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STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S 1,335

Witness

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Poulnacapple,
Callan,
Co. Kilkenny.

Identity

Commandant 7th Battalion, Kilkenny Brigade;
O/C Battalion Active Service Unit.

Subject

Irish Volunteer Activities,
Ahenure, Co. Kilkenny, 1917 - 1921

File No. S 2661

Statement by James Leahy,
Poulacapple, Callan, Co. Kilkenny

I was born in the year 1895 at Kylecallan, Callan, CO. Kilkenny, and I attended the national school at Coolagh until I was 12 years old. I then went to the Christian Brothers' school in Callan for a further two years. My father was a farmer, and in the Land League days he was closely associated with the late William O'Brien in the Land League movement. Both my grandfathers were members of the Fenian organisation. When I was 17 years of age I came to reside with an uncle of mine in the house at Poulnacapple where I still live.

I joined the National Volunteers in Killeamery in 1914, but this movement was short-lived. By the end of 1915 it had ceased to exist, so far as the Killeamery Company was concerned at any rate. In October, 1917, a company of Irish Volunteers was started in Ahenure, with the late James Roughan as Company Captain. I joined this company in or about the time it was formed. Beyond drilling and company parades, there was no activity at the time. Then when the conscription crisis came along and we were inundated with new members, all the members of the Ahenure Company who resided in and around Poulnacapple were formed into a section and transferred to the Callan Company. I was appointed Section Commander of this section. The Callan Company at that time numbered about 300 men. During the conscription crisis period we drilled publicly and held manoeuvres, but except for any [2] of us who were lucky enough to own shotguns and a few Martini rifles which were in Callan from the National Volunteer days, we had no arms. When the conscription crisis had passed over, interest in the Volunteer movement was lost in Callan for the time being, and this fine company broke up and the members ceased to attend parades or to take any interest in Volunteer work. The late Fr. Delahunty, then C.C. in Callan, came out to Poulnacapple sometime about the autumn of 1918 to organise a Volunteer Company. He was a great enthusiast and he spoke about the necessity for a strong virile Volunteer organisation, well disciplined and trained. A company was formed and I was elected its first captain. Other officers elected at the time were: Patrick Egan, Lieutenant, Dick Hurley of Coolagh, Quartermaster, and John Grace of Coolagh as Company Adjutant. As far as I can now recollect, we had about 50 members, all drawn from the districts of Coolagh, Garryricken and Poulnacapple. Our arms consisted of a few privately owned shotguns and a miniature rifle which we used for target practice.

In September or October, 1918, accompanied by Hurley and Grace I attended a meeting which was held at the house of Mr. Thomas Cahill, Kilbricken. Thomas Treacy and Ned Comerford from Kilkenny were present, as also were Fr. Delahunty, C.C., Callan, and representatives of other newly formed companies in Dunamaggin, Hugginstown, Mullinahone, Ahenure, Kilmanagh, Ballycloven, Ballymack and Callan. At this meeting it was decided to form the nine companies into a battalion, to be known as the 7th Battalion, Kilkenny Brigade. Battalion officers elected that day were:

[3]

Battalion Comdt. - James Roughan, Ahenure.

V. Comdt. - John J. Dunne, Callan.

Adjt - John Fogarty, Callan.

Q/M - Pat Walsh, Dunamaggin.

Pat Walsh, the Battalion Q/M, was killed in action at Tubrid in May, 1921.

The first order I received from the Brigade. H.Q. was; to bring a party of Volunteers from my company to police the polling booths, at Kilmoganny on the polling day of the 1918 general election and to escort the ballot boxes from Kilmoganny to Kilkenny Courthouse. Members of the R.I.C. were also on duty in Kilmoganny that day, but we took no notice of them or they of us. When the polling booths closed, the presiding officer objected to my travelling in the car with the ballot boxes, but when I paraded the volunteers in front of him and told him what my orders were, he offered no further objection and we got the ballot boxes safely in to Kilkenny without any further incident.

In that election James O'Meara of Limerick, who was the Sinn Féin candidate for this constituency (then known as South County Kilkenny), easily defeated the outgoing representative, Matthew Keating of the Irish Parliamentary Party.

