

ROINN COSANTA

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S 1032

Witness

James Lalor,
19 friary St.,
Kilkenny

Identity

member of I.R.B. Kilkenny, 1905 - ;
Vice O/C 1st Battalion, Kilkenny Brigade,
1917 -1918;
Vice O/C Kilkenny Brigade, 1918 - 1921

Subject

(a) The I.R.B. Kilkenny, 1905 -;
(b) Irish Volunteers, Kilkenny, 1914-1921

File No. S 2336

Statement by Mr. James Lalor ,

19 Friary Street, Kilkenny

My first contact with an Irish revolutionary organisation was made in or about the year of 1905 when, as a youth of 17 years, I was sworn in to the Irish Republican Brotherhood by the late Peter de Loughrey, who was then Head Centre of the I.R.B. in Kilkenny. It was in de Loughrey's own house in Parliament St. that I took the I.R.B. oath. Meetings of the I.R.B. Centre were held at irregular intervals, generally on Sunday evenings; in Tom Stallard's garden. The principal business discussed at these meetings was organisation and the admittance of new members. Occasionally a member of the I.R.B. in Dublin attended our meetings and stressed the need for keeping the organisation alive and active. As far as, I can now recollect, there were then about 20 members of the I.R.B. in Kilkenny.

On the 5th March, 1914, a meeting was held in the City Hall, Kilkenny, for the purpose of starting the Volunteer movement in Kilkenny. The principal speakers at this meeting were Sir Roger Casement and Thomas McDonagh, both of whom were subsequently executed by the British for their part in the Rising of 1916. The speakers were well and enthusiastically received and after the meeting a large number of young men, myself included, handed in their names; to become members of the new organisation then known as "The Irish National Volunteers At this time I was 26 years of age and was engaged with my father in his building business in Friary St., Kilkenny.

From its inception until the time of the 'split', i.e., about six months afterwards, the Volunteer movement in Kilkenny was controlled by a committee composed partly of supporters of 2.

John Redmond's Party and partly of members of the Irish Republican Brotherhood and Sinn Féin. Training and instruction in military matters were carried out under instructors who were formerly members of the British army. Sometime about July 1914, obsolete Italian rifles for which there was no ammunition were received from Dublin and were issued to members of the Volunteers. These rifles, which had very long barrels, were soon nicknamed the 'gas pipes'. When the European War broke out in August 1914, the Redmondite supporters on the Volunteer committee made a strong move to get complete control of the Volunteers and to oust the I.R.B. and Sinn Fein members. They - the Redmondite members of the committee - openly advocated and encouraged recruiting for the British army with the result that a crisis soon arose in the ranks. The matter came to a head at a parade in the Market Place, Kilkenny, early in September 1914. I was not present at this parade as I was in Dublin at the time on business for my father, but I am aware that the parade was addressed by supporters of the Redmondite policy, and by the late Peter de Loughrey, Pat Corcoran and Ned Comerford on behalf of the I.R.B. and Sinn Fein side. Eventually a party of about 30 Volunteers, who decided to follow de Loughrey, Corcoran and Comerford, fell in at one point in the Market Place and marched, under Thomas Treacy, to the Banba Hall, St. Kieran St. (then called King St.). Being a member of the I.R.B. I naturally, on my return from Dublin a day or two later, threw in my lot with this party. We became known as A/Company of the Irish Volunteers. The hall became known as the Volunteer Hall and those who followed the Redmondite supporters became known as the Redmondite Volunteers. Thomas Treacy was elected captain of the company and I was appointed section commander of No. 1 section. Naturally the split in the Volunteers brought about a split in the controlling committee already referred to.

The I.R.B. or Sinn Fein members of that committee now formed a committee of themselves to control and govern the Irish Volunteers in Kilkenny City and County. The members of this latter committee were Alderman James Nowlan, Edward Comerford, Peter de Loughrey and Patrick Corcoran. This committee was also the link between the Volunteer movement in Kilkenny and Headquarters of the Irish Volunteers in Dublin. The members of the company were very enthusiastic and made good progress with their military training. Parades were held at regular intervals and on Sunday mornings, with few exceptions, rifle practice was carried out in a field at Lower Dunmore. This rifle practice was done with a .22 B.S.A. rifle. In addition to infantry and arms drill, Irish classes were held and lectures were given on military and historical subjects. The publication "The Irish Volunteer" was distributed amongst members of the company. Each man paid for his copy. With a

view to strengthening our numbers, a constant lookout was kept for suitable new members. In the summer of 1915, in company with Ned Comerford, Laurence de Loughrey and Timothy Hennessy of A/Company, and Martin Kealy of the Clara (Co. Kilkenny) Company, I attended a course of training at a Volunteer Camp. at Galbally, Co. Limerick. This camp was run on strictly military lines.

A G.H.Q. officer - Captain J.J. O'Connell (Ginger) - was in charge and was the principal instructor. He was a strict disciplinarian. On one occasion during the time I was there I remember him refusing a pass-out to two men who were attending the course, and who wished to attend a ceili which was being run that night by the Cumann na mBan in Galbally, on the grounds that the programme for the following day included a long route march, and a full day's field exercises for which they must conserve their energies. Not to be outdone, however, the two boys crept out of the camp after 'lights out' that night, cycled to Galbally on bicycles which they had arranged to be left in a nearby field for them, and attended the ceili. Next morning they appeared with their towels and soap when we went to a nearby stream for our morning wash. Their absence from the camp during the night was not noticed. More than 20 years later I mentioned this incident to Ginger one evening when we were having a friendly chat in Wynn's Hotel in Dublin. He laughed heartily, but mentioned that had he known it at the time we were in the camp, he would certainly have punished the two culprits.

The course at the camp at Galbally lasted for about one week. I should say that about 60 or 70 men from various counties attended during the period I was there. Amongst others whose acquaintance I made during this course was that of Mr. Frank Fahy, later Speaker of Dáil Éireann, later in the year, i.e. 1915 or early in 1916, Captain O'Connell visited Kilkenny for some weeks during which time he was busy organising and training the Volunteers in the city and county. On 23rd November 1915, the annual commemoration of the Manchester Martyrs took place in Kilkenny. 'A' Company marched in the demonstration and carried some new Lee Enfield rifles which had been obtained some short time previously by the Controlling Committee. After the public demonstration an oration was delivered by Sean McDermott in the Gaelic League Rooms in Parliament St. When speaking privately to Sean McDermott that same evening, he told me that a Rising would shortly take place, but that a definite date for it had not yet been fixed. I distinctly remember him remarking: "It will be soon, and some of us must go down in it".

