ORIGINAL

ROINN COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913–21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1718.

Witness

Micheál Ó Droighnáin,

Furbough, County Galway.

Identity.

Brigade Commandant, East Connemara Brigade.

Subject.

I.R.A. activities, East Connemara Brigade,

1917 - 1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

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ORIGINAL

SECOND STATEMENT BY MÍCHEÁL Ó DROIGHNEÁIN,

Furbough, Co. na Gaillimhe.

PART II.

During part of the year 1916 that I was away from school, a young teacher from Spiddal, Seoirse Ó Flaharta, just out of training, acted as substitute in Furbough school. When I returned, I took up duty there again, but the Board of Education refused to recognise me, and requested the Manager, Fr. Lally, to have a teacher appointed in my place. This, he refused to do, though he was not particularly nationally minded, but the clergy of Galway, on the whole, were very strong on the point.

Then the National Board withdrew recognition entirely from the school, and refused to pay the salary of the assistant, as well as my own. The Irish National Teachers' Organisation took the matter up, and paid us both grade salary for the period of non-recognition, which extended to April, 1920.

In the month of February, 1917, at four o'clock in the morning, we were all awakened by a loud knocking on the door, together with an order to get up at once. My mother opened the door, and in trooped a number of R.I.C. men, led by Sergeant Goulding of Galway and Sergeant Reidy of Spiddal. They went up to my room, and ordered me to get up at once, which I did. They brought me in a car straight to Renmore Barracks, and handed me up to the military. George Nicolls was in the guard room

before me, and we had a bit of a laugh to cheer each other up. Later on in the morning, Pádraic Ó Máille was brought in, and, later still, Dick Murphy of Athenry.

We were put on a train, with a military escort, and brought on to Arbour Hill Barracks. George Nicolls and I were put into the one cell for the night, where we slept or tried to sleep on the floor. Next day, we were put on board a ship bound for England. There, we met some others of our countrymen, among them being Terry MacSwiney, Tomás MacCurtain, Seán T. O'Kelly, Seamus O'Doherty, Peadar Ó hAnnracháin, Darrell Figgis, etc., etc.

On arrival at Holyhead, we were put on a train and, when we reached Shrewsbury, we were put up in the guardroom of the Military Barracks for the night. We were, by now, separated into smaller groups - our group consisting of the four of us County Galwaymen, together with Terry MacSwiney, Tomás MacCurtain, Peadar Ó hAnnrachain and Séamus O'Doherty. Next, day, we were brought as far as Hereford, and handed over to the police. There, we were broken up still further. Pádraic Ó Maille pretended he had no English, and wanted me as interpreter. Consequently, we were sent together to the little town of Kington in Herefordshire, not far from the Welsh border. When we arrived in Kington, it was near midnight, and the sergeant of police did not know what to do with us, and he seemed embarrassed when he told us he would have to send us to the workhouse. This, we flatly refused to do,

and told him we wanted to be brought to their best hotel, and pay our way. Pádraic got violent (in Irish), and the poor sergeant got on the 'phone to the Chief Constable in Hereford. After a long conversation, he brought us to the Cambrian Hotel for the night (it would be about two o'clock in the morning). Three of our number, Nicolls, O'Doherty and Murphy, were sent to Leominster, and three more, MacSwiney, MacCurtain and Ó hAnnrachain - I can't recall where they were sent to. We were quite free to move about, hire bicycles and move around the country at our pleasure. We often met, and discussed the situation at home. I remember MacSwiney remarking, while discussing organisation work, "We will be better fit for a campaign in five years' time".

The whole eight of us were having a snack together one day in a hotel in Presteign in Wales, conversing in Irish, as we nearly always did - we were all Irish speakers with the exception of Dick Murphy who didn't know much of the language - when a big burly Englishman jumped up, and began to abuse us - Welshmen - for not being out at the front, helping Britannia in her troubles. He took it that we were speaking Welsh. We laughed him out of the room, in good Irish.

For a few weeks, about a month, we paid our own way at the Cambrian Hotel; it was about fifty shillings a week each, and then the Government decided to pay our board for the rest of the time. We were then changed to a private house, Arrow House, the Arrow being a little river flowing beside it. It was occupied by a grand family, named Powell, father, mother and two

daughters, the only son being in the war. The mother was of Waterford extraction, with the good old Waterford name of Power. One old constable was staying in the house - he was a pensioner who had been recalled for service, the only other policeman in the town being a sergeant stationed in the barracks. The Powells were very sympathetic to us, and made us as comfortable as they possibly could.

The Longford election campaign was in full swing by this time, and the deportees decided that some would escape, and make their way back to Ireland to assist in the campaign. Pádraic Ó Máille, being a useful politician, was one of those selected to go, and I was to remain behind. We cycled on to Leominster one morning to meet the others, and, when evening came, I was back in Kington alone. No question was asked. Padraic wore a bowler hat, and he left it with me, so that I could hang it up in the hall with my own cap. The constable could see the hat and cap there together, and he would not get suspicious. He knew nothing of Padraic's disappearance for three days, till the papers had it, and what he did then was to go searching the hills around the town, to see if he could come across the fugitive. He never came near me, nor asked a single question about the escape. All who made the attempt to cross over to Ireland succeeded. Then the War Office decided that we were all to be sent home, and towards the end of June (1917), the Powells, father, mother and two daughters, accompanied me to the railway station as they would one of their own family. On reaching Holyhead, I met the others, and we all

travelled home to Dublin, and to our different destinations.

On my return, I started to reorganise the Volunteer companies in my area. Nothing of any great importance happened during the remainder of that year.

On January 8th, 1918, I got married. Both myself and my wife continued to teach in Furbough. school, though not recognised by the Board of Education.

Early in the year (1918), perhaps March or April, I got a message from Michael Collins to travel to Dublin to meet him. I went, and met him in Fleming's Hotel. With him were Diarmuid Lynch and a man who was introduced as Mr. Harrington.