Early in 1919 an order was received to prevent "Meetings of the Hounds". This was, I think, as a protest against the treatment of political prisoners, many of whom were on hunger-strike at the time. About 40 or 50 Volunteers were mobilised to stop a meeting of the hunt. We were armed with sticks and ash plants and we met the huntsmen and hounds at Coolagh Cross. Isaac Bell of Kilcreane Lodge, Kilkenny, was then Master of the Hounds, and our spokesman on the occasion was the late Michael Shelly (afterwards a T.D.) of Callan. After some [4] discussion Bell decided to abandon the hunt and we then escorted the huntsmen and hounds back to Callan, from where they returned to

Kilkenny. This action of ours was frowned upon by many local people, including a number of farmers and what I might call the local gentry, and for a time we were very unpopular with them.. During that year of 1919 we continued to drill and hold weekly parades and collected all the money we could from our friends and sympathisers towards an arms fund,, and at the same time we were collecting every piece of armament and explosives we could lay hands on. Nothing was too small or too antique to be despised., The parades were usually held in a quiet, lonesome spot near Garryricken House. On one occasion James Lawlor, then Brigade Vice Commandant, and the late Peter de Loughry came out from Kilkenny to a Battalion Council meeting, after which de Loughry gave musketry instruction and a talk on organisation, discipline, and training. The arrangements in this district for the collection of subscriptions for the Dáil Éireann Loan Fund in 1919 were left in the hands of the Sinn Féin Clubs in Callan and Coolagh.

Early in 1920 I was in touch with the late Tommy Donovan of Drangan, then Commandant of the 7th Battalion of the South Tipperary Brigade, regarding a proposed attack on Drangan R.I.C. barracks, to be carried out jointly by units of both battalions, i.e. 7th Battalion of the Kilkenny Brigade and the 7th Battalion of the South Tipperary Brigade - our areas joined each other' along the Kilkenny-Tipperary border'. Tommy Donovan was arrested before the plans were completed and for the moment the idea of an attack on Drangan barracks was abandoned. [5].

Then about the first week in March, 1920, Jim Roughan, the Battalion Commandant, told myself and Patrick Egan, then O/C of the Mullinahone Company, that the Kilkenny Brigade Staff had made plans for an attack on Hugginstown R.I.C. barracks on the night of Monday, March 9th, 1920. He asked us to come along to assist and to bring along another Volunteer from Mullinahone who had a motor cycle and side-car. This man was unable to come as he would be missed from his employment that night.

On the Monday night, Egan, myself and another Volunteer named Paddy Raleigh of Jamestown cycled from Poulnacapple to Aherviller, where we met Roughan and some of his Ahernure men. The Ahernure men were armed with rifles. Egan, Raleigh and myself were armed with shotguns and revolvers which we had brought with us from Poulnacapple. These three revolvers had been picked up in raids for arms;, two of them, in fact, had been got in a raid on a deceased R.I.C. man's house while the funeral of the R.I.C. man was in progress. From Aherviller we went on to a point about a few hundred yards from the village of Hugginstown, where we met the Kilkenny and some local contingents and where final instructions were given by Tom Treacy, the Brigade O/C.

My position in this attack was with a party of 8 or 9 men, all armed with shotguns, who occupied a haggard at the end of the barracks. From here we controlled' the road which ran in front of the barracks, and our instructions were to fire on the policemen if they made a sortie out of the barracks. [6] The attack was timed to commence at 11.30 p.m., and at that time all units were in position and we heard Treacy calling on the police to surrender. When they refused to do so, Treacy called on them to send out any women and children who might be in the barracks, but no women or children came out. Treacy then gave the signal for the attack to begin, and parties of riflemen and shotgun men in positions to the front and rear of the barracks opened a slow, steady fire on the windows and doors to which the police replied vigorously. A man named Joe McMahon, who was in charge of a party of 5 or 6 men with bombs and grenades and who occupied a yard at the opposite end of the barracks from where we were, reached the roof of the barracks from a ladder and he broke some of the slates with a hammer. Having succeeded in making a hole in the roof, McMahon threw a number of bombs on to the roof, some: of which went in through the hole and some. of which exploded on the roof or fell down and exploded outside.. it was my first time, and I am sure it was the first time for many of the others, to hear bombs exploding. A few minutes later,, firing from the barracks ceased' and the police called out that they were prepared to surrender.. Tom Treacy then called on them to send out their arms. One policeman carried out the arms, which he put down on the road at a place indicated to him by Treacy. The remainder of the police, then came out, except one - a Constable Ryan - who was seriously wounded. A priest and doctor were got for him but he died next morning.. The attack lasted about half an hour, and after it was over we were withdrawn to the Commons at Carrickshock, where we were dismissed.. One of my companions, Paddy [7] Raleigh, succeeded in pinching one of the rifles surrendered by the police and we brought it back to Poulnacapple with us, where we arrived safely in the early hours of the morning.