1916.

Shortly before Easter Sunday of 1916 - perhaps a week or ten days before that day - I went with Tom Furlong, Peter de Loughrey and Patrick Corcoran to SkeeterPark, Clearys town Co. Wexford, for gelignite, fuse and detonators. We travelled in a motor car owned and driven by de Loughrey. We collected the gelignite etc. at the home of Tom Furlong's brother who was then an overseer in the Wexford Co. Council. We conveyed the gelignite etc., which was packed in butter boxes, to Kilkenny from whence it was dispatched - labelled as 'Castings' - from de Loughrey's foundry premises in Parliament St., to G.H.Q. in Dublin. On the Tuesday of Holy Week, with Peter de Loughrey, and again using de Loughrey's motor car, I went to The Swan, Co. Leix. We called to the residence of the late Eamon and Patrick Fleming where we remained until it was dark. After dark and guided by Eamon Fleming, we went to Wolfhill Colliery where we collected another lot of gelignite) fuse and detonators. This lot we delivered to a Mr. Ramsbottom of Maryboro' who, I understand, was transmitting it to G.H.Q. I remember this incident distinctly by our visit to Kelly's Hotel, Maryboro' next day. We had been out all night and were very hungry as we had no breakfast. When we got to the hotel it was too early for dinner so we ordered tea with steak and onions for the three of us. The waiter stared at us in a strange manner, but passed no remark. He served the meal to which we did justice, but still we noticed that he continued to stare at us in a strange way. Subsequently it dawned on us that the day was Spy Wednesday and, of course, a fast day. Our ordering and eating steak on that day must have shocked the poor waiter.

It was, as far as I can now recollect, on the occasion of this trip to the Swan that I learned from de Loughrey that the Rising, about which Sean McDermott had spoken to me the previous November, was fixed to start on Easter Sunday and that the manoeuvres arranged for that day were, in so far as the Kilkenny Volunteers were concerned, just a ruse to get the men to the Scallop Gap on the

Wexford border, where we were to link up with a party of Wexford Volunteers, without attracting the suspicion of the British authorities.

At this time I owned and rode a motor bicycle and was frequently called upon to deliver dispatches. On Good Friday of 1916, someone - whom I cannot now, unfortunately, recall asked me to go with a dispatch to a Mr. Doyle at a printing works in Enniscorthy. I immediately set off with the dispatch which I duly delivered. I had no idea what this dispatch was about, but on page 51 of his book "Allegiance" which was published in 1950, Mr. Robert Brennan writes as follows:-

"We were all very glum and we were particularly so the next day when a dispatch rider from Kilkenny arrived with the definite news that the Kilkenny Brigade would not come out since there was disagreement in the staff at G.H.Q. As Kilkenny was to work with us, this was a serious blow, but we determined that if a start was made in Dublin we would be in the fight".

This first appeared when Mr. Brennan's story was published in serial form in the "Sunday Press". To say the least of it, I was astounded when I read it as I was convinced, and am still convinced, that no member of the Controlling Committee, nor any officer of the Irish Volunteers in Kilkenny, issued such a dispatch, nor were any of them likely to be aware of any disagreement amongst the staff at G.H.Q. It certainly was never mentioned in I.R.B. circles in Kilkenny. I discussed the matter with the surviving members of the controlling committee and with Mr. Thomas Treacy who was the senior Volunteer officer in Kilkenny in 1916, but none of them had any knowledge of the dispatch. I then visited Mr. Brennan at his home in Dublin and asked him how he came to make such a statement and asked him to tell me who signed the dispatch. This he declined to do. I pressed him strongly on the point that in fairness to all concerned the name of the author of the dispatch should be published in the book, but he remained adamant in his attitude, but he agreed that when his book was being published he would put in a footnote stating that "The Kilkenny Volunteers now living know nothing of this dispatch". The footnote which also appears on page 51 of the book reads as follows:-

"It is only fair to say that the surviving leaders of the Kilkenny Volunteers know nothing of the contents of this dispatch. The Kilkenny men were mobilised under arms on Easter Sunday and again on Easter Monday night only to be disbanded each time on the orders of General O'Connell".

It was customary at the time for dispatches from Dublin to circulate through Kilkenny to other places, and it is my idea that this particular dispatch originated in Dublin, and that Mr. Brennan should be approached again to say who signed it.

On Easter Sunday 1916, in accordance with the instructions of the Company O/C., I paraded with my section at the Volunteer Hall. at 12 noon. There was a full muster of the company which, at this time, was about 60 strong. All available arms were carried. These consisted of about a dozen rifles, some shotguns and a few revolvers scarcely sufficient to arm half a company. At the time of the parade practically everyone was aware of the announcement which appeared in that day's 'Sunday Independent' stating that the manoeuvres arranged for that day were cancelled At 2 p.m. the company was dismissed with instructions to mobilise again at the Volunteer Hall at 8 p.m. that night. At 8 p.m. there was again a full mobilisation of the company. Pat Corcoran - member of the controlling committee - was in Dublin that day and was expected back with definite instructions. At about 10 p.m., Captain J.J. O'Connell (Ginger) arrived at the Hall with word that everything was "off". The company was then dismissed with instructions to parade again on Monday night at 8 p.m. Shortly afterwards Pat Corcoran arrived back from Dublin. His news must have been similar to Ginger O'Connell's, for no fresh orders or instructions were issued.

On Easter Monday morning of 1916, I went with Pat Corcoran and Peter de Loughrey to Borris, Co. Carlow, to collect arms which were under the control of Dr. Dundon there. We travelled in de Loughrey's motor car. On reaching Borris we contacted Dr. Dundon and collected the arms, which consisted of about 10 or 15 shotguns and some cartridges. These guns and cartridges had been stored in a mill in Borris. The cartridges were damp and many of them did not fit the guns. We arrived back in Kilkenny about 8 p.m. and at a point on the Thomastown Road, near Archer St., we were met by a party of Volunteers "from/Company who assisted in pushing the motor car into

Stallard's garden. Here the guns were distributed amongst the members of the Volunteer party. Had the original instructions for Easter Sunday not been countermanded, these guns would have been collected in Borris by the Kilkenny Volunteers on their march to the Scallop Gap.