The purpose of this meeting was to arrange a landing of arms from Germany, on the coast of Galway Bay. The place selected was near Inverin, at a village called Baile an Logáin. I understood that Mr. Harrington was a seaman, who was to travel to Germany, by what method, I do not know. He was to land the arms by means of a collapsible boat from a German submarine. On reaching the shore (at night), he was to say, "It's a fine night, glory be to God", and I was to answer, "Seadh, maise, buidheachas le Dia".

Collins selected three possible dates: May 3rd, May 13th, or May 23rd - he thought it better to have ten days between, rather than seven days, so that the watch would not take place on the same

nights in three consecutive weeks. We were to watch for the landing for three nights on each occasion, that is, on the 2nd, 3rd and 4th May, on the 12th, 13th and 14th, and again on the 22nd, 23rd and 24th. Reason for the three-night watch was that the submarine could be in too soon or too late.

On returning home from this meeting, I selected fifty men from the Spiddal and Knock Companies - the majority of them were members of the I.R.B., but some were not. We travelled in twos and threes, keeping away from the public road as much as possible, and reached the spot on the seashore some time after dusk on each night. Peadar Ó Máille, a native of the village - Baile an Logáin - was there to meet us. I arranged the boys in small groups along the shore, and stayed in a central place myself. We carried out the same routine faithfully for the nine nights, staying there until about four o'clock every morning, and then trooping home. Though our movements must have been noticed by some of the people, not a single word was ever heard afterwards about the incidents. Unfortunately, the landing never took place, the boat carrying the arms being captured in the North Sea, but the arms were sent to the bottom.

Southern Volunteers believed that the arms had been landed - a carload of Limerick Volunteers actually travelled to Galway to get their supply.

I think it was during 1918 the British recruiting meeting, which was being held in the Town Hall, Galway, was broken up by the Irish Volunteers. The hall was packed. Máirtin Mór McDonagh was in

the chair, and Stephen Gwynn was the principal speaker. Four of us from Spiddal took part: Mícheál Duignan, Johnny Furey, my brother, Máirtín, and myself. Tom Hynes had a number of test-tubes filled with some foul-smelling liquid, distributed to a certain number of the Volunteers - my brother had one - and they took up the positions allotted to them in different parts of the hall. The meeting was not long in progress when the electric cable leading to the Town Hall was cut, and the hall plunged in darkness. This was the signal for the test-tube carriers to crush them under foot, and release the foul smell through the hall. In a few seconds, all was pandemonium, and there was a rush for the exits. My job was to stay close to George Nicholls, not far inside the main door. In the rush out, I was pushing George out before me when the drummer of the St. Patrick's Band, which was present for the occasion, a lad named Kelly, whom I knew, lifted his drum stick to strike Nicholls on the head. Before he could strike, I grabbed his arm and forced him to the ground, thus saving Nicholls. I have a recollection of some candles being lighted on the stage, but the meeting was brought to an end.

We four from Spiddal collected our bicycles, and were cycling out over O'Brien's Bridge when we saw Nicholls engaged in a hot argument with a big man who was called John L. Sullivan, a boxer of the town. We came off the bikes and surrounded O'Sullivan who made a hasty retreat when he saw us. We brought Nicholls home to his digs at Tandem Lodge, Lower Salthill.

The Galway City Volunteers, together with some from Castlegar, took part in this episode.

The 'flu was raging towards the end of 1918, and we lost one of the most determined of the Spiddal Volunteers, Jimmy O'Flaherty, at that time. He was buried in Knock cemetery. Half-a-dozen R.I.C. men followed behind the funeral, but did not come any nearer to the cemetery than the public road, a quarter of a mile away. We fired three volleys over the grave, with revolvers. The R.I.C. remained at the head of the boreen leading to the graveyard, until we had passed through, on our way home, but they did not molest us, nor search us.

Coming close to the general election of 1918, a large election meeting was being held by the Irish Party, one Saturday afternoon, at the Square in Galway, and addressed by Stephen Gwynn, William O'Malley and others. I happened to meet Rev. Professor T. O'Kelly of U.C.G., just outside the Royal Hotel, and he suggested to me that we ought to set up a counter-meeting. Looking around for a few to make a start, we saw about half-a-dozen Castlegar boys. Pulling a side-car out of the hotel yard, I mounted it, and, with only about a dozen listeners, I started to address them (in Irish) at the top of my voice, about fifty yards away from the Party meeting, which was surrounded by a big number of R.I.C.men. Some of their listeners left them, and joined our group, and, before long, we had the big majority of the meeting around us. I have no idea what I said on that occasion, but when I was at the end of my tether, Louis Faherty, native of West Connemara, a student of U.C.G., got up on the

side-car, addressed the crowd in English, and held them until the other meeting dispersed.

The year 1919 was mainly used for the collection of all the available arms in my area, which consisted of shotguns, single and double-barrelled. Of these, there was not a big number.

Some time in May 1919, we were planning an attack on Rosmuck Police Barracks, mainly for arms. This place was outside my area, being in West Connemara, and transport at that time was slow. I selected about thirty Volunteers from Moycullen, Barna, Spiddal and Knock Companies, together with two or three from Rosaveel Company. George Staunton of Lettermore was to have a lorry at Tully crossroads waiting for us. George was working at Camus Co-Operative Stores at the time, and the lorry belonged to the co-op. It was very late when the Moycullen and Barna men arrived at Spiddal, as they could not travel till darkness fell, and then they had to be brought to Tully on side-cars. The result was that we were not able to reach Tully until three o'clock in the morning, and Rosmuck would be close on twenty miles further away. Colm Ó Gaora of Rosmuck was to arrange some sort of diversion, to try to keep the police out in the open, but he had not sent us any definite word as to what it would be. In the absence of that information, we had a hurried consultation, and decided that it was then too late to make the venture. George Staunton was there all right, with his lorry, but we sent him home, and had all the boys brought home before daybreak. This attempt showed how crude and indefinite we were at that time.

