

ROINN COSANTA

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

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Witness

Edward J. Aylward,
The bungalow,
Rocklands,
Waterford

Identity

Member of Irish Volunteers, Callan, Co. Kilkenny, 1918 -
O/C 7th Batt'n Kilkenny Brigade, later.

Subject

National and military activities,
Callan, Co. Kilkenny, 1916-1921

File No. S 2305

Statement by Mr. Eamon Joseph Aylward,

The Bungalow, Rocklands, Waterford.

I was born on the 29th October, 1895, at Riversfield, Callan, Co. Kilkenny. My father was a farmer. I went to school to the Christian Brothers in Callan and having passed the Junior Grade there, went to St. Kieran's College in Kilkenny. Having passed Senior Grade, I went over to the ecclesiastical side of the College where I studied for the priesthood, studying philosophy and theology. It was in 1913, as far as I remember, that I passed the Senior Grade and about that time and from that onwards I read bits and pieces of the national papers published by Arthur Griffith, which began to develop my interest in national affairs. At that time - 1915 - there was a Company of the National Volunteers, i.e. the Redmondite Volunteers, in Callan but I had never joined this body. I knew enough from my reading to understand that the National Volunteers represented a manoeuvre of the Irish Parliamentary Party, and that this party did not truly represent the national aspirations. There was a fellow student in St. Kieran's with me with whom I was very friendly at this time. He was Arthur Cantwell, a nephew of the Archbishop of Los Angeles, from Loughcapall, Fethard. The chief influential man in connection with the Redmondite Volunteers at Callan was Father Delahunty, the local curate, and sometime during 1915 a number of old Martini rifles were obtained to arm this Company through the influence of Matthew Keating, who was the member of Parliament for South Kilkenny. Cantwell travelled through Callan on his way to Fethard when we went on our vacation from St. Kieran's and returning to Kilkenny after the Christmas vacation of 1915 - that would be early in January 1916 - I met Cantwell on the bus and we discussed the question of the Volunteer organisations. He told me then, for the first time, that there was a Company of Irish Volunteers, as distinct from the Redmond Volunteers, in his native place, Fethard, and while there were other Irish Volunteer companies around Tipperary, that as they in Fethard would like us to have a Company and to link up with us in Callan and, through us, via Kilkenny Company With General Headquarters in Dublin. I told him that I thought there would be no difficulty in doing this as there were a number of people in Callan that would be sympathetically disposed and if they would send an organiser to explain the position to those concerned in Callan, I had no doubt that a Company could be formed. One of those, I felt sure, who would give support to the matter was Jim Roughan who, although he was a member of the Redmondite Volunteer Company in Callan, was not in agreement with the set-up of the Parliamentary Party. We discussed the whole thing at length on our way back to the College and I remember that Cantwell, impressing the urgency of the matter, told me then, strange though it may seem, that there would be a Rebellion before the year was out. I told him to get in touch with Roughan and Michael Shelley. Being at school, I knew nothing of what happened after that until the Rising had taken place the following Easter, but I heard afterwards that an organiser had come down to Callan from Dublin and had interviewed Father Delahunty, but made no progress with him. Before the Rising, the Redmondite Volunteer Company had become more or less inactive. The Company still existed and they had these Martini Enfield rifles that I mentioned, but coming up to the Rising they were very little in evidence. Following the Rising the same revulsion of feeling as took place elsewhere in Ireland occurred there and, finally, an Irish Volunteer Company was formed which consisted largely of the old Redmondite Volunteer Company. These continued to train and drill with a new orientation in their aims, but nothing much happened then until the Conscription crisis of 1918 when the ranks were swollen by a large influx of recruits. In the middle of the

Conscription crisis the students in St. Kieran's who were within the military age group were allowed to go home, It was announced to us then that whatever happened as a result of this crisis, we were liable to be conscripted and we had better go home and make our own arrangements. All the boys of military age returned to their homes and I presume most of them joined their local Volunteer companies, as I did. This was in April, 1918, and this as my first active participation in the Volunteer movement, when I joined the Callan Company as an ordinary Volunteer. Up to this, there had only been the one Company in Callan, but the influx of recruits necessitated the organisation of new Companies - one at Coolagh, one at Ballycloven and one at Mullinahone, which, though in Co. Tipperary beyond the Kilkenny border, was included in the Callan organisation. About this time, the various companies were organised into battalions and brigades and these Callan Companies became the 7th Battalion of the Kilkenny Brigade, but we had not got used to the idea of the separate Brigades at this stage and our Battalion area always worked in harmony with the 3rd Tipperary Brigade units, as we had more contact with the 7th Battn. Tipperary than with Kilkenny City. Mullinahone⁴. Company, which was really a Tipperary Company, belonged to the 7th Battalion of the Kilkenny Brigade. After the organisation of the battalions and brigades, about the summer of 1918, the Conscription crisis having then passed, the chief activities of the Volunteer units at the time were connected with the political activities then going forward in anticipation of the General Elections due at the end of the year. There was a Sinn Féin Club formed in Callan and this club acted as a pioneer unit in the organising of Sinn Féin clubs all over South Kilkenny. Some of the principal people involved in the organisation of these Sinn Féin clubs were Michael Shelley, John J. Dunne, and Father Delahunty. These were some of the older men whose patriotism, springing from an older national tradition, made them foremost in the political organisation where they were not young enough to take the more active part of becoming Volunteers. The younger men - the Volunteers, that is - were also members of the Sinn Féin club and threw themselves wholeheartedly into the political organisation which was almost the only thing that allowed scope for their energies at that particular time. As a private Volunteer at that time, I did not know much about the higher organisation, but I knew that Tom Treacy of Kilkenny town was the Brigade Commander and he remained Brigade Commander until his arrest some time towards the end of 1920. He was arrested following the arrest of Ernie O'Malley at Inistioge sometime about October 1920 and a number of other brigade and battalion, officers were arrested at the same time. It was believed then that some list of names had been found on O'Malley when he was arrested. O'Malley had come to Kilkenny as an organiser from G.H.Q. and was arrested by British forces, who surrounded the house of Jim Hanrahan of Inistioge where he was staying.⁵ Thinking about this now, it may have been before O'Malley's arrest that Treacy was arrested, because I remember that Treacy was the officer commanding the Brigade during the attack on Hugginstown R.I.C. Barracks which took place in March 1920, and I think that was the last action he took part in before his arrest. Jim Roughan was our Battalion Commander (7th Battalion) at that time. In the political field at this time the chief men on the Sinn Féin side in Kilkenny were Peter de Loughry, old Alderman Nowlan, Tom Stallard and Pat Corcoran. De Loughry, P. Corcoran, Tom Treacy and Father Gibbons, had been arrested following the 1916 Rising and these were all men who had followed the national movement of Griffith from the early years of the century, and were then foremost in upholding and forwarding the campaign for the supremacy of Sinn Féin in the Irish political field. Tom Treacy, the Brigade Commander, though a much younger man, was associated with de Loughry, Stallard and the other older men and was a very sincere and earnest national worker. His ideas, however, were mostly on the military side of things. Thus, he was elected as the Brigade Commander. While he was very earnest and well