On Easter Tuesday night at 8 p.m. the company again mobilised at full strength and under arms at the Volunteer Hall. There was still no word or instruction from G.H.Q. and only rumours of the fighting in Dublin trickled through. Late on this night I was given a dispatch by Captain O'Connell (Ginger) with instructions to bring it next day to Mr. James Lyddon in Limerick. He gave me full particulars of Mr. Lyddon's address and how best to find him. If I failed to find Mr. Lyddon on my arrival in Limerick, I was to contact a Father O'Connell who, Ginger assured me, would find Lyddon for me. About 6 a.m. on the Wednesday morning I set out on my motor cycle for Limerick. When passing through Nenagh I was held up and questioned by R.I.C. After inspecting my licence they inquired to know where I was going. I replied that I was going to Lisdoonvarna for a few days holiday. The policeman who asked the questions then said that I would be lucky if I got across the Shannon as all the bridges were blocked by British military. After a further exchange of greetings, during which the R.I.C. man remarked that we were living in dangerous times, I proceeded on my way. On reaching Limerick I had little or no difficulty in finding Mr. Lyddon. Having read the dispatch he inquired if I was aware of its contents. I replied in the negative. He then told me that Captain O'Connell wanted to know if the landing of the German arms on the Kerry coast had been successfully carried out and, if so, that he proposed to send a party of Volunteers from Kilkenny to collect some of the arms. Mr. Lyddon told me to tell Captain O'Connell that the attempt to land the arms had been a complete failure and, consequently, no arms were available. I came back to Kilkenny by another route, i.e. through Rearcross and Thurles, thus avoiding Nenagh, and gave Mr. Lyddon's message to Captain O'Connell at the Volunteer Hall. On my way back I met near Rearcross a convoy, of about ten motor car loads of R.I.C. They were headed towards Limerick, but at the time I met them they were halted on the road repairing a flat tyre on one of their cars. They allowed me to pass without question.

The company mobilised each night at the Volunteer Hall during Easter Week. There were no absentees, and about a dozen new members called to the Hall and joined the company during that week.

The strength of the enemy garrison in Kilkenny city at this time was approximately 440, consisting of in or about 40 R.I.C. men divided between two R.I.C. barracks - one in John St. and one in Parliament St. - and about 400 British soldiers stationed in the military barracks. The R.I.C. kept mostly confined to their barracks during the week, only those who lived outside the barracks in private houses moved to and fro. The military were confined to their barracks during the week. On the 3rd May, 1916, Capt. O'Connell (Ginger) was arrested by British Forces and lodged in Kilkenny Gaol. On the following day Peter de Loughrey and Alderman James Nowlan were taken into custody and also lodged in Kilkenny Gaol. On the morning of the following day, i.e., May 5th, the city of Kilkenny was heavily patrolled by a force of British infantry and cavalry about 800 strong. They were accompanied a strong force of about 200 R.I.C. men. Streets were cordoned off, houses and shops; were entered, and general arrests began.

I was one of about 25 arrested on this day and brought to Kilkenny Gaol. By May 9th, on which day we were removed to Richmond military barracks, Dublin, the number of Volunteers held as prisoners in Kilkenny Gaol would, I should say, be about 30 or 35. Before leaving Kilkenny Gaol rather an unusual incident occurred. We were addressed by a Capuchin priest from the Friary in Kilkenny. He appealed to us to arrange to have the arms belonging to the Volunteers handed over to the British forces. The poor man appeared to have been well primed with British propaganda, for he stated that in return for the handing over of the arms the British authorities had assured him that we would be dealt with leniently. Peter de Loughrey replied on behalf of the prisoners by simply suggesting to the priest that he give us his; blessing and let the matter rest at that. There could be no question of our handing over any arms to the British. The good priest then gave us his blessing and departed. On the march from Kilkenny Gaol to Kilkenny railway station where we entrained for

Dublin, one of the prisoners, John Kealy, dropped dead in John St. He was very ill at the time of his arrest and, if my memory serves me right, he was refused a drink of water before leaving the gaol. From Richmond Barracks, Dublin, I was removed with other prisoners to Wakefield Prison in England. After about two months in Wakefield I was transferred to Frongoch Internment Camp in North Wales. Some time about July of 1916 I was brought from Frongoch to Wormwood Scrubbs Prison, London. One morning in Wormwood Scrubbs Prison I was brought before some kind of a board or commission who asked me my name, address, and if I had actually been in Dublin during the week of the Rising. Having replied to the questions, I was brought back to my cell and, a few days later, I was brought back to Frongoch Internment Camp from where I was released about the middle of August 1916.

I should have mentioned earlier that while a prisoner in Wakefield, I had a visit from a friend, an Irish priest then stationed in Leeds. He asked me if we had Mass every Sunday. I told him we had it on every alternate Sunday. He went to see the prison chaplain, who was a Belgian, and who, I believe, had either a parish or another institution to look after, and asked him would it not be possible for him (the chaplain) to arrange for two Masses each Sunday so that the Irish prisoners could hear Mass every Sunday. The chaplain's answer to this was "Do you think do they mind? Are they not all Bolsheviks?" My friend was so disgusted and vexed that he could not answer him. He simply turned and walked away. That Belgian priest was a victim of British propaganda. On my return to Kilkenny in August 1916, after my release from Frongoch, in company with my former associates of "A"/Company I frequented the Volunteer Hall which was now called the Irish Club. Here, Ned Comerford, also just home from prison, held Irish classes.

1917.

On Easter Sunday of 1917 I attended a meeting in Barry's Hotel, Dublin, at which delegates were present from many counties in Ireland. This meeting was addressed by Cathal Brugha and Michael Collins who outlined a scheme for reorganising the Volunteers on company, battalion and brigade lines. Others from Kilkenny present with me at this meeting were Patrick Corcoran and Martin Kealy. After the meeting we called to McCarthy's hotel on Essex Quay for Alderman James Nowlan, who was in Dublin that day presiding at the G.A.A. Congress. I remember well the streets of Dublin were that night covered with ice for, after picking up Alderman Nowlan at McCarthy's hotel, I could not get the car which I was driving to go up Winetavern St. so to get out to Inchicore and the road to Kilkenny. I had to go back along the quays to O'Connell Bridge and get a-round by Westmoreland St. and Dame St. using, as far as possible, the curb stones of the tramway lines for a grip for the wheels of the car.