Lord Killanin - uncle of the present Lord Killanin - had a chauffeur named Ruttledge, a native of Sligo, a Protestant and an Orangeman, who was very bitter against Sinn Féiners. On Armistice Day, 11th November, 1919, he had a bonfire blazing, and he fired a few shots around the place. He made it known that he would be able to drive off any twelve Sinn Feiners who might raid him. I planned a little raid on him on St. Stephen's night. There were five of us - Padraic Folan, Paidín Faherty, Michael Keady (deceased), my brother, Martin, and myself. We left Peter Conneely and my other brother, Dan, on guard, about fifty yards away from Ruttledge's house, which was about fifty yards from Killanin's house. At about eight o'clock, we knocked on the door, and a little boy of about twelve years, his son, came and asked who was there, and my brother said, "Paddy". "Paddy Who?", said the boy. "Paddy Thornton", was the reply. Paddy Thornton was working in the garden for Lord Killanin. The boy opened the door. I had a .32 revolver in my pocket. Paidin Faherty had a short stick, and Padraic Folan had a large hatchet, to be used in forcing a locked door or press.

When the door was opened, we rushed in and, at the same time, the boy screamed. Ruttledge rushed out to the top of the stairs, and shouted, "What's all this?" I rushed up the stairs towards him, caught him by the two legs and pulled him down the steps to the floor below. I then jumped behind him, and grasped him around the shoulders, but he was a very strong man, much stronger than I was, and he was using all his strength to get out of my grip. Faherty gave

him a handy little tip of the stick on the head, and then he got all quiet. While I was pulling him down the steps, Mairtín and Folan flew up past us, and went to search the rooms for arms. They got two beautiful double barrelled guns and two boxes of ammunition. We had suspected there was also a miniature rifle in the house, but we could find no trace of it. When going out, we told him that no one was to leave the house before morning.

It was James Dillon, Lord Killanin's gardener, who informed the police in the early morning, of the raid, but they took no action. Sergeant Rogers remarked, "The two Thorntons ought to have more sense".

We heard afterwards that Sergeant Rogers was to have been a guest at Ruttledge's that night, but, being St. Stephen's night, a row started in the village of Spiddal sometime previous to our raid, and the police afterwards thought we had got it started on purpose to keep them engaged, but we really had nothing to do with the starting of the row.

Lord Killanin, who was in London, was informed of the raid on the next day, and he immediately sent for Ruttledge and his family, to London. I met him (Ruttledge) face to face at Eyre Square, Galway, on that day, and we brushed past one another without a look. I never saw him after that until the day, years after, of Lord Killanin's funeral, when he accompanied the remains to Galway. I was at the funeral to the New Cemetery, Galway, and I edged up close to Ruttledge, but he did not pretend to see me. The raid was not at all directed against Killanin.

In the early summer of 1920, we burned all the vacated barracks in the area, namely, Moycullen, Barna and Tully. These passed off without incident.

On a protest against the treatment of our political prisoners, we had a one-day compulsory closing of all the shops in the area. An order was issued to all shops from Barna to Derrynea, and from Bushypark to Oughterard, requesting to have the shops closed for the day. Not a single shop-keeper refused, although we had expected a few to do so. We had a patrol of half a dozen Volunteers under the direction of Máirtín, my brother, parading in the village of Spiddal all day. There was also a patrol of armed R.I.C. in the village, and the two patrols met every now and then, and things looked nasty at times. One R.I.C. man was especially provocative. His name was Murhill. He attempted to jostle Máirtín on one occasion, and said, between his teeth, "You'll soon smell smoke!"

I made a circuit of the whole area on a bicycle, and each time that I passed through Spiddal, a Black and Tan named Langrill gripped his revolver, and kept eyeing me all the time.

As a protest against the ban on Gaelic football and hurling matches by the British authorities, a special Sunday was selected on which matches were to be played all over the country. Our hurling team in Spiddal was not engaged, there being no other team available to meet us.

We decided to have a practice match of our own in the Spiddal Irish College grounds. There were

twenty of us engaged, when Sergeant Reidy and Constable Ryan of the R.I.C. came along on two bicycles. The Sergeant asked us to give up the game, but he was met with jeers and laughter. The two remained on the avenue for a considerable time, until the ball was hit in their direction and rolled to their feet. The Sergeant snapped it up, and put it in his pocket, and the two began to move off rapidly. All the players rushed up to them, with hurleys raised, and Constable Ryan, who was always a bad pill, drew his revolver, and said he would shoot any man who would approach nearer. Seeing this, I immediately ordered the boys back to the field, as I did not want any casualty. The two R.I.C. men went off, and we secured another ball and continued our game. But, after half-an-hour, Canon McAlinney, Secretary of the College, came along and angrily hunted us off the grounds. He must have been given the word by the Sergeant.

At this time (the summer of 1920), we were living in a little gate lodge belonging to Major Smith of Knocknagreena House, now the summer residence of the Presentation nuns of Galway. My wife and I were visiting one afternoon at the house in which we live now (Marino) - we knew the caretakers here. Two young Black and Tans in civies came along to the house, looking for solution, to mend a puncture. One of them, named Grahame, was chatting with me, and he inquired if we wanted any arms. I told him we didn't. He said he could easily arrange to put us in the way of getting some. All we need do was to hold up a patrol when he himself would be in charge, and we

could get all their arms. I told him again we didn't require any arms at all. This man Grahame was shortly afterwards transferred to Galway City, and he was one of the group that murdered Michael Walsh of the Old Malt, and we were told it was he who actually threw the body into the docks. So, it was good for us that I didn't fall for his scheme.

Some time around the middle of September, 1920, it was arranged that I should go to Headquarters in Dublin for a supply of arms and ammunition. I used to stay at Vaughan's Hotel in Parnell Square. There, I was put in touch with Sean McMahon, and I was brought to an underground cellar which, I think, was somewhere in Pearse Street (then Brunswick Street). There I met Captain Thompson, a very nice low-sized man. There, a box was packed for me, containing mainly home-made bombs, a piece of piping, about five inches in length, with a two-inch diameter, closed at one end, and fitted at the other end in such a way that it could be detonated. It was, I suppose, packed with gelignite. The box contained four revolvers and ammunition for same. It was brought to the Broadstone Station and put into a carriage, by evidently some one of the Headquarters Staff. At Broadstone, I met a plain-clothes R.I.C. man, Peter Folan, from my own locality at home. We knew each other well, but I did my best to avoid him. He came up to me and spoke to me, and I took him very coolly, and showed him plainly that I didn't want to have anything to do with him. He was in the Censor's Office at Dublin Castle, or wherever they had their office. He was a Gaelic scholar, and his job was to censor the Gaelic papers, such as the

