when the day came.

We remained all day, the 8th May, on the mountain top and came down for tea at Michael Coyne's house in the evening. We then started off across Bundoraghs, across Delphi Bridge, and then due north west almost to the butt of Maolrea, into the valley of Glen-Cuilleagh-na-Gower. Here we intended to put up a fight for it, as it was a splendid defensive position. For some reason the round-up did not take place, but the Auxiliaries still remained billeted at the Leenane Hotel.

On the 9th May there was a general meeting of all the column, and afterwards there was a meeting of the officers. It was decided at that meeting to break up the column into small units. We had 10 Magazine rifles, 3 Martini rifles .303 bore, 1 Winchester, and 1 Howth rifle, with the new supply of 200 rounds of .303 to divide out between them. Our idea was to confuse the enemy as to our numbers and our position and to snipe at them from different places at the one time. It would also ensure that we would not be completely wiped out, for at least some of the units would

escape capture. We sent another urgent appeal to G.H.Q. for more ammunition. We had plenty of .45 ammunition, but that was no use as we could not get to close grips with the enemy after the Clifden attack.

We assigned the men of the 3rd and 4th Battalions, under the command of Gerald Bartley, O/C Clifden, to cover the Leenane/Clifden road, to harass the enemy any way they could. We gave them the pick of our rifles and almost all our ammunition. Five men of the 1st Battalion were to stay around Leenane, with Patrick Wallace in charge, to harass the enemy there and to act as a guard to Pádraig Ó Máille. The three brothers, Pádraig, Eamon, and Tomás, were sent to a small cave in Ashmount, with Dick Joyce in charge of guard, to keep watch that nothing would happen there.

All arrangements for the splitting up of our column and the welfare of the men had to be done urgently, as our O/C, P.J. McDonnell, had arrangements made for his marriage to take place early in May. He was getting married to a sister of Michael Kilroy, and I was to act as best man. On the 11th May we bid farewell to the Connemara Mountains and trekked across mountain, bog and river to Newport, Co. Mayo. We halted on the way at my aunt's house in Aughergower, Mrs. Moran of Curvey. On the 12th May we arrived outside Westport, after covering a distance of 23 miles, at the village of Carmaclay, and, to our surprise, we were told that Michael Kilroy was in that area with his column. We located Kilroy and he was surprised to see us. He told us that he had sent some of his men into Westport to shoot up any enemy that might be found there. We continued on to Newport, and on our way we called at

Mick McGoff's house and there, to our horror, found his aged father (80 years) sitting in the midst of his ruined house; everything was smashed and broken. I told him who we were and not to be afraid. I asked where his son, Michael, was. He happened to be at the back door and came in. He was a comical sight. Half his moustache was cut off, half of his hair was clipped bare, his shirt was torn in ribbons, and he had no trousers. Seemingly a gang of R.I.C. under Dist. Inspector Fudge and Sergeant Butler had raided the house just before we arrived. They brought a cow into the kitchen and put Michael sitting on her back, whipped her around the kitchen and out the front door. The cow made for an old boreen, with Michael still on her back and shots ringing out after him. He threw himself off over a fence and escaped from them without much to spare.

We were told the R.I.C. party made off in the direction of Kylemore, Newport. We made haste after them, and as we were well armed with grenades and small arms we would give them something to think about if we caught up with them. We came to Tom Lyan's house. They had beaten this man as he lay in bed, with rifle butts, and brought his horse into the bedroom and drove the horse wild with beating until he reared up and brought his hoofs down on Tom as he lay in the bed. Tom Lyan died some days afterwards from internal injuries.

We continued on to the house of Owney Keane, nearer Westport, and found only his sister there, very badly shaken for the raiding party of R.I.C. had left their mark here too. They broke everything in the house, pelted her brother with eggs and beat him insensible.