During the following summer months I assisted in the organisation of Volunteer companies in a number of towns and villages in Co. Kilkenny. When the organisation of companies in rural areas was well under way, it was decided, in accordance with the instructions received from Collins and Brugha at the meeting referred to in the, preceding paragraph, to go ahead with the formation of battalions and to allot companies and areas to the new battalions. As a first step, three battalions were formed. Roughly, these were organised as follows: No. 1 Battalion was made up of the companies in Kilkenny city and suburbs. No. 2 Battalion embraced the companies in the northern and north-eastern part of the county, and No. 3 Battn. was organised from the companies in the south and south-eastern part of the county. At a later date the Irish National Volunteers in Callan, and what I might call the western part of the county, came over with whatever arms and equipment they had to the Irish Volunteers and formed the 4th Battalion. This organisation of the county in four battalions proved unwieldy and unmanageable and subsequently, when the Brigade was formed in 1918, it became necessary to reorganise the four battalion areas into eight battalion areas. In the reorganisation Callan and district became the 7th Battalion, later still it became necessary to form a ninth battalion.

Thomas Treacy was elected O/C. of the 1st Battalion at the time of its formation, and I was elected Vice' O/C. or the Vice Commandant. The late Leo Dardis was appointed battalion adjutant, and Ned Comerford became battalion quartermaster. In this year also Peter de Loughrey and I went to East

Clare to assist the Sinn Fein candidate - Eamon de Valera - in the by-election there. We travelled on two motor cycles and remained for about 10 days there, i.e., until the day after the declaration of the count which resulted in a tremendous victory for de Valera and Sinn Fein. Shortly after our arrival in Ennis we were surprised to see a man named Smithwick from Kilkenny, whom we knew to have no connection with the movement, driving a motor car flying a large tricolour flag through the streets. We had a chat with him, during which he told us that he had been on a visit to his cousin Pierce McCann (later to die in an English prison) in Co. Tipperary. Pierce McCann was ill and unable to travel himself, so he had asked Smithwick to bring his (McCann's) car to Ennis and render what assistance he could with it to the Sinn Fein candidate. Peter de Loughrey and I assisted the Volunteers in the regulation of the crowds at meetings, escorting speakers, etc. On polling day I did duty at the polling booth at Tulla, and afterwards escorted the ballot boxes to Ennis. On our way back from Clare, de Loughrey and I passed a number of men from Dublin who were halted on the road with car trouble. They were Sinn Fein supporters who were returning to Dublin after the election and whose acquaintance we had made while in Clare. After the usual salutations one of them said: "We will see you down in Kilkenny in about a month's time for the election there". We then learned that Mr. Patrick O'Brien, the Irish Party (Redmondite) M.P. for Kilkenny City had just died.

Late in June or early July a Sinn Fein Convention was held in the City Hall, Kilkenny, to select a candidate to contest the by-election. The late Mr. Sean Milroy attended from Dublin and, at a private meeting held before the Convention in one of the ante-rooms in the City Hall, he informed a number of us that headquarters had decided that Mr. W.T. Cosgrave was to be the Sinn Fein candidate. He was anxious that there should be no opposition to the official candidate and that his choice should be the unanimous decision of the Convention. We then moved out to the Council Chamber where the delegates to the Convention were assembled. Mr. E.T. Keane, then editor of the 'Kilkenny People', who presided, announced to the delegates that Mr. Cosgrave had been selected as the candidate and called on Mr. Milroy to address the assembly. Mr. Milroy gave a stirring address in which he dwelt on Mr. Cosgrave's part in the Rising for which he had been sentenced to death by the British authorities. He also spoke of Mr. Cosgrave's activities in public life as a member of the Dublin Corporation and of his general suitability as a public representative.

A few days later Mr. Dan McCarthy arrived in Kilkenny to act as Director of Elections for Mr. Cosgrave and soon the election machinery was in full swing. We had an ample supply of good speakers. The usual procedure was to divide up the speakers and to hold several meetings each night in various parts of the city, after which - headed by bands or torchlight processions - the crowds from the various meetings marched to the Parade where one main meeting addressed by all, or as many as possible, of the speakers was held. This election was another victory for Sinn Fein as Mr. Cosgrave won by a comfortable majority. The Redmondite candidate on this occasion was the late Alderman John McGuinness of Kilkenny.

Our activities during the remainder of 1917 centred principally on the work of organising and training the battalion

1918.

In March of 1918 I went with a party of about twelve Volunteers under the command of Thomas Treacy to assist the Sinn Fein candidate - Dr. Vincent White - in a parliamentary by-election in Waterford city. We were billeted in a hall, in, I think, Thomas St., Waterford. Our duties were something similar to the duties which Peter de Loughrey and I performed at the East Glare election, but with what a difference. Here in Waterford we were met with the utmost hostility from the Redmondite supporters. I have no hesitation in saying that this election was fought in the bitterest spirit of any Irish election of modern times. We and the Sinn Fein speakers and the Sinn Fein meetings which we endeavoured to guard and protect were attacked at all hours of the day and night by mobs organised by the Redmondite supporters.

To our great disappointment the Sinn Fein candidate was defeated in this election. During the conscription scare in the late Spring and Summer of 1918 the strength of the various Volunteer units

increased enormously. Training of the Volunteers was intensified in all company areas and almost every Sunday exercises or manoeuvres took place between one or other of the companies or battalions. From time to time we had the services of an organiser from G.H.Q., amongst them being our old friend, Captain J.J. O'Connell (Ginger), Captain Ted Kelly and Peadar McMahon. Acting on a G.H.Q. Order that we should not remain in our ordinary places of residence, Thomas Treacy, Edward Comerford, Patrick Corcoran and myself went at this time to live in an empty house on the farm of Mr. Joseph Rice, Outrath, about two miles from Kilkenny City on the road to Waterford. Mr. Rice was an officer of the Outrath Volunteer company and his sister provided us with meals during our stay there. We were, of course in constant touch with the Volunteer units during the time we stayed in Outrath.