Claidheamh Solais, and also letters written in Irish. He told me he had come across many communications about me, but, he said, "I have put everything right for you". I showed my impatience to get away from him, for I didn't believe him. During the Truce afterwards, I asked Michael Collins if he knew anything about this Peter Folan. "I do, well", he said. "What was he like?" "He was allright", he said, and he laughed. After that, I had more respect for the man. I knew his wife, a Miss Barrett from Moycullen, a teacher in Dublin, and an active member of the Gaelic League. I often met her at the Oireachtas in Dublin during the preceding years. They lived on in Dublin, North Circular Road, and, some years afterwards, he bought a large house in Spiddal which used to be called "The Bird's Nest" which, in my young days, was occupied by soupers or jumpers, as we called them - there would be about two hundred of these children, boys and girls. This house is now used as an Irish Secondary School for girls, under the direction of the Sisters of Mercy.

To come back to the journey from Broadstone to Galway, the large box was under the seat, and I sat all the way in a corner. The train would be reaching Galway at night - around eleven o'clock. At Oranmore Station, Christy Macken (now Dr. C. Macken) came into my carriage, by previous arrangement, and sat in the other corner, taking no notice of me. There was a group of six or eight Galway Town Volunteers waiting at the station for my arrival, under the command of Seán Turke. Frank Dowd, Tommy Fahy (of Craughwell) Seamus Mulvoy and others were there. Tommy

Reddington (R.I.P.) and Seán Seoighe (still in the Education Office in Dublin) had a sidecar ready, waiting to take the box away. We put the box up on top of the sidecar, the driver sat up in the dickey, Seán Seoighe sat up on one side, and Tommy Reddington and I sat up on the other side. No sooner had the horse begun to move out of the station than shots rang out around us. We galloped off with our load.

What happened was this: A Black and Tan, named Crumm, was moving around the station, swinging a heavy revolver, and blowing about it, and making himself a nuisance to everybody. Just at the point that we had our box on the sidecar, Seán Turke jumped on Crumm's back, and brought him to the ground. Crumm blazed away immediately, and one of his bullets hit Mulvoy, from the effects of which he died during the night. One of our boys had a .32 revolver and, with it, he shot Crumm dead. Some say it was Frank Dowd who did it, but I remember Tommy Fahy, the youngest of the lot, saying it was he who fired the shot. The Tans and R.I.C. broke loose after that, and shot all round them. They went to Séamus Quirke's lodgings, pulled him out and shot him dead. Séamus was a young Cork boy, working at Faller's jewellery establishment, a very active Volunteer, but he was not at the railway station that night. Joe Cummins was put up against the station wall, and fired at. He fell down, pretending to be shot, and did not move. The Tans left him there, thinking he was killed, but he was uninjured, and, when they were gone, he made his way out of the town and took to the country. Seán Broderick, who was very young at the

time, was pulled out of his bed and, in his night attire, was beaten, but was glad to get away with his life. I don't remember how many more were molested that night, but shots were heard all over the town till morning.

When we left the station on our sidecar, we went on to the Courthouse Square, and took our box into McDonnell's lodging house, but, about two o'clock in the morning, thinking the place not safe enough, we transferred it to Lohan's house in Woodquay, and Seán Seoighe and I slept there for the rest of the night. The following day, Tom Courtney, who belonged to one of the Rowing Clubs, and a great oarsman, brought the box up the river Corrib by boat, and handed it over to Morgan Davoren and his boys of the Moycullen Company.

I come now to an unwelcome part of my narrative, namely, the work of a spy in my area. Good intelligence work by Joe Togher in the Galway Postal Service, and by a postman working in conjunction with him - I can't recall the postman's name - led to the capture of a number of letters passing through the Galway Post Office. The letters were addressed to different officials in the British Service. When opened, it was seen that they concerned my area. The letters were sent on to me. My suspicions fell on the Principal Teacher of Barna National School, P.W. Joyce. He was reporting on Volunteer activities around his own locality. He had a list of about twenty names in each communication, beginning with Father Griffin, Father O'Meehan and myself. Included were the officers of the local Company (Barna), and there was the name of

one person who was not a member of the Volunteers at all, a man named O'Donnell who had a lawsuit with Joyce. When half a dozen letters had been sent on to me, I arranged to enter his school by night and secure samples of his writing, which job was carried out without mishap. I did not want to have the responsibility of taking appropriate action in such a case, so I sent a messenger to Headquarters in Dublin with the captured documents and the samples taken from the school, and asked for instructions. The messenger I sent was John Geoghegan of Moycullen, Brigade Quartermaster, afterwards shot dead by Black and Tans outside his own door. He saw Dick Mulcahy, who examined documents and samples, and Dick sent back word that we ourselves were the best hand-writing experts, and that it was up to us to take the necessary action. I was deeply worried over this affair. Then, in the middle of October, 1920 - I think it was the 15th - it was a Friday - Father Griffin brought me out three more letters, posted in the letter box at the head of Salthill-Taylor's Hill road, and handed in to Joe Togher by the postman who made the collection. One was addressed to the officer in charge of Renmore Barracks, one to the officer in charge of the Lancers at Earl's Island, Galway, and the third to Sir Hamar Greenwood, Chief Secretary, at Dublin Castle. The letter to Greenwood complained that no action had yet been taken against the men reported by him. Evidently, all of his letters had been intercepted by our boys.

I got these letters from Father Griffin in the early afternoon. I decided, there and then, that we must act that night. I had my plans arranged, my

men selected. I sent word to all the groups to gather together near my own place, and each man had got his own instructions. I sent John Geoghegan across the Corrib to Kylebeg where he met Hubert O'Connell who accompanied him to Shrule for a priest. The priest was rowed across the lake from Kylebeg to Knockferry, and from thence to our rendezvous, which was a little disused cabin on the roadside, between Barna and Moycullen, about two miles from Barna. It would be close on eleven o'clock when the first group of seven men approached Joyce's house, which was situated fifty yards from the public road, near Baile Mhóinín, and within half a mile of the head of Salthill road. The family had gone to bed, all but himself. In response to an urgent knock on the door, he opened up, and immediately a canvas bag was clapped over his head, and he was taken outside. The house was searched thoroughly, but nothing else incriminating was found. The prisoner was walked away from the house, and on to the Cappagh road, a quarter of a mile away. There, a sidecar was ready, waiting to take him to the headquarters we had selected to hold our court martial. In due time, they arrived.