They retired to the rear of the house, probably considering shooting him, when he escaped to the house of James Geraghty who, when he saw his condition, sent for the priest, who annointed him. Owney Keane never recovered from the effects of the R.I.C. brutality, for he died a young man. We only missed them by the smallest bit, and our tempers were so bad that we were considering following them into Westport. Five members were all that took part in these atrocities, Sergt. Butler being the chief culprit. We proceeded through Carrowkennedy Valley, continuing on across the Westport-Newport road and arriving at my father's house in Rossow, one mile from Newport, on the shores of Clew Bay, in the early hours of the morning of 14th May. We ate a huge breakfast and retired to bed and slept almost all day.

The next few days were taken up in the preparation for the marriage of the O/C, Peadar McDonnell. The P.P. of Newport would not have the marriage ceremony carried out in Newport Church because it was too near the barracks. He arranged that the marriage should be carried out in Kilmeena Church. The marriage was duly carried out at that church at 6 a.m. with Nuptial Mass. The bridegroom and best-man were adorned with .45s and grenades. The wedding breakfast was partaken of at my house in Rossow, and Mrs. McDonnell and her friends returned to Derrylahan where her husband and I joined them later that night.

When it grew dark, the O/C and I began to move off to Derrylahan, and about  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile from Newport, when we were just getting down to cross the road from a high field, we heard the sound of marching feet and we stopped



dead. We were five feet above the ground and the field was rising behind us without any cover, and, to make matters worse, the moon at that moment appeared from behind a dark cloud. We flattened ourselves against a depression a few feet from us and held our breaths. The police came on in pairs, ten paces between each pair. They halted and we were then in the middle of them. Suddenly they took up positions across the wall on the other side of the road to us. There was a rattle of bolts as they put one "up the spout". Apparently they were lying in ambush for some of the Newport I.R.A., a strange state of affairs. Our friend, the moon, kindly went behind a dark, black cloud and, creeping on our bellies, we slid 30 yards to a low hedge, where we were able to get away unseen and arrived at our destination hours late.

On the 18th May a number of the West Mayo A.S.U. were scouting around Newport. They spotted a policeman leaving the barrack, and Capt. Jim Moran decided to have a shot at him, although most of the column thought the range was too far. He downed him, first shot, and the victim turned out to be none other than the infamous Sergt. Butler. Retaliation followed on a massive scale. Military poured out from Westport and Castlebar to attack Michael Kilroy's house. After directing a withering fire at the house for a long time, they plucked up courage to storm the building and found only Mrs. Kilroy and a few young children inside. They threw them out on the roadside, without even giving them time to get clothes, and set fire to the building and workshops.

The O/C and myself were in strange territory and not in touch with the Active Service unit there. We decided to get back to our own brigade area, and after saying good-bye to Mrs. McDonnell and friends we set out for West Connemara.

While staying at Andy Kirby's of Carnaclay on our way to Connemara, we heard some firing to the north. We hit off towards the firing, due north about four miles. On our way we met two of the West Mayo Column coming towards us. They told us that there was an ambush at Kilmeena, that they were there and were ordered to retreat. Some of the men had been wounded, they told us. We headed back to Kirby's and there met Joe Ring and some other members of the unit, who had been operating in the Westport area the previous night and on hearing the firing were heading for it.

We resumed our journey to Connemara and stayed at Moran's of Corveigh, south of Aughagower. They had news of the Kilmeena ambush for us and informed us that there had been some casualties on our side and that some of our wounded were captured. While we were there the roads were constantly carrying lorries of Tans, busy after the Kilmeena ambush. A plane passed overhead as we stood on the hill at Corveigh and we had to run for shelter. We veered off north towards Westport and Castlebar. On the 21st May we arrived at Gleannagimla and sent out dispatch riders to collect the column and to meet us at Glencroff, about  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile from Leenane on the south side of Killary Bay. While waiting for the column, British troops were pouring into West Mayo. We sent Eamon Ó Máille, B.E., to blow up Tiernakill Bridge on the Maam/Maam Cross

road to make the road from Galway impassable. Having done that, we told them to blow up the bridge at Cornamona, cutting off troops coming from Tuam or Headford. These bridges were destroyed. We received news the same night that there was fierce fighting going on around Newport. This was the Skerdagh fight, where the West Mayo Column had billeted after the Kilmeena ambush. The night of the 23rd May we blew up Ashleagh Bridge and Shraleagh Bridge. This cut off Westport and West Mayo completely from Connemara and no British reinforcements could come from the Galway direction to quell the gallant men of West Mayo.