In August 1918 a meeting of officers from all four battalion areas was held in a barn at the back of the residence of Mr. Thomas Cahill e near Callan. On this same day, which was a Sunday, Mr. Cahill was entertaining a garden and tennis party at the front of the house and amongst his guests for the day were some British army officers together with their wives or lady friends. However, due to Mr. Cahill's tact, everything went off in a nice smooth way. The guests at the front never suspected that Mr. Cahill had guests of a very different calibre at the back. We, of course, were fully aware of what was happening at the front of the house and that a number of enemy officers were amongst those being entertained there. At this meeting it was decided to form the Kilkenny Brigade. Thomas Treacy, who presided at the meeting, was elected O/C. of the brigade. Other brigade officers elected at this meeting were:- Brigade Vice Commandant - myself; Brigade Adjutant - Leo Dardis; Brigade Q.M. - Ned Comerford. Many matters concerning organisation were discussed and the brigade O/C. clearly outlined the action to be taken in the event of any attempt being made by the British forces to enforce the Conscription Act.

With the coming into being of the brigade, the need for the Controlling Committee which I have previously referred to ceased to exist. Its members, however, remained staunch members of the movement and of the I.R.B. In fact, one of them, viz: Ned Comerford was the brigade quartermaster. Towards the end of this year a General Election was declared I was appointed Director of Elections for the Sinn Fein candidates, in Kilkenny City and County. The Sinn Fein candidates for the Kilkenny constituencies were, however, returned unopposed. Nearing polling day I received an instruction from the Sinn Fein headquarters to transfer any available speakers, money and transport to the assistance of the Sinn Fein candidate – late Mr. Kevin O'Higgins - in the neighbouring county of Leix. The regular Kilkenny speakers were then absent assisting in other areas, but Mr. James Upton, then editor of the Kilkenny Journal, was available, and he agreed to come with me. We linked up with Mr. O'Higgins at Abbeyleix where he was addressing a meeting. Other meetings were held that day and night at Wolfhill Collieries and at Carlow-Graigue. Upton proved himself to be a very useful speaker. The crowds at the meetings preferred his speeches of ready wit and satire to those of Mr. O'Higgins, who was inclined to labour figures and statistics. Mr. O'Higgins won the seat for Siam Fein by a good convincing majority.

1919.

Early in this year instructions were received from G.H.Q. to administer to the Volunteers the oath of allegiance to the newly formed Dáil Éireann. When the matter was discussed at a Brigade Council, Ned Comerford raised fairly strong objections and wanted to know what the position would be like in the event of Dáil Éireann ever letting down or betraying the republic. The question resolved itself, however, at a later Brigade Council meeting, which was attended by the Chief of Staff, Dick Mulcahy. This meeting was held in the Sinn Fein rooms in Parliament St. After a long discussion, Ned Comerford agreed to waive his objection. The oath of allegiance was administered to each Volunteer in the brigade area and, henceforward, the Volunteers became known as the Irish Republican Army, or the I.R.A., as we were generally called.

Through a Volunteer named Brennan who was a barber, I made contact with a soldier named Williams of King Edward's Horse, then stationed in the military barracks, Kilkenny. This soldier, who was in the habit of frequenting the barber's shop where Brennan was employed, told Brennan that

he could procure rifles and would sell them for £1 each. Brennan passed on the word to me. I discussed the matter with the other brigade officers, viz: Tom Treacy, Leo Dardis and Ned Comerford. At first we were inclined to think that it might be a trap; but then, if there were any rifles to be got, risk must be taken. Through Brennan I arranged with the soldier that he hand a rifle over the barrack wall at a certain point at a certain time on a certain night. At the appointed time I went to the place arranged. The soldier passed out a Lee Enfield rifle over the wall. I passed over the money to him and slipped away with my prize. In this way 8 or 9 Lee Enfield rifles were procured for the brigade. I did not go to the barrack wall to receive all the rifles. Leo Dardis, Ned Comerford and Michael (Mickle) Phelan went on some of the occasions. On one occasion the soldier sent word that he had hidden a rifle under the end hut in Tintown. Tintown was an annexe to the military barracks built by the British authorities for greater accommodation during the 1914-18 Great War. It was situated in a field just outside the walls of the military barracks and consisted of galvanised iron huts - hence the name. There was a low wall separating this field from the road, and inside the wall there was a sentry post. To secure the rifle which the soldier said was hidden under the end huts I approached the wall under cover of darkness and waited until the sentry was furthest away from me and this particular hut. I then slipped over the wall and reached the hut. The soldier had not indicated the particular spot under the hut where he had hidden the rifle, but my luck was in, for after groping in the dark for a few moments my hand touched it. Using extreme caution for fear of attracting the attention of either the sentry or the soldiers sleeping in the hut I succeeded in getting the rifle, and again waiting until the sentry's beat took him furthest away from me, I reached the wall, got on to the road and safely away. Up to this point only one rifle was obtained at a time. All the arrangements had been made through Brennan, the barber, and, except for the few seconds in the dark of the night while he was passing the rifle down over the barrack wall and getting his money, the soldier had no contact with either myself or any of the brigade officers. Still working through Brennan, the soldier now sent word that he expected to be able to get a lot of 10 or 12 rifles and some ammunition and to pass the lot over the barrack wall in one lot. My own belief is that he was thinking of deserting at the time and wanted to get a good few pounds together. One evening the soldier, for some reason or other, failed to get permission to leave the barracks. He then wrote a letter outlining the final arrangements for handing out the rifles and ammunition and gave it to his pal for delivery to the barber. The pal must have suspected something for he showed the letter to his commanding officer, who opened it, read it, re-sealed it and handed it back to him, telling him to deliver it. The soldier delivered the letter to Brennan and, in due course, it reached me. The time fixed for handing out the rifles and ammunition was 2.30 a.m. next morning. Blissfully unaware of what had happened in the barracks, Leo Dardis, Ned Comerford, Michael (Mickle) Phelan and myself approached the barrack wail just shortly before the time appointed. On this particular night, for some reason or another which I cannot recall, we went by a very roundabout way, crossing the river Nore by a suspension bridge about a mile to the east of the city, thus arriving at our destination from more or less the country. Had we crossed by either John's Bridge or Green's Bridge we would have been spotted, as both bridges were watched by R.I.C. on orders from the British military. Nearing the barrack wall we got into a field opposite that part of the wall where the rifles were to be handed out. We saw soldiers lying under cover in the field just a few yards from where we got in. We thought at first that they might be soldiers with the rifles for us, but decided that could scarcely be. Although suspicious, we were reluctant to leave if there was any prospect of getting the rifles. Ned Comerford walked down the road and when passing the point where we saw the soldiers he said "Good night. Have you got a match?" The soldier whom he addressed did not reply, but returned to cover. Ned came back and told us what had happened and of his suspicions. We decided to go back the way we had come. Just a minute or two before, we had heard from inside the barrack wall the command: "Halt, who goes there?" We had not gone more than 80 yards when whistles sounded in the fields, but nearer to the barracks than where we were. This was the signal for the soldiers in the fields to extend out and surround us. Guided by Mickle Whelan, who knew the district thoroughly, we succeeded in getting away across the country to Dunmore.