We lit the place with candles. The court consisted of three of my highest Officers, and I prosecuted. I produced all the letters that had been intercepted, and much material in his own handwriting. He denied that he had been communicating with the British authorities, but feebly. He was convicted of spying, and was sentenced to death. The priest was then brought to him, and heard his Confession, and he received the

Holy Viaticum. A party of Volunteers from the Moycullen Company brought him into the boys, and he was there shot, with a .32 revolver and a service rifle, and buried in a convenient place in the bog.

I got no sleep that night. During the court proceedings and all through the night, we could hear volleys of shots away in the Bushypark direction. They had nothing to do with our episode. I stayed around my little house all day on Saturday, but not in the house. I watched the road, but saw no trace of military or police coming out from Galway. I could hear shots from beyond Barna. It was coming up to five o'clock in the afternoon, and I was beginning to think that things were quietening down. I was standing outside the gate, taking the daily papers from a man from the Spiddal area - Pádraic Conneely - by whom I had sent for them in the morning - when, looking towards the west, I saw a fleet of lorries coming from the Spiddal direction. I had not actually taken the papers. I backed in, shut the gate, and made off inside the wall in the direction from which the lorries were coming. There was a large breach in the wall, and I could see the heads of the Tans when they were passing by this breach. I went about eighty yards from the house, and pushed myself into a clump of briars in the wood. They all pulled up at the gate, and questioned Conneely. "Where is he?" Where is he?" He told them he had not seen me, and then they battered him with rifle butts, and knocked out some of his teeth and, after that, they let him off with his horse and cart. They fired shots all through the place, and spread out through the field, on to the shore, up

to Major Smith's house, and practically everywhere, except where I was under cover. Shots were whistling through the wood, which was a sparse little wood, all around me.

They went into the little house, and threatened my wife, who was afraid for the two young children, one of whom was less than four months old, but much more afraid lest they should find me. However, they did not come my way, and, after some time, they continued on their way to Galway. They were accompanied by Joyce's son, Joe, in one of the lorries.

What they did was to move on through Cappagh, around Joyce's residence, interrogating and beating up the people. They shot a horse belonging to one person, and then they moved on from Cappagh via a bye-road through Shanareehóg, and down the road at Furbough school, about half a mile west of where I was watching - thus bypassing me. They continued on to Spiddal where they pulled Eamonn Breathnach, my Brigade Adjutant, out of the Co-op. Stores where he was working. They gave him a severe beating, put a huge gash over one of his eyes, then placed a shotgun over his shoulder, and fired, putting a couple of grains of shot through his ear. Having done this, they came back, and very nearly caught me unawares. I don't know from that day to this how they did not see me when I was running in their direction, as I plainly saw them. But they must all have been looking towards the gate where they saw the horse and cart. When they had gone, I moved on to the

house, and picked up the papers outside the gate, covered with Conneely's blood.

Mrs. Smith came from her own house, crying, as she thought I could not have escaped.

On the Friday night, shortly after Joyce was taken away from his house, Paddy O'Flaherty of Galway, brother of Michael O'Flaherty, garage owner, Fr. Griffin Road, and member of Galway Corporation, drove past, into town, on a rubber-tyred side-car, with tinkling bells. He had been on some legitimate business of his own. They had livery stables, and Paddy did a lot of driving. The Joyces must have heard him passing, and recognised him by the rubber tyres and tinkling bells. They must have assumed that Joyce was driven away on Flaherty's car, for, a few weeks afterwards, poor Paddy was waylaid when driving late at night around the same place, and killed. I do not know the exact circumstances of his death.

I slept in Stephen Flaherty's house in Poillíní, on the Saturday night, and again on Sunday night, not having gone to Mass.

On Monday morning, we sent word to Joe Jordan, Galway, who had a hackney car, to come out and take my wife and two children on to Roscahill, to her uncle's (Fr. John Connolly, P.P. of Killanin) house, where she remained for about a month, the school being closed in the meantime. I walked through the fields, bogs and mountains from Furbough to Roscahill, a distance of about fifteen miles as I went, and

arrived at Fr. Connolly's late in the evening. I stayed there for a couple of days, and slept there a few nights, and after that, I slept at Pat Burke's house at Garnagry, a lonely village in Killanin parish. I think I slept there for a month, and after that I brought a mattress and blankets on to the sacristy in Killanin church, and slept there every night for a good spell. I had the key of the church from Fr. Connolly, and each morning I fixed up the sacristy in an orderly manner, and came on, through the fields, to the presbytery, for meals, etc.

By this time, we had a new parish priest in the parish at home - Father Davis, afterwards Canon Davis, and a great friend of ours. He considered it better to have the school open, so he sent word to my wife to come to Furbough and re-open the school on her own, and thought she would not be molested. She had been nearly a month in Roscahill by this time. She left the two children at Fr. Connolly's, and went on to Galway, where she met her sister, Agnes, and the two cycled on to Furbough. It was a Saturday, and, on their way home, they met Fr. Griffin, and had a talk with him, which my wife will herself jot down, and also how they found our little gate lodge when they arrived there on Saturday night. During our absence from the house, the Auxiliaries had come from Salthill in broad daylight, with a lorry, and carried off everything in the house, including some furniture belonging to Major Smith, and brought them to the Retreat, a house which they had commandeered in Salthill.

Nothing at all was left except a large picture of the Sacred Heart, which we still have, and a few things broken on the floor. When claims for compensation were being heard afterwards before the Recorder (Doyle), my wife made a claim, and she was granted a sum of £120, but no payment was ever made to her, except a sum of £5, for the articles broken and left on the floor - the rest being looted, she could get nothing for.