Funds were running out. The O/C and myself set out for the Cornamona area with the intention of making a collection in the Cornamona and Clonbur areas. We instructed the column to lie low in Glencroff until our return. We intended to do this collection as quickly as possible. Mick Browne, the Company Captain at Cornamona, billeted us in Michael Thornton's and Michael Coyne's houses in Doogla village. Patrick Wallace and Dick Joyce were also with us. We had to make demands sternly, as this area was a poor one and money was hard found. On our second night, as we passed through Cornamona village, we heard the sound of lorries coming. We rushed to the bridge to remove some planks the locals had placed across it for their own convenience, and we had them only removed and got under cover ourselves when a lorry pulled up and started to investigate. We moved off up the hillside under cover of darkness, reached our billet and collected all equipment, and then moved off north of Dooghta village. On the hillside we had a good view at the break of day. There was a section of Tans with

a Lewis gun not 400 yards from our billet, guarding a section of the road leading to Cloughbrack. We moved cautiously, as we knew that we had struck another round-up. Mount Gable Mountain, just across from us, was surrounded by lorries and a full-scale round-up was in progress. We scanned every road and breen from the hillside to make sure we were lucky enough to be outside the perimeter of the round-up. We kept along through the hills, keeping half a mile west of the Kilbride and Finney road, and landed at Mr. Jennings' house on the shoulder of Glentrellig Mountain, about 500 yards range from Finney Church. Right outside the church were two military lorries, and further on, on the road leading from Tourmakeady to the Maam Valley, was another lorry, waiting, we presumed, for the troops to get back from the hills. The four of us rested in the stable before going into the house, and I cannot remember which one of the four officers came with me towards the house, but just as we were about to go in there we saw, inside, two soldiers having tea. We backed away to the stable and wondered whether we should capture them, but if we did so we would have to take them with us. We decided to leave them in peace. We hit off through Gleantrague and over the mountains to Mounterowen and across the Leenane Mountains to Glencroff. There was a great welcome for us at Glencroff by the column. We had three days of most trying experiences.

A brigade meeting was held and a report taken from the whole area. It was reported that bridges were repaired by planking them, and that convoys of lorries and armoured cars were moving in strength

of ten or eight around by Maam Cross, Maam to Clifden, and back via Recess and Oughterard to Galway. We were too weak to attack them. A suggestion was made to amalgamate the two columns of West Mayo and West Connemara and to attack this convoy at Lahill, just outside Leenane village. A messenger with that idea was sent to West Mayo. It was also suggested that a mine be placed at the mouth of the Killary to intercept a warship in the narrow neck. This was to be laid at night by boat, and it was to be fired when the ship was leaving in the morning. We had plenty of electric cable for the job, also a detonator and exploder. A report was sent to G.H.Q. and they thoroughly agreed and were to send ample explosives to construct the mine, but this we did not receive in time from G.H.Q. We did receive on the 1st June from G.H.Q. 100 rounds of .303, 100 rounds of .45, and 50 rounds of 38 ammunition.

After this meeting I was instructed to go to Tully and Renvyle to make collections, as the one at Cornamona was interrupted and our funds were almost exhausted. Peter Wallace and Tom Coyne were to accompany me. We were to blow up the bridge at Letterfrack when we were finished. There was a very good company in Tully at the time and they helped us greatly. We were finished in record time. I remember going into two old pensioners and the old woman went to the room and brought out a bag with anything up to 300 gold sovereigns in it. She handed it to me and told me to take all I wanted. I took one and she said: "Sure that is no good to you, a stór". I thanked her very much and said I would take no more. Patrick McDonnell, the Capt. of the Tully Company and a cousin of the O/C, was with me when we approached the