When the general order was received for the destruction, on Easter Saturday night of 1920, of evacuated R.I.C. barracks, there were two barracks in my area to be dealt with, one at Windgap and the other at Killeamery. We had not much difficulty with the one in Windgap. After spreading hay sprinkled with paraffin oil in every room and setting it alight, the place went up in a blaze, but two similar attempts at Killeamery failed to burn the barracks. On our third visit we broke down the roof and floors with sledge hammers and hatchets and left only the walls standing.

The Income Tax office in Callan was also raided on that Easter Saturday night by another party of Volunteers, and all Income Tax papers and records were taken away and burned.

About May, 1920, Peadar McMahon, now Secretary of the Department of Defence and then an organiser for G.H.Q., came to our battalion area. He stayed in Callan under the pretext of being a commercial traveller. He inspected all companies during his visit. He remained with us for three weeks, and every night during these three weeks he gave classes for the battalion and company officers. His subjects included drill, musketry, bomb throwing, use of explosives, military tactics, road blocking and discipline.. The company officers were, in turn, expected to impart this knowledge to the members of their companies. [8].

The next incident of note which I can recall is in connection with the attack on Drangan R.I.C. barracks, which took place on the night of 14th June, 1920. That morning in Callan I met Fr. Delahunty, who told me that the attack on Drangan barracks was to come off that night. He told me to be ready and to be on the road. Later on in the day I received a dispatch to report at Cahill's of Cappahenry at 9 o'clock that night. There I met Jim Roughan, the Battalion Commandant, and six of his Ahernure men. They were armed with rifles. I was given a shotgun, as there were no more rifles available. I already had my revolver, which I had brought with me. There was some kind of a discussion, in which it was stated that only men with rifles were to go to Drangan. None of those who had rifles would part with one, and then it was agreed that I should take charge of a party of men who were also there and who had hatchets, cross-cuts and saws to block the Kilkenny-Drangan road between Modeshill and Lismolin.

The seven men from our battalion area who went to Drangan and took part in the attack on the barracks there that night were: James Roughan, the Battalion Commandant, Eamon Alyward, Robert Cahill, Patrick Ryan, Daniel Finn, Michael Gibbs and Patrick Maher. All were members of the Ahernure Company.

Edward Halley and myself took charge of the blocking of the roads.. We were only about three miles from Drangan, and hearing the explosions and seeing the Verey lights which the police sent up, we knew that the attack was on. After we had felled either 7 or 8 trees across the road I sent the men home and I then went on towards Drangan. It was daybreak by this time, and at Knockclura [9] Hill, about a mile from Drangan, I met some of the Mullinahone Volunteers, who had been on scout duty, on their way home. They gave me the news that the police had surrendered and that the attack was over.

After the attack on Drangan, the R.I.C. in Mullinahone were reinforced by a company of the Lincolnshire Regiment and, at the same time, a company of the Devonshire Regiment were posted to Callan.

About mid August, 1920, I was again in touch with Tommy Donovan (Commandant of the 7th Battalion, South Tipperary Brigade) who had returned after serving a prison sentence. We planned an ambush at Ballincullen or New Line Cross on the road between Mullinahone and Slievenamon. We occupied the position with about 50 men drawn from both battalion areas. Twelve were armed with rifles, the remainder with shotguns. As a decoy to draw out the military from Mullinahone, we held up the mail car, took the mails and then allowed it to go on into Mullinahone. A patrol did come out on bicycles to investigate, but when within a short distance of the ambush position they must either have noticed something or become suspicious, for they suddenly turned around and cycled back towards Mullinahone. One of our men fired a few shots after them. Tommy Donovan, who was in charge, then decided to disperse our men. Later a larger party of military came to the scene. They burned cocks of hay and arrested a man named Gleeson who lived nearby. All our men got home safely.