intentioned, he was hardly capable of actual military action in the field; I mean, that he was not the type who would have the necessary ruthlessness for this and, therefore, the only action he took part in was the attack on Hugginstown Barracks in March 1920. As he was arrested soon after that, he was in British custody from then up to the Truce. When most of the Kilkenny Brigade and Battalion officers were arrested following Ernie O'Malley's arrest at Inistioge about October 1920, we were thrown into a state of disorganisation. Our Battalion Commander, Jim Roughan, had been arrested with the others and for a time we had no Battalion Commander or Brigade Commander. Sometime⁶. after this, Jimmie Leahy of Poulacapple in Co. Tipperary was appointed as our Battalion Commander. This Jimmie Leahy should not be confused with Jimmie Leahy of Thurles who was the Brigade Commander of the mid-Tipperary Brigade. Jimmie Leahy of Poulacapple was appointed Battalion Commander and at this time also, I was appointed Battalion Quartermaster. We formed an Active Service Unit in the Battalion at the same time. It started off very small - there were only four of us originally - but, later, we added some more to this. The four who formed the nucleus of the A.S.U. were all from the Ahenure Company of the 7th Battalion. The attack on Hugginstown Barracks in March 1920 was commanded by Tom Treacy, the Brigade Commander, but there was a man present also from G.H.Q. He was an organiser and we knew him as McMahon, though I do not know whether that was his proper name or an assumed one. At any rate, he was supposed to be an expert on bombs and of the men assembled for that attack; there were: 12 men from the Ahenure Company of the 7th Battalion. There were about seven or eight R.I.C. men in Hugginstown Barracks, and the attack was only a matter of firing a few shots, when the Barrack was surrendered by the police and we captured whatever rifles and ammunition was in it. The next attack that took place was on Drangan Barracks in Tipperary. Arrangements originally made for the attack on this barracks had to be cancelled, but the attack finally did take place on the 29th June 1920. Our Battalion Commander got instructions, in connection with this attack, to send eight riflemen to Drangan on the night of the 29th June but these instructions only reached him during the day of the 29th, so he had to draw the eight riflemen from the Ahenure Company, which was nearest to him.⁷ The rest of the instructions he got were in connection with the blocking of roads in the other Company areas of his Battalion and that was attended to - particularly the road leading from Woodstock which was the Headquarters of the Auxiliaries in that area, and also the road from Kilkenny. We understood, of course, that similar arrangements had been made on the Tipperary side to prevent enemy reinforcements coming in from Fethard and Clonmel. The Auxiliaries who had their Headquarters at Woodstock were the men who later arrested Ernie O'Malley at Inistioge. The attack on Drangan Barracks was a combined operation of the South Tipperary and Kilkenny Brigades. The man conducting the attack or, at least, who was representing G.H.Q. there was Ernie O'Malley and, as I have said, the South Tipperary as well as the Kilkenny units had got orders about the blocking of all roads leading to Drangan to prevent enemy reinforcements arriving there, and we had supplied 8 riflemen as part of the actual attacking force on the Barracks. As far as I can remember, we had orders to report to Drangan at 10.30 that night - that was old time, as distinct from summer time. When we reached Drangan village we were waiting there for a local scout who was to take us to the position we were to occupy behind the barracks and while waiting we heard a burst of gunfire and saw vérey lights going up from the barracks. It was the first time we had ever seen Vérey lights and we did not know quite what to expect when we saw them. Consequently, we scattered to get under cover and when, after a short time, we got together again, we found that four of our men were missing. We could not find where they had got to in the dark. We moved on to the village and, meeting the scout, we were asked how many men we had. Unwilling to acknowledge the fact that