teacher's house at Eagle's Nest, and he told me that this man had a revolver and that I should ask him for it. He gave us £1. I then said to him that he had a revolver and that I wanted it, also that if he did not give it to me, the Tans would get it and shoot him after. All he said was: "I have hidden it and no one will get it". "All right, Mr. Coyne," I said, "if I am able to get it, will you leave it to me?". "All right, Mr. Feehan, that is a bargain" he replied. We never searched one bit of the house, but noted he had about eight beehives. I saw bees flying around all hives except one. I went over to it and lifted the lid. Mr. Coyne was in the door watching. I lifted the lid of the empty box and it was filled with paper. I took out the paper and found 20 sticks of gelignite and coils and fuse, and there below was a lovely .32 Savage automatic wrapped in cloth, with a box of 100 rounds for it. "Well, you deserve to keep it after that" said Mr. Coyne. I promised to return it when the war was over. Having our collection finished, Wallace, Coyne, McDonnell and myself set out for the bridge, and with the explosives we brought with us and the extra we now received, we made short work of the bridge and then hit off for McDonnell's house in Tully. While we were having tea, a Volunteer came in and said that there was shooting in Letterfrack. We finished quickly and got out. We counted 12 Tans coming down the road towards us. We were cut off. Our only means was to take a boat from Renvyle House, owned by Dr. Gogarty. We got the boat and made for the Mayo side, intending to land at Maolrea, but halfway across a storm blew up and no matter how hard we pulled we could make no headway but drifted for the mouth of the Killary. Patrick

McDonnell and one of his men had come with us, which gave us four good oarsmen. I was lying in the bottom of the boat, violently sick all the time. We were lucky the Tans did not spot the boat, but they were gorging themselves with whiskey in the two pubs. We were eventually washed up in Glashlaun, about three miles from Tully and on the same side of the bay. It was the 6th June when we returned to the column.

A meeting was held shortly afterwards and it was decided that nothing could be done owing to the shortage of ammunition, and that it would be better to split up the column into four parts, put an officer in charge of each unit and go to villages not too far apart. This was done to enable us to billet the men, as we could not afford to keep them altogether. All my appeals to G.H.Q. met with no results or supplies of ammunition.

The Ashleagh Bridge was planked over by the Tans and we planned to let this bridge stand. Peter Wallace, Tom Coyne and I went to Bundoragha on the night of the 18th June and blew up Delphi Bridge, and after doing this we came back to Bundoragha and stayed at James Heneghan's that night. The house is only 100 yards from the Louisburgh road. We were just having a meal at midday, having only got out of bed, when I saw through the window 2 lorries, and I took them to be Crossley tenders, coming down the hill  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile away, towards us. We could not get out of the house by the back as there was no back door, and we had to take a chance and sit tight and, if the lorries pulled up, we would try and get away by running along a fence on the side of the hill in line with the Killary. However, they passed on to the bridge, but there was no crossing of this and,

needless to say, we did not wait to see the result of our handywork. They had to return. For that evening they had an appointment with death at Carrowkennedy.

The West Mayo Column were on their way to join us and they saw this lorry and other lorries passing out to Connemara and, assuming that we had the bridges destroyed, prepared to ambush them at Carrowkennedy. It was there that Kilmeena ambush was revenged, and only that the bridge at Delphi was destroyed by us, the ambush at Carrowkennedy would not have been such a success, for this lorry would have gone stright through to Louisburgh and back to Westport. It was our plan of campaign to destroy all bridges in that area, and we made a thorough job of them.

On the 29th June, while we were billeted at Delphi Lodge, a number of us, five or six, walked part of the way home with a few friends who were visiting us, and it was such a lovely evening we decided to take a swim in the Killary on our way back. While we were swimming, we saw a motor boat coming towards us with what we thought to be a load of tourists. Just half a mile away the boat conked out, and as we dressed and rambled off up the hill with our rifles on our shoulders we laughed at the predicament of the sightseers. Imagine our frustration and chagrin when we later learned that our boat load of tourists was indeed a load of Auxiliaries, and that we had them like sitting ducks in a boat drifting helplessly only 800 yards from us. We would never get such a chance again, with 20 rounds a man. We got word that night by my late wife, Margaret, that a round-up was to start the next day and that nine lorries of Tans had arrived at the hotel.