Later we were to learn that the sentry's challenge which we heard was directed to the soldier, Williams, as he approached the barrack wall with the rifles. Luckily for us the challenge was a mistake on the sentry's part. He should have allowed Williams to pass, as the intention of the British authorities was to catch us in the act of receiving the rifles from him. Afterwards Dr. Crotty told us that in the County Club the British commanding officer spoke about the incident and said that he, had the four men under cover from the time they appeared on the road, but that he was holding his hand so as to capture the lot. He (the commanding officer) estimated that there were 300 or 400 men outside the barrack wall that night. Williams, the soldier, was courtmartialled and sentenced to two years' imprisonment.

After this episode at the military barracks, my home was raided for me on a number of occasions by British forces accompanied by R.I.C. but I was never there when they raided, as I rarely stayed at home at this time. My motor car was seized and taken to the military barracks. They did not get my motor cycle, for around this time I was taking the precaution of leaving it, when not required, with Mr. John Gardiner, gardener in the Presentation Convent.

1920.

In January of 1920, at a Brigade Council meeting, the Brigade O/C. stated that he had met the Chief of Staff, Dick Mulcahy, recently in Dublin, and that he had received an instruction from Mulcahy to attack an R.I.C. barracks. After some discussion Tullaroan R.I.C. Barracks was selected as the one to be attacked. Preparations for the attack were put in hand and grenades or small hand bombs were made at night in de Loughrey's foundry. The design or formula for these grenades was suggested by Joe McMahon, a Volunteer from dare who was on the run and had recently come to Kilkenny. These grenades subsequently proved to be very effective, but they were very dangerous to handle, and the utmost care had to be taken when filling them with gelignite and detonating them. Joe McMahon was a man who never counted the cost and was always prepared to take risks. On one occasion while these grenades were being made, we received a quantity of gelignite to be used in their manufacture from the 3rd Battalion (Castlecomer) area. This particular lot had been taken from the coal mines near Castlecomer and was frozen when we got it. To thaw it out Joe put it into the stove of a gas oven in de Loughrey's workshop and lit the gas full-on. Missing the gelignite, I asked him where he had put it and when he told me, I went to the stove, and was I shaking as I turned the gas off? Poor Joe! He was subsequently killed when giving a demonstration of these same grenades in Cavan. We made in all about 40 of the grenades. Those who assisted McMahon and myself in making them were Thomas Murphy, Martin Cassidy and Michael Oakes.

Just a day or two before the date fixed for the attack on Tullaroan barracks I. received an anonymous letter which stated that the British authorities in Kilkenny were well aware of our present activities. I had no idea who the author might be, but in view of this development it was decided to call off the attack on Tullaroan barracks and to attack Cuffesgrange barracks some days later. On further consideration it was decided not to attack Cuffesgrange barracks, but to attack Hugginstown barracks, which was situated at a crossroads in the village of Hugginstown, about 14 miles from Kilkenny.

The plans for the attack on Hugginstown were prepared by the brigade staff and explained in detail to the officers of the units taking part. We made a final check-up on the night before the attack was due to take place, to ensure that everything was in order. This final meeting was held in James Rowans house, Ahenure, Callan. This attack on Hugginstown barracks took place on Monday night, March 8th, 1920. The attacking party consisted of selected men from Kilkenny city companies, from the Callan company and from the local Hugginstown company. In all, I should say there were about 30 men in the party. Those taking part from Kilkenny went by different routes on bicycles. The mobilisation centre was at a point on the road from Knocktopher to Ballyhale where the road branches to Ballyhale near Ballyhale Creamery. I went with Thomas Murphy and Joe McMahon. As the men arrived they went into a field under cover and remained there until the full number arrived. At about 10.30 p.m. Tom Treacy (the brigade O/C), who was in charge of the attack, took us on to the road and we cycled in single file to Hugginstown. We halted a few hundred yards from the barracks

and had to wait some time for the Callan men who were coming from a different direction. All telephone and telegraph wires leading from the village had already been cut by the local men. As already stated, the plan of attack was fully arranged, and on arrival of the Callan contingent we moved into position. With Tom Treacy and the Kilkenny contingent I took up my position behind a low wall directly opposite to, and about 25 yards from the front of the barracks. This party was armed principally with shotguns. The Callan contingent, armed with shotguns and, I think, some rifles, under Leo Dardis (the brigade adjutant), occupied a position at the rear of the barracks. Four men, namely: Jo McMahon, Thomas Murphy, Martin Cassidy and Mickle Phelan, whom we called "The bombers" went on to the roof of a lean-to shed adjoining the barracks. This they achieved by entering the yard of the house next to the barracks where the local Volunteers had left a ladder earlier in the evening, and, using the ladder, got on to the roof of the lean-to shed from where they operated. The strength of the R.I.C. garrison inside the barracks was a sergeant and five constables. On a signal from Treacy the bombers on the roof dropped two grenades, one at the front and one at the rear of the barracks. Immediately the sound of the explosions cleared away Treacy, using an improvised megaphone, announced to the garrison that the barracks was about to be attacked and that he was giving them three minutes to surrender. No reply was received and when the three minutes were up, Treacy then gave the signal for the general attack to begin. The attack lasted in all about half an hour. After the first few volleys the windows of the barracks were completely shattered, but the exchange of fire continued; The bombers on the roof of the lean-to shed succeeded in breaking a hole in the roof of the barracks through which they dropped grenades. During lulls in the firing I heard shouts from inside the 24. barracks which both Treacy and I took to be "No surrender". Later I heard shouts which I distinctly thought to be "We surrender". I mentioned this to Treacy who then gave the ceasefire signal and immediately we both heard shouts from the R.I.C. of "We surrender". Treacy then ordered them to come out and to lay their arms down on the road outside the barracks. One R.I.C. man came out carrying six rifles, which he put down on the road. Treacy told him that he was not satisfied that all the arms had been surrendered, and sent him back into the barracks to get some small arms which he (Treacy) said should still be there. The R.I.C. man then brought out either 2 or 3 revolvers and laid them on the road beside the rifles. The R.I.C. man now stated that one of his comrades was seriously wounded inside the barracks and he asked for permission. to go and get the priest and doctor for him. This permission was, of course, given. The wounded man, whose name was Ryan, died within a few hours. There were no casualties amongst our forces. In addition to the rifles and revolvers, we also captured some ammunition. The barracks was badly damaged and was evacuated by the R.I.C. next day. After its evacuation it was completely destroyed by the local company.