we had lost four of them, we said we had eight. The guide conducted us to the rear of the barracks where we took up a position behind a small hedge and opened fire on the barracks. The Battalion Commander, Jim Roughan, and myself with two others were in this position and when we opened fire we drew a heavy fire upon us from the barracks, including machine gun fire and, having very little cover, where we were, we had to withdraw to a sunk fence that ran at right angles to the barracks from where we reopened fire on the barracks. One of our men was using a Martini Enfield rifle and this got jammed as these things habitually did, and the guide who was with us went to cut a piece of bull wire from a fence to make a ramrod to get the fired round from the breech but, in trying to get the wire, he got shot through the ribs, so that both these men were a dead loss to us. This meant that one of our men had to take the guide down to the local doctor, Dr. Conlon, to have him attended to. This doctor was a Sligo man and had been the doctor in Mullinahone before this. This meant that there were only two of us effective - Roughan and I - to carry on the attack from our position. Roughan and I kept up the fire on the barracks until coming near daybreak and we could not tell what was going on as there did not seem to be any fire directed on the barracks from the front during this time. Coming near daybreak we heard fire from a point near our position and at first we could not say whether it was directed at us or the barracks, but after some investigation we discovered that it was one of our own men, named Paddy Egan from Poulacapple. He was not one of the men who had been with us originally but, having heard the firing from his own home and being in possession of one of the police rifles which we had captured at Hugginstown, he came across country to join us and taking up a position, began firing on the barracks on his own. As the light of daybreak allowed us to see a little better, we then noticed O'Malley, Séamus Robinson and Larry Breen had come up through the roof of a house running parallel with the barracks on a story lower and from this point were playing petrol on the barracks. We could see these men running towards the gable end and firing the petrol and in no time the barracks was aflame but we continued to fire on it until the police surrendered. We continued to fire, moving closer to the barracks until we were right up to the door. The one Black and Tan in the barracks had got wounded: a bullet had gashed him across the forehead. Then the police surrendered there were about 14 or 15 rifles captured but these were taken charge of by the 3rd Tipperary Brigade people on the spot. We got nothing out of it and we felt rather sore about this. About this time - the middle of 1920 or perhaps earlier in April or May - there were wholesale resignations of the old British J.P.'s. These Justices of the Peace were generally substantial farmers and merchants and, feeling that their activities as British Justices were contrary to the popular feeling at the time, a large number, if not most of them, resigned in Kilkenny as well as all over the country. It was about this time that the Sinn Féin Courts were established to take over the functions of the local British courts and I was appointed District Court Clerk for the Sinn Féin district court of South Kilkenny. As far as I can remember, the meeting at which this court and its functions were established took place at the Metropole Hotel in Waterford, which at that time was run by the Misses Power. From then onwards, I attended all the courts that were held until I went on the run, and even after I had gone on the run I attended some of them. I had a lot of the records of these courts up to some time ago, but they have got lost. The operation of the Sinn Féin courts was looked upon favourably by the people generally, Even people who had hitherto not been well disposed towards the national movement looked upon these courts as offering a just and fair way of settling disputes. The first person to bring an action before the Sinn Féin court in South Kilkenny was Major MacCalmont, an ex-British officer and big landowner in Kilkenny. MacCalmont's action concerned a Freisian bull-calf which he had sold to some farmer whose name I cannot remember. The sale was subject to the condition that the animal would be castrated, but as the

farmer had not carried out this undertaking, MacCalmont brought the action against him and succeeded in it. I was not present at that particular court which was a sort of parish court, but we heard about it at the time. I can remember about three court sittings in the Kilkenny area, two of which were in connection with the stealing of cattle. In our Battalion area the Chairman was Michael Shelley and John J. Dunne was a member. A court consisted usually of the President and two or three members, something like the old Bench of Magistrates. For example, the kind of things that came before these courts: in Callan there was a woman who had a couple of horses which she used for the carting of the anthracite from Castlecomer collieries. One night a crowd of fellows seeing the horses on the roadside and thinking to have some fun, tied the horses' tails together and began riding them in opposite directions, so that the horses suffered serious injury. This piece of savagery was reported to the Volunteers who took immediate action, arresting the culprits and bringing them before the court where they were, on conviction, fined an amount to cover the damage occasioned to the owner of the horses. The decision of the court was duly carried out, as well all such court proceedings. One of the culprits in this case was a British ex-soldier and when we had arrested him the British military personnel in 11. the district spent some time searching for him but following the Court proceedings, he was one of the men who paid his fine to the last halfpenny. The adjoining 3rd Tipperary Brigade unit on our border was the 7th Battalion of the 3rd Tipperary Brigade and we worked in close harmony with this unit and with the South Tipperary Brigade columns which occasionally came into our area. The mid-Tipperary Brigade was also on our boundaries at a later stage. After the attack on Drangan in June 1920 we planned other attacks. One which we arranged on our own account was an ambush at Kilvemnon, near Mullinahone. In this case, we had arranged to hold up the postman coming from Fethard and to give him certain instructions which we hoped would have the effect of drawing out the British military from Mullinahone into our ambush position but, as it happened, something went wrong with this arrangement. Whether it was that the postman gave away our position or not, I do not know, but the result was that instead of the British military walking into our ambush position, they surrounded and surprised us, but we got out of it after a short engagement, in which there were no casualties on either side. The officer commanding the 7th Battalion 3rd Tipperary Brigade was Tommie O'Donovan of Killenaule, but he was killed about this time in an engagement and Denny Sadler was appointed in his place. As I have said, we had worked closely in harmony with the Tipperary 7th Battalion and about this time the A.S.U. which we had formed in our battalion area - 7th Kilkenny Battalion - linked itself up with the 7th Tipperary A.S.U. and we operated together for a time, coming together for the purpose of actions which were planned and separating again as was found suitable. But I can think of no action of any consequence until we come up to about November 1920.12. Then, we planned an ambush in conjunction with some of the men of the 8th Kilkenny Battalion, which was intended to deal, with a regular British convoy which travelled between Kilkenny and Clonmel. The ambush was to be at a place called Ninemilehouse. We had a good position laid for this but, unfortunately, before the lorries came along, a patrol from Mullinahone came up a back-road and was fired on by one of our men before it had reached the ambush position. This patrol consisted of about 15 soldiers on bicycles and when they found themselves fired on, they left their bicycles and retreated on foot. All we collected, therefore, in the way of booty was the 15 bicycles. We were afraid to keep these bicycles as they were easily identifiable, so we decided to break them up. A couple of our men thought it would be a pity to break up these perfectly good bicycles and took two of them with them when they started for their homes around Callan. When they had almost reached Callan, they ran into a mixed party of military and Black and Tans on two Crossley tenders. The encounter being rather sudden, one of our