Sometime before the incident referred to in the preceding paragraph, the Hugginstown (Co. Kilkenny) Volunteer Company reported to the Battalion Council that the sons [10] of three Protestant families in their area, viz, the Briscoes of Harristown and the Daniels and Carrs of Blackbog, were heavily armed and that they had formed themselves into an anti I.R.A. unit. Between the three families there were about nine men involved, and all of them had seen service with the British Forces during the 1914-1918 Great War and were violently pro-British in their outlook. The Hugginstown Company officers were of the opinion that in addition to shotguns and revolvers, these men had a Lewis machine-gun and service rifles. Jim Roughan, Paddy Raleigh, Paddy Egan, Ned Cuddihy and myself went in a motor car to Harristown, where we rushed Briscoe's house. There was only one of the menfolk and some women present. In a search of the house we got two shotguns, two miniature rifles, a revolver and some ammunition. On our way from the house we met another of the Briscoes. We told him what we had taken, but mentioned three revolvers instead of one. He remarked that we could not have got three as there were only two in the house. We then made him come back with us and show us where the other one was. It was a fine fully-loaded service revolver and it was hidden in a cavity cut out of a large book which lay on the sitting-room table. We then went on to Daniel's, where in the boy's

bedroom we got two shotguns, two miniature rifles and one revolver. Here, too, we got a good quantity of shotgun cartridges and .22 ammunition. At Carr's we got a shotgun, some cartridges and a revolver. Search as we might, we could get no trace or sign of either a Lewis gun or the service rifles. The Hugginstown Volunteers always maintained that these lads had both, and in the months that followed I searched all likely places for them. Years later, about the time the Civil War [11] ended, a brother-in-law of Briscoe's told me that the machine-gun and the rifles had been dumped all the time at his residence in Killeamery, and that at that time, too, one of the Briscoes gave spare stocks, barrels and pans of a Lewis gun to an ex-Volunteer named Lutteral in Kilmoganny.

About August, 1920, as a result of several raids by R.I.C. and military on my residence, all of which I was fortunate enough to avoid, I decided to leave home and go on the run. The raiders, when they called to search the house, never asked for me by name. They always went in shouting remarks like "is the murderer here?"

Towards the end of August or September, 1920, again working in conjunction with Tommy Donovan, I took charge of a party in an ambush position on the road between Mullinahone and Thurles. Donovan, with some of his Drangan Volunteers, occupied a position on the same day on the Mullinahone-Drangan road. We expected a patrol from Mullinahone to come either road, but we were disappointed. Some of the Drangan men then went and burned hay on the farm of a pro-Britisher named Boyle. Military from Killenaule came out to Boyle's; farm to investigate, but by the time we learned of this arid got to Boyle's place the military had left and gone back to Killenaule. Later we went into Mullinahone and patrolled the streets, but that night there was neither a policeman nor a soldier to be seen on the streets..

After the death of Terence MacSwiney a Requiem Mass. was celebrated in Callan for the repose of his soul. I went into Callan and attended the Mass. There was, I believe, a general order at the time that there should be [12].enemy casualties in every area as a reprisal for the Lord Mayor's death. I know that on that day, with a party of ten men, three armed with rifles and seven with shotguns, I occupied an ambush position at Poulnacapple on the main Kilkenny-Clonmel road. We waited all day, but again no enemy forces passed. I then decided to go into Callan and attack the night patrol in Bridge St. Again we were disappointed. No patrols came out that night and there was not a light showing in either the R.I.C. barracks or the military post. The strength of the British forces in Callan at the time was twelve R.I.C. men and a company of the Devonshire Regiment..

The officer in charge of the British forces in Callan was a Captain Banim. He was a District Inspector of the Royal Irish Constabulary. One night I learned that he had gone in civilian clothes to visit Briarsfield House near Mullinahone. With two others I went to Briarsfield and closed the avenue gate so that he would have to get out of his car when leaving. As Briarsfield was in the Mullinahone Company area, I sent for Paddy Egan, the O/C of that company. Egan told me that there were two wounded Volunteers lying in a house nearby and, on that account, we decided not to shoot Banim that night. The two wounded Volunteers were Patrick Clancy of Killusty and Patrick Ryan of Fethard. They had been wounded in Killenaule on the night of October 31st when my old friend Tommy Donovan was killed.