With the Auxies was an R.I.C. man named Greene. He was friendly disposed towards us and had been stationed some years previously in a protection post at Bundorragha. He and another R.I.C. man who had been stationed in the locality were picked up in Limerick and brought by the Tans to act as guides. The other man was being brought in a destroyer, up the Killary. This man Greene escaped from the company of the Tans in the hotel and went to Mrs. Cuffe's in the village for a drink. He gave this information to her, so my late wife sped with all haste to warn us. The round-up was on a very large scale. Two destroyers were to land troops from the Killary to the Old Head at Louisburgh all along the coast, and the party Greene was with was to spread along the Erriff Valley along the Westport road and make a wide sweep of the mountains inwards until they contacted the men who had landed from the destroyers and who were sweeping towards them. Another group was starting out from Westport and combing towards the sea. They were all likely to link up somewhere in the vicinity of our billets. The area to be combed covered all the territory from Westport to Louisburgh bounded by the sea on both sides.

Our camp hummed with activity at the news of this. It took some time to gather all the column together, for they were billeted in houses around for four miles. We marched four miles to the sea at Bundorragha Pier, where we were lucky enough to secure two rowing boats and sailed to the south shore of the Killary to Derrynasliggan, where we frightened the heart out of a family named Coyne who were living there. When they heard all the men around the house at night they thought that the Tans had come, but when they heard who we were

we got a céad míle fáilte and soon the kettle was singing on the fire. That morning we watched destroyers from the brow of the hill steam into the Killary and pick up all boats and curraghs and take them in tow, presumably to prevent any of the I.R.A. from using these small craft to escape the dragnet. The other destroyer steamed off around the Old Head, landing men at intervals along the coast. It was very comforting to be able to watch the round-up from a safe position on a hill just outside the area of operations, thanks to the R.I.C. man who gave us the information.

At 6.30 a.m. a plane came along and circled all the islands on the Killary, and delayed long enough at each of them to see that there were no men on them. Then it passed along the slopes of the mountains, scanning the area for men, and from our look-out on the mountain the O/C and myself had the rare experience of looking down on a plane in flight and seeing the pilot and observer quite clearly. The plane left the bay after  $\frac{3}{4}$  hour and headed over the Mayo Mountains. After a few hours we lost sight of the military operating on the Mweelrea mountainside, and the Tans were unable to use any motor transport on our side because the bridge at Doolough was blown up, so that they had to go first to Westport and then on to Louisburgh.

In the afternoon we moved from the immediate vicinity. Gerald Bartley and Jim King (with them also were Colm Ó Gaora and the rest of the men) moved to the Recess area. The O/C and I, with the local men of the column, went to Glencroff, just south of the Leenane/

Clifden road. As far as I can remember, the round-up started on the 30th June.

Here I must explain a difficult situation which had arisen. We had sent a full report to G.H.Q. re the fight at Pádraig Ó Máille's and how a car had come along and drove one of the Tans to Maam Post Office, where he sent word for reinforcements to Galway. Even though he carried the Tan against his will, G.H.Q. ordered the courtmartial of this driver and directed that outside brigade officers were to carry out this court. It was arranged to get officers from the West Mayo Brigade and that they would be at a given place on the 30th June.