men was unable to get his rifle from the rifle carrier on the bicycle, so had to abandon both rifle and bicycle as he dived for cover. The other man left the bicycle on the roadside but managed to get his rifle off it. In the exchange of fire which followed, a police sergeant from Kilkenny was killed and our two men made good their escape. Aughatharagh was the name of the place where this incident took place and is near Poulacapple and Ahenure on the Kilkenny/ Tipperary border. The R.I.C. sergeant who was killed there was a man named Walsh and the rifle which one of our men lost was a Martini Enfield. Sometime around Christmas of 1920 an ambush was arranged to be carried out between Ballingarry and the Commons. This was a joint action in which men from the 7th Kilkenny Battalion were engaged with men of the 7th Tipperary Battalion. That place was actually in the mid-Tipperary Brigade area. This ambush proved abortive as apparently we were seen waiting in the ambush position, and no enemy came near it. That may have been on a certain Thursday and on the following Sunday there was a meeting held in a house near Drangan of the officers of the 7th Tipperary Battalion, and seemingly the enemy learned of this and surrounded the place. In the encounter which followed two of the Tipperary 7th Battalion officers were killed; one of them was named Clancy - I forget the name of the other. I am in some doubt about the date of this encounter at Drangan because it was in my mind that this was much later than November, but I notice an entry in the Bureau chronology showing a Thomas Clancy killed in an encounter at Killusty and, while this may be the same Clancy, I do not think it could be given as Killusty. Another entry in the Bureau chronology shows a Patrick Clancy killed at New Drangan on the 1st December, and I think that is more likely to be correct reference. Leaving aside the date for the moment, what followed was that we were anxious, in view of this reverse, to carry out some action to restore our prestige and the morale of our men. There were some of the 7th Tipperary Battalion men with us at the time at Kyleothesa, which is not far from Killusty, and we decided to organise the 7th Tipperary Battalion and the Kilkenny 7th Battalion to carry out an attack on Mullinahone. Having made this arrangement, we went to a place called Garryricken which was on the border of Kilkenny and Tipperary, but was in our Battalion area. There were six of the A.S.U. there and we went into Garryricken House - the property of the Earl of Ossory - for the night. We went first into the herd's house - a man named Luttrell - who was a Volunteer and we had a meal there but as this was a small house and unable to accommodate us, they suggested we should go to the steward's house which was inhabited by 14. a brother of Luttrell. One of our men, however, preferred to stay where he was and the remainder of us went up to the steward's house. We met some of the local Volunteers who had been in Luttrell's playing cards and we asked them to keep a look-out so that we should not be surprised during the night. On our way to the big house we heard some peculiar sounds in the form of whistles to which, however, we did not pay much attention, though it was very late at night. When we arrived at the big house two of our men slept in a room downstairs where a bed had been arranged, and the other three of us went upstairs where a large bed accommodated us. It was about 3 a.m. by the time we got to bed and we slept heavily until about 6 a.m., when I was awakened by someone shouting and screaming at us to get up quickly. Without asking any questions, I got out and kicked the other two out. It was one of the womenfolk of the house who had called us and the last thing I heard her say as she went out the door was that the house was surrounded. My Colt automatic on the lanyard around my shoulder was in my hand before I was out of bed. I was pulling on my trousers when a voice from the doorway shouted "Hands up". We had the shutters closed on the windows so that we could not see what was going on outside. As I turned to fire at the voice in the doorway there was a shot fired, as it seemed, straight in my face, which however did not hit me and I fired back two or three times. I heard them shouting and running down the stairs, while I followed with my automatic still going. It