We (the Kilkenny party) cycled back to Kilkenny city without incident and reached our homes about 4 a.m. The grenades used in the attack on Hugginstown barracks were those which I have already mentioned as having been made in de Loughrey's foundry to Joe McMahon's formula. A sketch of the grenade is attached to this statement - see Appendix 'A'.

One day the R.I.C. raided for Joe McMahon at the house where he stayed in Patrick St. He got out the back way and succeeded in escaping into the country. He sent word to me that he would be at a certain place in Drakelands and that I was to come with a motor car to bring him to Callan. Due to Joe's escape and to R.I.C. activity, there was a certain amount of excitement in the city that evening, and it would be difficult for me to get a car out without attracting attention, so I asked Martin Kealy to call to a man named Mulrooney who had a motor car for hire, and to hire the car, explaining to Mulrooney that he (Kealy) was a cattle buyer, and that he was going to see some cattle in the Ballycallan area. Mulrooney went with him and when they reached Kilcreane Gate where I was waiting, Kealy got him to stop the car; Kealy got out and I got in. Mulrooney, who was not a Volunteer, now suspected that the story he was told about the buying of the cattle was not true. He did not protest in any way but offered to help in any way he could. When we reached the appointed place at Drakelands I gave the signal and Joe McMahon appeared over the wall with a .45 revolver in each hand. Mulrooney got a bit of a shock, but I explained to him that all we wanted him

to do was to drive us to Callan. This he willingly did, where I handed Joe over to the safe keeping of the late Mr. John J. Dunne. On the way back Mulrooney visited his mother at her home near Ballycallan, and thereby arranged an alibi should he be questioned by the R.I.C. on his return to Kilkenny.

Shortly after, Thomas Treacy, Thomas Nolan (who also took part in the attack on Hugginstown barracks), Michael Loughman and myself were arrested in Kilkenny and detained in Kilkenny military barracks. After some time we were brought by rail under military escort to Cork Jail. We were in Cork Jail for about a month when with other political prisoners we were brought to Cobh and put on board a ship for Belfast. Arriving in Belfast we were brought to Belfast Prison. Here the political prisoners under the leadership of Eoin O'Duffy (later General O'Duffy, Commissioner of the Garda Siochana) were about to go on hunger-strike to secure their release. We joined them in the hunger strike. After 1 or 2 days on hunger strike, a batch of prisoners which included my three colleagues from Kilkenny were transferred to an English prison.

We continued the strike in Belfast Prison and, after, a fast of 15 days, we were released and removed to the Union Hospital, Belfast. Here I was placed in a huge ward by myself The other prisoners being accommodated together in a ward downstairs. I protested, but on the plea that there was no bed available downstairs, my protests went unheeded. After a few days, thro' the good offices of a member of the visiting committee, I got transferred downstairs to the ward where my companions were. One of the conditions which O'Duffy insisted on in connection with our release was that each prisoner should be given a railway ticket to his home town. When an official visited us in the hospital to inquire where we required tickets to, I was surprised to hear another prisoner asking for a ticket to Kilkenny. He was Dan Hogan (later a Major-General in the Irish army). He was going to his home in Grange Mockler, Co. Tipperary.

I was still feeling very ill when I left the hospital in Belfast, so on my way home I remained for a few weeks with my sister in Drumcondra, Dublin.

The batch of prisoners who were transferred from Belfast to an English prison also secured their release by continuing the Hunger-strike. So Treacy, Nolan and Loughman arrived back in Kilkenny in or about the same time as myself. This, I should think, was towards the end of August 1920.

About August of 1920, Woodstock House, Inistioge, was occupied by members of the Auxiliary Division of the R.I.C. Shortly after our return from prison, Tom Treacy (the brigade O/C.) received verbal instructions from the Chief of Staff (Dick Mulcahy) to investigate the possibility of attacking and capturing Woodstock House. The matter was discussed at a Brigade Council meeting and I was deputed to go to Inistioge and investigate the matter on the spot. Woodstock House stood in or about the centre of a large wooded demesne bounded on its eastern side by the River Nore. From a high vantage point I was able to get a fairly good view of the house itself. I could see that it was completely surrounded by barbed wire entanglements. The windows were sandbagged and there were sand-bagged machine gun posts on all sides of the house. Sentries when being changed moved to and from their posts by slit trenches. Searchlight lamps were also in position. I came to the conclusion that anything in the nature of a frontal attack without artillery would be sheer madness. To find out the strength of the garrison was another problem. Lorries and tenders of Auxiliaries were frequently arriving and departing, and the numbers arriving often varied from the numbers departing. By finding out the average amount of bread, milk and meat supplied daily by local contractors, I calculated that the normal garrison would be in or about 45 men. The movements of the Auxiliaries themselves, and the fact that we had no inside contacts, left little hope of capturing the place by a ruse.