Therefore, on this night we left Glencroff, the O/C and myself, and went to Connolly's house, the I/O, and met him there, hoping he would have news for us, but he had none. It was through Mrs. Cuffe and Margaret McDonnell (both sisters; Margaret was my late wife) that we got all our information, and any word that would come regarding the above event would be sent to Tobias Joyce's at Ashmount, Mounterowen. We set off along the bare side of the mountain sloping down to Killary Bay. There anchored in the bay was a British destroyer. One could throw a stone on deck from Connolly's house. The bare mountainside was continually swept with a searchlight from the ship. We could travel about 100 yards between every sweep of light and then had to dash for whatever cover happened to be there. Eventually we got to Ashmount. The house was only 100 yards from the road leading to Maam. We stayed there the night and sent word to Cuffe's to find out if any information came from the officers of

West Mayo, and told Mrs. Cuffe that we would wait around there for a few days until word came.

Word came next day by Michael Joyce, Derrintin,  $3\frac{1}{2}$  miles along the Westport road, north of the Errif river, that Michael Kilroy and two other men were there. We arranged for Joyce to escort Michael Kilroy and the two other officers, Johnnie Gibbons, Brigade Adjutant, and Jim Rush, Company Captain, to Martin Heraghty's of Letteras, and told them to remain there until we sent word of the next move. There was a large number of Tans billeted in the Leenane Hotel and lorries of Tans were constantly going and coming from Westport. We had to be most careful, for there was no sign of the round-up ceasing and our only chance of moving across the Leenane/Maam road was at night. We moved across the mountain and landed in Gleannagimla on the Westport side of Leenane, and stayed at Phil McLoughlin's. We sent word to Michael Kilroy to be ready and we would send a guide to bring them to Gleannagimla the following night. As far as I remember, it was the night of the 9th July. When Michael Kilroy arrived he gave us an interesting account of his escapades on his journey into our area. The most hair-raising was when they lay concealed under a large rock and the Tans walked over them without finding them.

While in Gleannagimla, the Mayo officers and Peadar and I saw lorries of Tans coming from Mayo and going into Leenane. At 11 o'clock J. Connolly arrived at our billets with a courier from Dublin. He was introduced to us but I forget his name; anyhow names meant very little at that period. This man informed us that he was a courier from G.H.Q. and showed us his

permits to travel from I.R.A. and British military. He gave us a communication informing us that a truce was being declared and that a cease fire would begin as from 12 o'clock noon on July 11th.

We were more stunned than delighted as we could not understand what it meant, but in the communication all brigade officers were requested to attend in Dublin immediately that week. Michael Kilroy was immediately sent for. He was staying in a house some distance off and he was introduced to the courier. The courier informed him that a messenger was sent to his area, too, with the same instructions. Michael Kilroy immediately set out for his area and I accompanied him three miles along the side of the mountains towards Westport to Reilly's of Glenacolly, where a pony and trap were got to take them to their destination. On returning again to my old friend in Gleannagimla, we slept with ease that night. On the following morning we got up early and went to the top of Gleannagimla Hill overlooking Leenane. We saw nine lorries of enemy passing into Leenane and it made us think how lucky we were to see this day. Were it not for our friend, the R.I.C. man, my late wife, and the I/O, J. Connolly, our chances of getting through the last round-up would have been slight indeed. We moved down towards the road and were just about to cross it when we heard the whine of a Crossley tender. It was not yet in sight; it was hidden in the turn of the road. There were six of us, with small arms. We ducked into an old roofless hut beside the road. We had just time to take up positions in the hut when the lorry came in sight and stopped 100 yards away from us, reversed and turned back for Leenane again.

The I/O was listening to some Auxies talking in the hotel afterwards and heard them remark about the courier from Dublin: "See how quickly this blighter returned. These damned Shinnors were here under our noses all the time while we were breaking our hearts in the hills looking for them".

That morning, 25 lorries and two armoured cars started off from Leenane at 11 o'clock to get to Galway at 12 o'clock. Looking at them go, we now realised with relief that we were once again free men, and twenty minutes after they had left the six of us were marching to Leenane. There we received a splendid welcome from our friends and were united with them amid tears of joy, thanking God that we were safe and happy.

This finishes my account of our fight for freedom in West Connemara up to the Truce on 11th July, 1921.

Signed: John FeehanDate: 29th Oct 1957Witness: [Signature](Investigator).  
[Signature]

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