was a big house and at one part near the lower end it overlooked the remainder of the house attached to it. From here we could see the District Inspector leaning out on a window and directing his men where to go and what to do, from which it was evident that the house was, in fact, surrounded. I had only my Colt automatic in my hand at the time so Jimmie Leahy and I went back to the room for our rifles. Coming back to where we could see the D.I., we shot at him, which took effect, as he flopped on the sill of the window. Following our fire on the D.I., fire was opened in our direction from all round us outside. We did not open the shutters on the front of the house, but contented ourselves with firing from this gable end window at any target that presented itself. I decided at this stage that the best thing we could do would be to get outside before they had settled down to a siege process that would keep us inside. I was unfamiliar with the layout of the house and appealed to Leahy who knew the place to lead us to a way out. Leahy brought us along a corridor which led to the opposite gable from where I could see, by looking out, that there was some chance of escape. There was a stairs leading down at that point so, shouting to the others to come on, I charged headlong down the stairs. On reaching the first landing, however, I fell headlong, as it then appeared that instead of a further flight of stairs, there was merely a ladder. My rifle went clattering down to the bottom but, fortunately, my instep caught on the first rung of the ladder and, thus, I was saved from serious injury. I gathered myself up at the bottom, shouting a warning to the others that there was no stairs at this point. There were only the three of us together at this stage as the two men who had slept on the ground floor seemed to have disappeared. We had not heard anything of them from the time the alarm started. Leahy indicated where the door was and as we came out of the house we saw the other odd man of ours who had stayed the night at the herd's house. He was across the courtyard, firing away at somebody from a small gate in the corner of the courtyard. Just as we had joined up with him, he had succeeded¹⁶ in shooting the cap off a policeman who was firing at him from behind a wall. We turned left when we came out and going down a little way, the next thing we saw was soldiers with a machine gun mounted on a wall. As we opened fire immediately on the machine gunners, they disappeared at once. The machine gun team had ducked for cover behind the wall so we kept going straight ahead until a Black and Tan behind a tree straight in front of us opened fire on us. There were four of us together at this stage but one of the men had a police carbine with which he was not very familiar so that the other three of us returned the fire of the Black and Tan. When he fired we fired at the flash of his rifle and he, in turn, fired at the indication given by the flash of our rifles. This went on for a few seconds. The youngest member of our party, a lad named Ryan, was quickest to recognise the possibilities of the situation and after a shot or two he, instead of firing when Leahy and I did, held his fire until the Tan poked out his rifle to fire again. Ryan shot him dead and we got clear from that point. After that we got away. At the time, we knew nothing of the other two men but learned later that they were captured by the raiders. It was just daylight then when the action began and it carried on for over half-an-hour before we got away. In the meantime, there were enemy reinforcements on the way as we expected there would be, and the local Volunteers had ranged themselves around the area to give what assistance they could to us but, not knowing what the situation was, they did not interfere. They saw our other two men being captured. I cannot be very definite about the date of this occurrence. Trying to tie it up with certain other entries in the Bureau chronology would place it at an earlier date, but in the back of my mind I have a strong feeling that it took place after Christmas of 1920.¹⁷ To go back a bit in the chain of event, when O'Malley was arrested at Inistioge around October or November 1920 practically all the Battalion commandants of the Kilkenny Brigade were arrested also. Our Battalion Commandant, Roughan, was arrested at that time and there were a few of us in

his Battalion working on our own with Seán Hayes, Tommie Donovan, Micky Burke and other members of the 7th Tipperary Battalion, and we were acting more or less as a free lance unit, i.e. we carried on without any specific orders from Brigade or other sources and made no records or reports of our day to day activities. I learned long afterwards that the Chief of Staff, General Mulcahy, had sent a message of congratulation to the O/C of the Kilkenny Brigade regarding the fight at Garryricken House, but at the time that fight took place we did not even know that we had a Brigade Commander. In fact, a man named George O'Dwyer had been appointed as Brigade Commander of the Kilkenny Brigade but we did not know about this until approaching the date of the Truce. We were therefore carrying on our activities independently. From the time of Treacy's arrest, when all the Battalion Commanders were arrested as well, the Kilkenny Brigade had been in a disorganised state and whatever activity did occur in the Brigade area was the local effort of individuals or individual groups. George O'Dwyer, the Brigade Commander, was not a bad sort of man. He was in the ambush at Castlecomer. Neither the Brigade staff nor the other Battalions in Kilkenny gave us any assistance. At various times we got in touch with the adjoining Kilkenny battalions but they were not inclined to be cooperative so we continued in our Battalion area to cooperate with the 7th Tipperary Battalion. After the fight at Garryricken Jimmie Lahey, who had been up to then acting as our Battalion Commander, got some sort of skin trouble or nervous affection - shingles, I think it was - and went away from us for treatment, and from then on I assumed the duties of Battalion Commander. It was not a matter of seeking for position or formal appointment but Lahey and I had been working together in the A.S.U. and when he left, I carried on his position. That state of affairs continued up to about April 1921 when Ernie O'Malley and Con Maloney, representing the Second Divisional staff, visited us and O'Malley ratified my appointment as Battalion Commander. Sometime in April 1921 we lost one of our men, Lieut. E. Brett of Mullinahone, through a fatal shooting accident. Brett and some others were billeted at the time in a house near Kiltrassy, Windgap, when he was shot dead by a young fellow whose gun went off accidentally. We buried Brett at Cussane, Windgap, and soon after the truce his body was taken from there and given a public funeral to the burial ground in his native Mullinahone. I find it difficult to remember all the incidents and engagements we were concerned in, but I believe that, for our strength, we had as many active engagements to our credit as any I.R.A. Battalion in Ireland. I remember, for instance, an occasion when Sean Hogan's column, the 3rd Tipperary Brigade Column, No. 2, came into our area. This would be early in May 1921. I think we had a general plan to attack the barracks at Urlingford but the column, at any rate, came into our area where a few of us joined up with it, and part of this column was surrounded by British forces near Tullaroan where 2 of our men were killed in the encounter. Hogan seemed to have got a rather wrong view of the conditions in Kilkenny because when he arrived with his column, they had a motorcar with them and I thought it was rather suicidal to be driving along the roads in this car, not knowing the minute we would run bang into a military or Black and Tan party. Actually, I believe this was a car they had commandeered somewhere and they lost it in Kilkenny as it had to be abandoned when the column was surrounded. I had not invited Hogan or his column into the area but I was always in close touch with the South Tipperary Brigade and had more contact with Dinny Lacey's column who had come into our area on a previous occasion to assist us in an attack on Mullinahone - that was round about Christmas of 1920 but, however, the attack had to be abandoned because the enemy had got wind of our plans. Regarding the date when Hogan's column came into the area, I had thought it was about April or May but also I believe it was after Dan Breen's wedding, so as this was the 12th June, it must have been after that. Hogan came into my Battalion area through the 8th Battalion area and was near Windgap before I