I reported back to the Brigade Council who decided that as I had carried out the investigation I was in the best position to explain the situation to the Chief of Staff. My appointment with Dick Mulcahy - the Chief of Staff - was arranged for a Sunday morning in the Gaelic League Rooms, Parnell Square, Dublin, at 10 o'clock. I travelled to Dublin by train on the Saturday afternoon and stayed the night. with my sister in Drumcondra. After early Mass on Sunday morning I walked from Drumcondra to Parnell Square. Passing along Dorset St. I saw a large force of British military, which had cordoned off

the block of buildings between Eccles St. and Blessington Street, making house-to-house searches. Mulcahy was alone when I saw him. After a brief general conversation he asked me about Woodstock. I told him first of all that I estimated the strength of the garrison as 45 and explained to him how I arrived at that figure. He then more or less took the wind out of my sails by telling me that not only did he know the exact number of Auxiliaries in Woodstock, but that he had a list of their home addresses in England. His figure was, I think, 12 less than my estimated figure of 45. At this stage, a man entered the room and Mulcahy introduced me to him. He was Ernie O'Malley. I had heard of Ernie before, but this was my first time to meet him. He sat down on a chair beside the table but took no part in the conversation. Mulcahy next inquired about the prospect of capturing Woodstock. I explained the position to him as it appeared to me, and stated that in my view the place could not be taken by rifle fire, and that a piece of artillery would be required to blow in the fortifications before an assault could be made on it. Mulcahy then said "All right. I will send down a man who will take it for you. Ernie here will go". This more or less concluded the interview. I asked O'Malley when he would come down and he said he would come by train on the following Saturday night. I said I would meet him at the railway station and bring him to a safe place to stay. He said 'No' that it would be better for none of the local men to meet him. He asked me to draw a map for him indicating the way he should go when he left Kilkenny railway station. I then drew a sketch for him indicating the way down John St., across John's Bridge into Rose Inn St., then taking a sharp right turn through King St. (now St. Kiernan St.) and told him that from the end of King St. he would see the lights of a cinema (then run by Tom Stallard and Peter de Loughrey), and that he should come into the cinema just like anyone going to the pictures on a Saturday night, and that I would be waiting for him just inside the cinema door. O'Malley did not come on the following Saturday night, nor on the following Saturday night, nor, if my memory serves me right, did he come on the Saturday night following that again. Meanwhile, we had no word from either him or from G.H.Q. About three or four weeks after my visit to the Chief of Staff I was arrested in Kilkenny by R.I.C. and British military. Thomas Nolan, Thomas Treacy and Michael Loughman were also picked up on the same day; thus the same four as were released in August were now back in custody again. I believe Ernie O'Malley arrived in Kilkenny on the Saturday night following our arrests. He found his way, as directed, to the cinema where I understand he was met by Tom Stallard who looked after him.

From Kilkenny military barracks, where we were detained for a few days after our arrests, Treacy, Nolan, Loughman and myself were conveyed by road under escort of British military to Clonmel military barracks. Before starting out on the journey, we were warned by the officer in charge that if we made any effort to escape, or if the convoy was ambushed en route, we would be shot immediately. From Clonmel we were brought, by road again under an escort of Auxiliaries and military, to Kilworth Camp, Co. Cork. After a few days in Kilworth we were brought to Cork military prison. Before starting out on both these journeys we received a similar warning to that given us when leaving Kilkenny for Clonmel. After a few weeks in Cork military prison, Treacy, Nolan, Loughman and myself, with a large number of other political prisoners, were put on board a ship and again brought to Belfast. From Belfast we were brought to Ballykinlar Camp where we were kept in custody until the general release, which took place within a few days of the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty on December 6th, 1921.

December 6th, 1921.

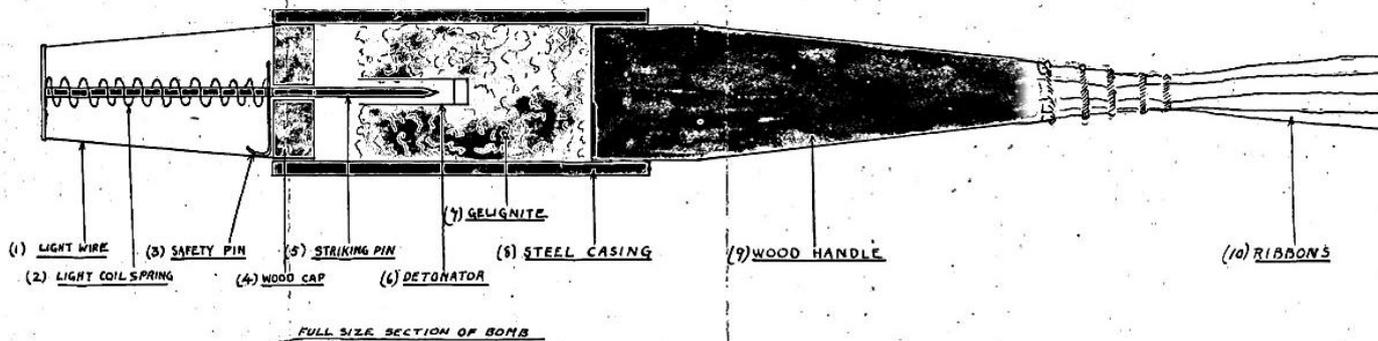
Signed: James Lalor

Date: 2nd Nov. 1954

(James Lalor)
2nd Nov. 1954.

Witness: John Grace

(John Grace)



No 1 Light Wire	This wire was secured to no 4 wood cap and brought over the top of no 5 striking pin. Its purpose was to prevent no 5 striking pin falling out when no 3 safety pin was withdrawn.
No 2 Light coil spring	This coil spring is of light wire sufficient to hold no 5 striking pin from falling into no 6 detonator when no 3 safety pin is withdrawn
No 3 Safety Pin	This pin is fitted through no 5 striking pin and prevented it from going into no 6 detonator when not being used. It should only be removed immediately before use.
No 4 Wood Cap	This cap is driven dead tight into no 8 steel casing. The hole in centre is to permit striking pin entering no 6 detonator
No 5 Striking pin	This pin has large round head so that if it fell in soft ground the resistance would be sufficient to drive no 5 striking pin into the no 6 detonator
No 6 detonator	This is fixed in no 7 gelignite which is packed tightly around it
No 7 Gelignite	This was the explosive used in these bombs
No 8 Steel casing	This was made from seamless steel tubing cut to lengths as shown on drawing
No 9 Wood handle	This wood handle was made as shown for throwing and it was very tightly driven into the no 8 steel casing
No 10 ribbons	Ribbons were attached to the end of no 9 wood handle so as to guide the no 5 striking pin on to its objective.