Father Griffin was taken away from his residence on a Sunday night. Fr. O'Meehan was not sleeping in the house, being fiercely suspect by the British authorities. I do not know of the circumstances of Fr. Griffin's removal. I believe he was lured away by some one with a plausible story. I know definitely that he had decided to refuse to leave his house at the behest of the British forces, and more especially of any stranger. Therefore, my opinion is that the individual (or individuals) who called him was known to him.

On the following Tuesday forenoon, Fr. Tommy Burke and Fr. Sheedy (afterwards Dr. Sheedy) visited me at Fr. Connolly's house at Roscahill, and told me they feared the worst about Fr. Griffin, and asked me to help in organising search parties. For that reason, when it got dark, I set off on a bicycle in the direction of my own home. When I got to William Duffy's house within two hundred yards of where Fr. Griffin's body was afterwards found, I met Duffy. We spoke about Fr. Griffin's disappearance. He told me to be very careful passing through these byeroads,

as, he said, "there was a lorry here at the cross-roads late last night (that would be Monday night) which remained a good while before it made off again towards Galway". Duffy told me that a search party of the Barna Company was by then organised by the Galway priests, and were continuing the search by day. He himself was one of the party. I slept in Stephen Thornton's house in Coismeigmore that night, met some members of the Furbough Company the following day, and after night-fall went back again to Roscahill.

On the following Sunday, Fr. Connolly told me that he had just heard that Fr. Griffin's body was found. Downhearted and sad, I moved off on Monday to my own area (Furbough), but I decided it would be very unsafe to appear at the funeral. So I went back to Roscahill. I picked up all the information I could about the discovery of Fr. Griffin's body, on Saturday - six days after he had been taken away. William Duffy was searching around the spot when, in the boggy field inside the wall, he noticed a little piece of a black coat above ground. He notified the others of the party, who came there, but did not do any digging until they notified Fr. Davis and the other Galway priests. They, the priests, came out to the lonely spot at night, and, with the aid of lanterns, the clay was removed with spades and shovels, and the body taken up. Later on that night, the body was placed on a donkey cart, and brought in via Cloch Scoilte, Buaile Beag and Leitreach to St. Joseph's Church, where it was received by Fr. Davis, arriving about five o'clock on Sunday morning. Later in the morning, when the sad news spread, the Commanding

Officer of the Military at Renmore visited Fr. Davis, and demanded that the body be handed over to him. Fr. Davis vehemently refused, and the demand was not insisted on. The boys who brought the body in to St. Joseph's were: Patrick Lydon, Martin Griffin, William Conneely and one other.

While the body was being brought to Galway, a row of thatched houses on the Quay at Barna were set alight and completely burned out.

I am very proud of my association with the martyred Fr. Griffin. It was he who baptised my two eldest sons - Piaras, October, 1918, and Seán, June, 1920. Together, we organised the Barna Feis and currach competition, and, with him, I conducted a class of adults, in preparation for Confirmation in 1918. He came out to the school every night to this class, and he enjoyed it immensely. Any time he had to spare from his duties, he came out to my house, speaking Irish on all occasions.

During the winter of 1920, I remained in the Roscahill area, in close touch with Killanin and Moycullen Companies, with Paddy O'Flaherty, Captain of Killanin Company, and Morgan Davoren, Morgan Conneely, Tim Coyne and Tim Keady of Moycullen. The police at Oughterard must have got word that I used to visit Fr. Connolly's, for, one day, they came to threaten Fr. Connolly. Head Constable Farrell came in to the house, and a number of his men lined up outside the house. I was actually in the house while the Head Constable was warning Fr. Connolly in the parlour. I had my ear to the door, listening to every word

he said. The gist of his warning was that, if there was an ambush anywhere in the locality, Fr. Connolly's house would be burned. I went out of the house through a back window, while he was still there, and I could see the caps of the others, lining the road, and I got a safe nook outside until they were gone. On another occasion, I was making my way to the sacristy in the church, along the road leading to the church, on a very bright night, near midnight, when something put it into my head to cross through the fields and take a short cut. It was lucky for me that I did, because, if I had continued on to the chapel gate, I would have run into a patrol of R.I.C. from Oughterard, who were posting up notices on the chapel gate. Paddy O'Flaherty, who lived near the chapel gate, told me the story on the following day, Sunday.

I am fully convinced that I owe my escape all through the period and up to the Truce, to Fr. Connolly's prayers. He used to say his daily Mass in the oratory of his own house. I served his Mass and, during his secret prayers in the Mass, I could hear his low whisper including my own name in all his Masses. During part of the winter, Fr. Morley, ffom the Headford area, who was on the run, was in the house, and I served his Mass also while there. He had a very sore foot, and could only hop about on one foot, and walk with the aid of a crutch.

One evening during that period, there was a funeral in Killanin parish, and the corpse was brought to the church. About one o'clock that night, I went into the church to sleep. I came out of the

sacristy to the body of the church at that hour, and put my hand on the coffin, thus showing that I was not then afraid of any unearthly thing - I was only afraid of the living enemy.

In the month of February, 1921, I was expecting an important dispatch from Headquarters in Dublin. I sent John Geoghegan, Quartermaster, to Galway to meet the despatch carrier from Dublin, and bring on the dispatch. I was to meet John at Moycullen around one o'clock on a Saturday night (or, rather, Sunday morning). I left Spiddal late that night, and cycled towards Moycullen, all alone, to reach Moycullen about one o'clock. When I was cycling down towards the priest's house which was on the Spiddal-Moycullen road, about half a mile from the village, I saw in front of me, at the priest's gate, the light of a cigarette in a person's mouth. I came off the bicycle immediately, and moved into the side of the road where there was a little boreen, or a pathway. Then I heard some people talking, and I took them at once to be the enemy. I got the fright of my life when I felt the people moving on towards me, and was horrified to find them turning into the boreen where I was standing, with my bicycle hidden. I had a .45 revolver and, levelling it, I shouted at the top of my voice, "Hands up!" "O, my God!" said one of the persons, and put up his hands as did the two other persons who were with him. It was Fr. Cunnane, then in charge of Moycullen parish, and he was accompanied by Tim O'Connor and Eddie Geoghegan, brother of John. Then I recognised them, and heard from them the sad story that John had been taken out of the house by the Black and Tans and shot dead,

just outside the door. The two boys had rushed for the priest, and they were taking a short cut to Geoghegan's house. I was horrified at the sad news, and I accompanied them to the house. There he was, stretched on the kitchen floor, his trousers and coat on, but no shoes. He was shot through the head. Fr. Cunnane annointed him. This would be roughly an hour after he had been shot. Michael, his brother, told me they had all gone to bed when the Tans knocked loudly on the door. They were let in, and they told John to get up at once. While pulling on his trousers, he managed to whisper to Michael that the dispatch he had for me was stuck in a cock of hay in the haggard. He went out to the cock of hay there and then, and, after some time, found the dispatch and handed it over to me.