knew of his coming. It was actually at a point on the Windgap road about halfway between Carrick-on-Suir and Callan. Our local intelligence people had informed us regarding the probability of a couple of lorries of military coming along to Kilmanagh in connection with the auction of a farm. This had some political connection and it was expected that British military protection would be provided at the sale. Our plan then was to lie in ambush at Kilmanagh and await this military party. I had about 15 men with me and we joined Hogan's column at Dunamaggan on their way to Kilmanagh. Hogan's column was about 60 strong at that stage, and they had a machine gun with them. That was in the morning and we lay in the ambush position all day until late that evening but no enemy forces appeared. As it was clear then that nothing would happen, we were planning to carry on with the attack on Urlingford Barracks. On the way we decided to stay the night around Tullaroan. We were just settling into the various houses through which the Column was distributed when we got word from our scouts that enemy lorries in strength could be heard approaching. It seemed clear enough to us that the enemy force were throwing a cordon around the area where we had been, and we had no alternative but to move on further at once so as to put ourselves outside the probable area of the cordon. It seemed clear enough, also, that the enemy were acting on accurate information and inquiry into this matter afterwards disclosed the fact that the information had been supplied by two spies who were arrested and executed following the incident. One of these, it was established, was definitely in the pay of the British Army. Long afterwards, the British were checking up on this man's disappearance, trying to find out definitely whether he had been shot and where he had been shot: apparently with a view to compensation to his relatives. It was the local Volunteer Company that ascertained the guilt of the two spies and they were arrested and executed three days later. There was no need for any formality in trial in connection with these two spies as they were seen and identified by members of the local Volunteer Co. going round with the British troops, and apparently directing their activities in the search for the column. One of these spies was named Robinson and I forget the other man's name: they were both arrested and executed in the Kilmanagh district. On the night of the round-up, when we judged we were far enough away from Kilmanagh, the column was quartered in a number of houses around the locality. It was very dark and we felt it was safe enough to stay at this point until daylight. One of the houses where about eleven of us were staying was Kennedy's of Knocknamuck. There were about eight of the South Tipperary column in that house with myself and a couple of other Kilkenny lads. Kennedy's house is on the Gaulstown/ Knocknamuck road and is on the south of the road. This was the only house on the south of the road that was occupied by any of the column members. The remainder of the column were scattered among a number of houses, all on the north side of that road and, as it afterwards transpired, the cordon went along the road and worked southwards so that Kennedy's was the only house raided where the members of the column were: the others on the north of the road, being outside the cordon, were not attacked. Tommie Ryan and Seán Hayes were two of those I remember being with me in Kennedy's. Early the next morning we were having our breakfast: some of the men had finished and I remember that I was just sitting down to mine. We were having pork for breakfast though it was a Friday morning - a fact which had escaped our memory for the time being. At this point, one of the men about the place rushed into the kitchen with the alarm that the Tans were coming up the breen. I had not known up to this stage about the two Kilkenny men who were with us as they had come in late that night when we had gone to bed. They had slept in an outhouse. When the alarm was raised we grabbed our arms and rushed out through the yard and had run nearly the length of a field when we were fired on from the right. Replying to this fire we soon found ourselves fired on from the left. The road was running up on our left and this force was

attempting to envelop us from the roadside. A little later, the Black and Tans appeared in our rear in the yard we had left and began firing on us from that position so that our retreat was now constrained in one direction only. At about the third fence away from the house in the line of our retreat, there now appeared another military party, evidently designed to cut us off from that direction. They were coming down a slight slope towards us and actually one of them put up his head over the fence and one of our men shot him - I think it was Hogan. When this happened, the military rushed for cover and we cleared over the fence, though we were still being fired on from the rear, and the second man who was in front of me going over the fence had his cap shot off him as he jumped. A little later, as we came to and were about to cross a road, an old lady told us that there were lorries and troops all around us on the road, so we moved further on. A little later cavalry appeared coming towards us from the direction of the Commons. Avoiding these, we kept going until we got down between Callan and Mullinahone. When we reached this point, which was on a hillside, it was full dusk and we were able to watch the activities of the troops across the valley still searching for us. We did not know, of course, that had happened to the remainder of the column but as we had heard no other shooting, we assumed that they had got clear away. The two Kilkenny men I mentioned, who were with us leaving the house, were not with us after we crossed the fence where we had met the military, though we knew they had not been hit up to that time. We learned afterwards that they were captured alive and were shot out of hand on the spot by the Tans. I am afraid I have not been able to give a very clear picture of the details of this fight and a lot of other incidents occur to me now concerning it. For instance, when we were approaching the fence where the military party was attempting to cut us off, as I have stated, Hogan or someone shot one man who appeared - he may have been an officer - and we were all firing in their direction. I took a couple of shots at one man who was running down the slope towards us but without effect, as apparently I was not allowing my aim far enough in front of me. Recollecting this fact, I then fired further ahead of him and had the satisfaction of seeing him fall. Then, one of the Tipperary men jumped the fence and fired about five or six shots very rapidly on the soldiers who were lining the ditch, whereupon they all scurried away for cover - any of them who were not hit - and it was this attack of ours which gave us sufficient breathing space to allow us to get clear over the fence. Tommie Ryan, the footballer, who was afterwards an officer in the National Army, was foremost in this episode and I imagine Tommie's account of the incident would be clearer and more accurate. The date of this occurrence still eludes my memory. I have a feeling that it should have been about April of 1921 although, as I have said, it is also connected in my mind with the date of Dan Breen's wedding, which was June. However, Tommie Ryan's memory on this would probably be more accurate and I would be prepared to accept whatever date he gave for that incident. From then onwards to the Truce, there was never a week which passed that we did not take some action or other. We were in Mullinahone and we were in Kilkenny town. There was no activity in Kilkenny City and we knew that the Kilkenny Volunteers had about 50 good magazine rifles. We tried to discover where these were dumped as we actually intended to take them from them and make some use of them but by the time we had discovered where the dump was, we found we were one day too late as they had removed them the previous day and we were not able to discover where they had gone to. It was only within four or five days of the Truce when we again got on the track of these rifles, and succeeded in getting four or five of them. On the first occasion that we went into Kilkenny we were invited there by the Kilkenny Volunteers to shoot a Certain County or District Inspector who had made himself particularly obnoxious. Why the Kilkenny men could not have done this themselves, I do not know, but Seán Hayes, Paddy Ryan and myself went in and, arriving at the