After Ernie O'Malley's arrest near Inistiogue early in December, 1920, practically all, if not all,[13].of the senior officers of the Kilkenny Brigade, including Jim Roughan, our Battalion Commandant, and John J. Dunne, the Battalion Vice Commandant, were captured in a series of raids carried out by the British forces. Some of the company officers in our battalion were also arrested about the same time. These arrests created an amount of disorganisation and confusion, and from then until the Truce we in this battalion area worked more. or less on our own.

When the late George O'Dwyer was appointed to succeed Tom Treacy as Brigade Commandant, he seemed to confine his activities to the Laoighis and Carlow sides of the brigade area and, as far as I know, he never visited this battalion area until a few days before the Truce.

Two tenders of Auxiliaries were in the habit of passing along the main Callan-Clonmel road on Mondays, going, it was believed, from Woodstock to Macroom, Co. Cork. Paddy Egan and I decided to have a crack at them and we selected an ambush position about 300 yards from the village of Nine Mile House where the road turns sharply to the right and then after about 40 yards or so it turns sharply to the left before entering the village of Nine Mile House. The road from Mullinahone to Nine Mile House joins the main road at the point of this last sharp turn. For this ambush we mobilised about 80 men from the Kilmanagh, Ballyline, Ahernure, Mullinahone, Cloneen and Coolagh Companies. About 7 a.m., before daylight, on the morning of December 20th, 1920, we occupied the ambush position, bringing along every rifle, shotgun and piece of armament we could lay hands on. Up to 3.30 p.m. that day there was no sign of the Auxiliaries, and at about that time [14] of the evening we saw a cycle patrol of 14 British soldiers and two R.I.C. men coming along the Mullinahone road. They (the patrol) had dismounted and were pushing their bicycles up a steep incline leading to the main road.

Our position had been planned to deal, as I have said, with tenders on the main road, and we were in the worst possible position to deal with this unexpected patrol which was coming towards our left flank. I considered that it was odds on that the patrol would turn to their right and go into the village of Nine Mile House, so I told Egan that I would withdraw some of my party back to the village and attack the patrol there. While I was arranging this, one of our men fired a shot at the patrol. The two R.I.C. men, who were at the rear of the patrol, turned at once and cycled away. The soldiers, however, discarded their bicycles and ran back down the road. They were too far away from us for the shotguns to be effective, so I told the riflemen to open up on them. Four or five of the soldiers took cover and for a few minutes they returned our fire, but without doing any damage. We collected the bicycles and Egan and I then dismissed the men, telling them to return to their homes.

Some of our men decided to cycle home on the bicycles we had captured from the military. Four of them cycled along the main road through Killeamery and Poulnacapple towards Callan. The first two got home alright, but the second two, Paddy Ryan and a boy named Maher, met a cycle patrol coming from Callan. Ryan and Maher had rifles tied on the bicycles. It was nearly dark at the time and they met the cycle patrol almost head on. Ryan had a Webley revolver and he shot one of the leading patrol - a Private Squib - through the head. [15].Himself and Maher had to discard the bicycles, but, bringing their rifles with them, they crossed the fence at the side of the road and were pursued by the military across some fields. When this party of military were returning through the fields after their unsuccessful pursuit of Ryan and Matter, they were fired on by another party of military and Black and Tans who had arrived in lorries and who apparently mistook the military in the fields for I.R.A. men. Under the same misapprehension the fire was returned and a Constable Walsh, who was With the Black and Tans on the road, was shot dead. This fight between the two parties of British forces was a bit of luck on our part, for while it was on it enabled our men who were dispersed at Nine Mile House to get away from the district. That night further forces of military and Black and Tans arrived and reprisals started. They set fire to hay and haybarns at farmhouses near the road.