I went back the short cut with Fr. Cunnane, got my bicycle where I had left it, and cycled on through the village of Moycullen to Roscahill. I saw a light in a house occupied by Mrs. Ruttledge, wife of an R.I.C. man who had been stationed there until the barracks were closed down (afterwards burned). I thought then and, for a long time after, that this light had something to do with the murder, but I am now satisfied that it was a Sacred Heart lamp that was burning in the house.

I feared a general search and round-up that Sunday morning, and I hurried to Killanin church, where I had some arms stored. I took them all out of the church, and hid them in a small wood, about a quarter of a mile away, and I had everything in order before anybody got up in the morning.

John Geoghegan was a wonderful man, the most unselfish I ever came across. It was he I sent to Dublin in connection with the Joyce letters; it was he I sent across the Corrib for a priest. I had given him orders not to sleep at home, but his answer to me was: "If they come looking for me and I am not there, they will shoot one of my brothers, and I cannot allow that to happen!"

Poor John must have been shadowed around the town of Galway on that Saturday.

During the Truce year, the East Connemara Brigade, of which he was Quartermaster, erected a cross over his grave in Moycullen cemetery.

In the month of May, 1921, we began to prepare an ambush for the R.I.C. at Spiddal. They were in a very strong barracks close to the shore. It was formerly a coastguard station, and it contained four houses in all. It was surrounded on three sides by barbed wire entanglements, with bells, etc. In about early September, 1920, we had a long discussion about an attack on the barracks. Tommy Reddington was home in Galway, on holidays, from Longford where he taught carpentry work. He was at our meetings, and he was very anxious to take part in this attack. His idea was to fill two canisters with gelignite, have them connected with one another, place a long ladder up to the roof of one of the houses comprising the barracks, go up himself and place the two canisters astride the roof, come down again, have a long lead connecting the two canisters, and detonate them, and explode them from a distance

outside the barracks. There should be two holes made in the roof, after the explosion. Then one was to go up again, with a tin of petrol, sprinkle over the roof timbers and set alight. Reddington thought that all the work, up to and including the explosion, could be carried out by night, on the quiet, unknown to the garrison; after that, concentrated fire was to be kept up on the barracks until such time as the garrison capitulated. I did not think this was at all feasible, and I called off the attempt.

To come back to May, 1921, the R.I.C. in Spiddal Barracks were boycotted by all in the area, as regards a supply of turf and other commodities. They used be up very early on Saturday mornings in the village, to commandeer cart-loads of turf, on their way in to Galway. They forced the owners to bring their loads to the barracks. We formed a plan to attack them in the village on Saturday morning, May 14th, 1921. We had nine rifles (.303), a dozen shotguns, and three or four revolvers. I had twenty-four men in all in the village, and around it. In addition, I had four men at Furbough Bridge, to block the road, and they had a couple of shotguns. The men were selected from Moycullen, Barna, Furbough, Spiddal and Knock Companies - those whom I considered best.

We took up positions very early in the morning. I put four men in the old graveyard, by the shore, covering the barracks main door and front windows. These were Morgan Davoren (Vice O/C in

charge), Martin Lynskey, Brian Folan and Michael Costello. There was fine cover there, and a good retreat. I had Eamonn Breathnach and two others in Kelly's yard - opposite the church, and about sixty yards away from Folan's corner, where the R.I.C. would first stand. I had five men under Tim Kyne's command, situated near the Post Office, which is on the road leading from Spiddal to Moycullen, and about a hundred yards from Folan's corner, and in view of the corner. I had six men in Lydon's house in the middle of the village, the present Gárda Barracks, having been given every facility by one of the Lydon's - Mattie - who was a Volunteer himself. This group included Tom Conneely, Tom O'Connor, Paidín Faherty, Padraic Concannon and two others. Their duty would be, if any policemen fell, to collect their arms and take them away. I had two or three others placed west of the river by the shore, in case there would be any move from the barracks westwards. And lastly, I myself and Pádraic Folan, then Captain of the Spiddal Company, took up position inside the wall of the old Girls' School, on the north side of the road, and about one hundred and twenty yards from Folan's corner. Instructions were given to each group to fire no shot until they heard my shot first.

At about four o'clock, after a delay of about an hour, the first of them made his appearance, and stood at Folan's corner. Shortly afterwards, three more came up, and stood close to him, and, after them, two others. The light was not good at that time. I heard the rumbling noise of a cart

coming the road, a short distance west of the village. I told Folan to get ready, to aim low and fire immediately after my shot. I took deliberate aim, as I thought, plumb centre, and fired. Folan fired immediately after, and then firing broke out from all the groups. The moment we fired, the police threw themselves on the ground, and rolled away down the road from the corner where they were under cover of the high walls. The four men in the old graveyard peppered the door and windows. Nobody left the barracks, and no shot was fired by the six men in the patrol. Verey lights were sent up at intervals from the barracks, and, if they attempted to 'phone Galway or any other station for help, it was useless, as we had the telephone wires cut all around. I saw three of the group at Lydon's come out in the middle of the road, but, unfortunately, there was no disarming to be done. The firing continued for about five minutes, and then I gave the signal to fall back. We all met, a mile north of the village, and then went to our several dug-outs. The net result of our attempt was two wounded R.I.C. men who had to be treated in hospital.