outskirts of the city, we found ourselves high and dry. We did not know the local set-up and there was nobody to act as guide or to orientate us on the situation. Actually we had a local guide up to a point, but when we reached St. Kieran's Church in Kilkenny, the local guide left us and we had no idea where to turn. We went in at the back of the wall of St. Kieran's College and waited for this police inspector to come along, but the only thing that did come along were a couple of lorry loads of Auxiliaries which we did not dare to attack. We were waiting for the County Inspector, White, but he did not come along unless, perhaps, he was in one of the Crossley tenders which passed with the Auxiliaries. We had to abandon the project and make our way out of the town as best we could. Another incident which comes to mind concerns an individual who was known to us as "The Foxy Officer". I do not know whether he was an Intelligence Officer or not, but he had been in Killenauloe and I think he had also been stationed in Tipperary town. Everybody in the 3rd Tipperary Brigade and in our Battalion area was anxious to get this man who had made himself particularly unpleasant and was looked upon as a dangerous character. I got word one night that he was in Mullinahone and that we would most likely find him in a certain public house there, where he often adjourned to play the piano and have a few drinks. I got a lot of the men from the Ahenure Company together and placed them at the back of the barracks, with instructions that when they heard our fire at the public house where we intended to go to shoot "The Foxy Officer", they would open fire on the barracks to keep the enemy indoors. That was the plan, but it miscarried. Three or four of our men went along at the back of the houses opposite the house where the Foxy Officer was, and Jimmie Kelly and I went along the street and stood in a doorway near the pub. In this way we thought that if the men on the opposite side of the Street failed to get him when he came out, we could get him if he came our way. Whichever way he went we could have a crack at him. One of the houses which the other men passed behind across the street was the house of one of the ordinary R.I.C. men and as this fellow was at home and heard the men walking down the back gardens, thinking perhaps it was someone trying to steal something, he came out and followed them, coming in behind them to the empty house opposite the pub where they had got into. He was in uniform and when he suddenly appeared in the house coming in on their rear and glimpsing his uniform in the semi-darkness, one of the men shot him. Immediately this shot was heard, the men behind the barracks, assuming that that was the shot fired at the Foxy Officer, opened fire on the barracks and then, of course, the fat was in the fire. The soldiers in the barracks began replying to the fire and the Foxy Officer and the others with him, guessing at the situation, did not emerge from the pub. There was nothing to do, therefore, but retire. That incident took place, I think, sometime in April 1921 and the name of the policeman who was shot was Grace. Sometime previous to this, we had planned an attack on Mullinahone, in which Denny Lacey's column was invited to assist. Lacey came along with the column and as we were ready to start for Mullinahone we got word out from the town that the military had learned of our intentions and were waiting for us to go in. There was a considerable leakage of information in that way around Mullinahone where there seemed to be a number of spies, and the same applied to Callan where we went a few times to ambush the curfew patrol but, whenever we went, the enemy seemed to learn at once of our presence there and we could do nothing. On another occasion, I think it must have been about May 1921, we went down to Fidown in the 8th Battalion area where we thought we might have an opportunity for an attack. We got any help we wanted from the 8th Battalion men who lived around there but we did this on our own. There was no such thing as Brigade orders or requests from the other Battalion or anything like that. We just went down and claimed the assistance of the local Volunteers. There was a patrol which travelled between Fidown and Piltown which we thought we might ambush. We came through

Bessborough Demesne and lay in the ambush position, but after waiting all day, the only person who turned up was one lone Black and Tan, who was in the barracks. He came along into our position and we captured him. I had the feeling that something had gone wrong when the normal patrol did not turn up and, fearing to remain any longer where we might be surrounded, decided to pull my men out. The 8th Battalion men who were with us did not want to leave and when, eventually, we refused to stay any longer, they suggested that we should go up to the big house to Lord Bessborough and get a meal at any rate. I agreed to this as it was on our way home but I told them that they had better lead the way, which they did. As we were crossing a stream at a place called Ladies' Bridge where the road goes through a belt of wood, fire was opened on us from the woods. It seemed that the troops from Carrick had been encircling our position and were in the woods. We were in a bit of a dip in the field at the time and the first bursts of machine gun fire went over our heads by a couple of feet. None of us were hit, however, and as we jumped for cover we were encumbered by our prisoner, the Black and Tan we had captured earlier. There was²⁷. nothing we could do with him except bring him along, but in the predicament we found ourselves, he was a bit of a nuisance. We took him with us, however, for a couple of miles across country and then, faced with the alternative of either shooting him or letting him go, we decided to let him off at this point. He seemed to be a fairly decent sort of chap and we did not like to shoot him in cold blood. His name was Garrigan - a London-Irishman - and he volunteered that if we allowed him to go, he would not give away anything he had seen nor identify any of us. We heard afterwards that he had been as good as his word; that when he got back to the barracks and was questioned, he said he was too frightened to remember anything and could not identify anybody. We went on then to the 9th Battalion area where we had learned that a patrol travelled daily between Upper and Lower Kilmacow. We got in touch with the 9th Battalion men and explained¹ to them that we wanted none of the booty we hoped to capture there. We just wanted to start something in the area and this seemed to be a suitable opportunity, but they told us to go home again; that they were not ready yet in that area to start any fighting. From April onwards, as I mentioned earlier, we were active in organising attacks, so that hardly more than a couple of days passed at any time without something being done in this way. As I also mentioned, we went into Callan²⁸. several times to try to ambush the patrol there, but always they seemed to hear of our coming, no matter how secretly we tried to approach and, consequently, they failed to come along into our ambush. In some cases, we then did a bit of sniping at the barracks there, both to ease our feelings, and to remind the enemy that we were around. There are probably no official records of a lot of these activities because until O'Malley and Maloney came to visit us on the formation of the Second Division sometime early in May, we did not bother about official reports or records of our activities. One of the directions O'Malley gave us when he visited us on that occasion was that all activities should be officially reported to the Divisional Headquarters, and it was from then on that we began sending reports. I think I have made it clear in the foregoing pages that our Battalion had been very largely working on its own up to this. We had no contact with Brigade Headquarters and, in fact, at that stage, say the end of April 1921, I do not think we even knew who our Brigade Commander was. George O'Dwyer was, in fact, the Brigade Commander at that time, but he had been operating with the column up around Castlecomer and did not, therefore, concern himself with the organisation of and liaison with the other units of his Brigade. I know he was concerned in an ambush which took place at Coolbawn, outside Castlecomer, where a couple of men, Mullins and Hartley, were killed, but I don't know what other operations he was concerned in. He paid us a visit sometime about June and he seemed anxious enough then to get the Brigade organised for action as a Brigade unit but, as he had not