The mark of my first bullet was to be seen for a few years after in the wall of Folan's corner, scarcely one inch above a man's head, and, when word went around during the days that followed, we learned that the man standing there was Constable Hannon, the most harmless man in the barracks. I would have been sorry to have shot him.

Why did our attempt fail? In the first instance, there was not enough of daylight. Secondly, perhaps

I fired too soon. I should have let them come out to the middle of the road, which I might have done if I had not heard the approach of the turf-cart. And again, I would not use the chapel yard from which the R.I.C. could be covered when retreating back to their barracks. Also, I could have placed a couple of men in the Co-op. Stores, almost opposite Folan's corner, where they would be within twenty yards of the enemy, and could have slaughtered them with shotguns. The co-op. belonged to the people, and I did not like to see it go up in flames. I had considered all these points, but would not take the advantage.

It was around mid-day on that Saturday before any support came to the barracks. Then, several lorry loads of Black and Tans and military came out. Coming to the obstacles at Furbough Bridge, they rounded up a number of men from the locality to remove the barricade, and then went on to the village, threatening all and sundry, and looking for information. They got none.

When night came, they went on an orgy of burning. They burned four houses - Eamonn Breathnach's in Sheeaun; Pádraic Costello's in Ballydonnellan, Pádraic Folan's in Salahoona, and my father's house, in which nobody had slept for some weeks. A few weeks before that, the Tans had come to the house by night, forced my father and mother, and sister, up to an upper room, and then threw a grenade into the kitchen, which smashed two windows and peppered walls and ceiling. We also had a little boy, Aodán Connolly, son of Seán Connolly,

killed in the City Hall in Easter Week, in the house, and he was sent up with them. Aodán came to our house in 1917, at the age of about seven, and stayed with us till 1922. He was a fluent Irish speaker then, and had forgotten his English.

I stayed around my old home for the month following this attack. I had a dug-out about half a mile from the house, all to myself. My sister, Peggy, brought me my meals every day. During this month, we were preparing for another attack. There were about eight Protestant Tans in the Spiddal Barracks, and they came to Service every Sunday in the Protestant church there. This church is now a dwelling house belonging to Lord Killanin. It was remodelled. I collected most of the group I had on the 14th May. I selected a Sunday, four weeks after the first attack - 12th June I think it would be. The church was situated about three hundred yards west of Spiddal, about thirty yards in from the public road. There was a little gate-lodge (and is still) beside the gate leading to the church. This lodge was occupied by Paddy Thornton, his mother and sister. We occupied this lodge, and had the Thornton's removed to another lodge at Lord Killanin's. Paddy was working for Killanin. We occupied the church itself, and had six men in it, under the command of Morgan Davoren. I had half a dozen others in the wood between the road and Lord Killanin's house - they were spread out at regular intervals. I had three men west of the river, and covering the barracks. Pádraic Folan and myself were at Bohoona Cross, inside a loop-holed wall,

which had a view of the road from the Spiddal direction. This cross was within thirty yards of the church.

In this case, we were to let the Tans march on towards the church, in the gate, and close up to the church itself, before making any attack. The boys in the lodge had a couple of Mills bombs on this occasion, which they were to use.

Masses in Spiddal at that time were at 8.30 and 11 o'clock. We arrived and took up our positions long before anybody came to the 8.30 Mass, so as not to be seen by anybody. The Tans came to Service usually at ten o'clock, the minister coming out from Galway for the service.

To our dismay this Sunday morning, nobody turned up to the church. We stayed on. The people were arriving for the eleven o'clock Mass. We let them pass. We waited until a quarter to twelve. Then, the thought struck me that they would come, mixed up with our own congregation coming from Mass. So, to avoid this, I came out, and gave the order to withdraw.

It was at four o'clock p.m. that Sunday, the Minister came out from Galway for his service, and he didn't stop at Spiddal, but went on to Tully first, and afterwards came back to Spiddal to conduct the service. When the Protestant members of the barracks opened the church, they noticed the sign of occupation, and there was consternation among them, to see how near they went to being trapped. They examined the place all around, saw the loopholes in

the wall at Bohoona Cross, but never found out anything about the occupation of the lodge. I stayed around the Spiddal area for a week after that, and then I went to Moycullen. Fr. John Connolly was just after changing from Killanin parish to Moycullen parish as P.P., and I stayed in his house until the Truce came.

One beautiful Sunday in July, Tim O'Connor of the Moycullen Company sought me out at Fr. Connolly's, and had a stranger from Dublin with him, with a notification to me from Headquarters that a Truce was arranged between ourselves and the British Government. Tim had his misgivings about this man, and he said to him, "If this is a trap, you are in for it!" I came out to meet him, and I had never met him before - his name was either Dónall O'Donohoe, or Dáithi O'Donohoe.

One little throw-back. I visited the little gate lodge where my wife and two children lived, one night after midnight. I only stayed a few minutes, and left on a bicycle for Spiddal. When I had reached the gate of my present house, the lights of a car coming behind me were thrown on me from a distance of about three hundred yards. No cars were out those times but military or police. I spurted on to a little boreen, about eighty yards further on, turned into the boreen, and let the car pass. It was an ordinary Ford motor car, travelling very fast. Instead of continuing my journey to Spiddal, I slept in Stephen Thornton's house, just beside me. Next day, I heard that the occupants of that car had visited my father's

house, searched it thrroughly, and, when leaving took a photograph of me with them, placed it up on the wall, and put four bullets through it. It was picked up in the morning by my mother, and preserved for me to see.

One other morning, about March or April, 1921, I came out of my dug-out near home in Spiddal, and was making for my parents' house through the fields. I was disguised as to clothes. Coming round a hill with bushes growing on it, and all around it in the field next to the house, I saw the house surrounded by police. I thought my hour had come. I swung around as quietly as possible, and back again to hide behind the hill until the police disappeared.

It has often struck me, down the years, that my escapes on a few occasions were bordering on the miraculous. How else, for instance, could the police surrounding the house that morning fail to have seen me, as some of them, at least, were looking in my direction. As I said before, I attribute it to Fr. Connolly's prayers in his Masses, and to my own devotion to the Mother of God.

SIGNED: Micheál O Dónaill

DATE: 16 - 12 - 57

WITNESS