gone round until that time, it was not so easy to get things done in a hurry. One of the first things that we put up to him during his visit was the question of the rifles held in dumps in Kilkenny City by the 1st Battalion. Dwyer took this matter up as a result of our representations, and we did, in fact,²⁹ get five or six of these rifles some time later. On instructions from Headquarters Active Service Units were disbanded about this time for the summer months on account of the long days, which made movement difficult, so that our Active Service group was effectively reduced to some members of the Ahenure Company. Nevertheless, those of us who were left tried to carry on some activities and on one of the nights when half of our group went to Callan I was with the Callan half of the party that night in one of our attempt to catch the patrol there. The other half of our group attacked a military party at Mullinahone where an officer and a soldier were shot. Another example of our activities around this time was one morning when we held up the postman coming from Callan to Mullinahone. This postman carried the mails in a pony-car, or a horse and trap as you might call it. While we were holding up the mail car we heard the noise of a lot of military lorries moving on the Kilkenny/ Clonmel road, but we were not alarmed about this as we assumed it was troops moving on towards Carrick. Having taken the mail sack, and the postman having returned to report his loss, we laid in ambush for the expected police or military party which might come out from Callan to investigate the matter. There were only 11 of us in the party and we did not expect a very big police or military patrol but, to our surprise, the first thing we saw was two lorry-loads of Auxiliaries approaching our position. Our party were somewhat scattered in the ambush position - four being some distance down the road, and the remaining seven at the other end, hoping to catch this small patrol we expected between the parties. When the first lorry came into the ambush position it was fired on and it stopped and the troops getting out proceeded to return the fire with Lewis guns and rifles. The four of us who were at the other end in the wood came under this fire at once, so we jumped out on to the road to return it. I had fired about five shots at the man with the Lewis gun, who was under a lorry firing into the wood and observing that the Lewis gun was now silent, a bullet passed close to my ear from another direction before I had time to make a further advance. I then discovered that the military patrol had come on our flank and were now in the wood, advancing on our rear, so we had no alternative but to get out of it as quickly as we could. Our party divided, two going in one direction and Paddy Ryan and I in another. Ryan and I circled round a bit and came out on the road again further up, being puzzled to know what exactly had happened. When we reached the road and turned into a little breen to get round at the back of the wood where we intended to discover who it was that was firing on us from this point, we then saw it was a party of Black and Tans and that, instead of having two lorries which we had seen originally, they had three or four. Realising that there was nothing much we could do in these circumstances, we had a few shots at them from our new position and then made our escape. I had the satisfaction of knowing that the man under the lorry with the Lewis gun was dead. There were numerous instances of this kind. That incident was at a place called Moonarch, between Callan and Mullinahone, about two miles from Callan. It was never reported and I doubt if it even got into the newspapers. I think that would be the beginning of May 1921 but it was before O'Malley came to visit us. There may be a reference to this action in the daily papers of the time but there was no official report or record of it. A reference in the Bureau chronology to an action at Kilbride on the 13th April 1921 is probably the same action, though the precise location of the action was Moonarch. The general district might be referred to as Kilbride. I went up to Rosegreen, the Headquarters of the 3rd Tipperary Brigade, for the occasion of Dan Breen's wedding which took place there on 12th June, 1921, and having spent some time there I found on my return that I had

been elected T.D. for South Kilkenny. I had no previous knowledge that I was to be nominated as the Republican candidate and so my election as a member of the Dáil came as a complete surprise to me. Following the truce in July, 1921, the Kilkenny Brigade set up a training camp at Moneenroe, near Castlecomer, and the 7th Battalion Kilkenny Brigade had a training camp at Garryricken, Callan. A good number of recruits were taken in and trained during the truce period in these camps. There was also a training camp at Galtee castle which was set up by the staff of the 2nd Division during this period and some of our officers attended this camp for training. In the controversy that followed the signing of the Treaty the majority of the old I.R.A. in the area of the 7th Battalion of the Kilkenny Brigade took the side of those who opposed the Treaty.

Signed: Edward J. Aylward

July 27th 1954