Eamon Aylward and myself spent the night moving the arms from Garryricken House where they had been brought from Nine Mile House, as I felt sure that Garryricken would be searched. Having secured the arms) Aylward and myself walked about four miles to the house of friends named Wallace of Ballyhall. By morning the countryside was swarming with British troops from the Curragh and from Waterford, so we moved further away to Dunamaggin. Rumours were prevalent that so-and-so had been shot and so-and-so had been captured, but by Christmas Day every man who had been mobilised for the ambush was safely accounted for

On the day of Constable Walsh's funeral, the British authorities ordered all business houses in Callan [16].to close. One woman, a Mrs. Ryan, the owner of a licensed premises, opened her door to look at the funeral as it passed. She may have thought that no notice would be taken of her, as the R.I.C. were in the habit of drinking in her premises, but she was fired on by either the troops or the Black and Tans and she died almost immediately inside her own door.

Aylward and myself spent Christmas night in the home of Fr. Larkin, C.C., Windgap, Co. Kilkenny. We left next day and within 24 hours the house was raided by Auxiliaries from Woodstock, who questioned him (Fr. Larkin) about the two men who stayed in his house on Christmas night..

From Windgap we went to south Co. Kilkenny and visited Volunteer officers in the hope of getting them to start activities in their areas. Except for a few, such as Pat Walsh of Clogga and Dick Brennan of Mooncoin, we received a poor response. It appeared to us that they feared the reprisals which would follow any aggressive action on their part. In Carrick-on-Suir, where I went from Mooncoin, I had a narrow escape from arrest when, after attending Mass at 7 a.m. in the Friary Church, I almost walked into a party of R.I.C. and troops who were drawn up in the Main St. Amongst them I saw an R.I.C. man who knew me personally.. By entering a shop which chanced to be open at that early hour, and then after leaving the shop by retracing my steps back to the Quays, I avoided being held up. Leaving Aylward in south Co. Kilkenny, I moved back towards my own area, staying in various houses, including [17].Maher's of Cussane and Somer's of Closhaveha. I stayed in the latter house on a Saturday night, left there on Sunday evening and the place was raided by the Auxiliaries from Woodstock on the Monday morning.

While at Whelan's of Seskin, I watched with field glasses a party of military and Auxiliaries as they carried out a round-up at and around Windgap where I had spent the two previous nights;. On this occasion they had prisoners with them as hostages, and they made the prisoners go in front of them as they searched fields and houses, It was obvious that the Auxiliaries in Woodstock were receiving information about my movements, but from what source I was never able to find out. In an effort to trace the informer I walked slowly and fully armed in broad daylight through the village of Windgap, having previously cut the telephone and telegraph wires and placed scouts at vantage points around

the village to see if anyone would leave. This ruse of mine was unsuccessful, but next day the Auxiliaries were again raiding in that area for me.

While at Whelan's of Seskin I received a dispatch to go to Cahill's of Cappaheny that night. It was about six miles cross country to Cahill's, and on my way I called for James McKenna at his home in Garrythomas. It was dark when I reached McKenna's. Mrs. McKenna told me that James was out. In fact, he had gone to Cahill's of Cappaheny but I did not know that at the time. She pressed me to go in for a meal but, fortunately, I refused. I had only left her about half a minute and gone out by a haggard, when six men [18] in civilian clothes and carrying revolvers in their hands pushed in the door. They questioned Mrs. McKenna to know who was the man who had just left the house, and she told them that it was her son who was gone out to visit some neighbours. From her description I have no doubt but that they were either Auxiliaries or R.I.C. men in plain clothes. McKenna's was the only house they entered, and, with the exception of some people whom they held up in Cotterstown, no one else appeared to have seen them.

Representatives of the various companies in the battalion area were present at Cahill's, as also was an organiser named Patrick Medlar from G.H.Q. Medlar was a native of Paulstown, Co. Kilkenny. He had lived in Dublin for a few years and at that time he was attached to the staff of the Director of Organisation. He stressed the necessity of getting the battalion reorganised and to elect officers; in lieu of those who had been arrested. The first thing to be done was to elect a Battalion commandant and a Battalion Vice Commandant in lieu of Jim Roughan and John J. Dunne. At this meeting I was elected Battalion Commandant and Edward Halley of Ballywater Calan, was elected Vice Commandant.

I was not keen on taking on the job, for at the time I was contemplating going and joining one of the columns in the South Tipperary Brigade, and again the idea of visiting companies and trying to hammer them into some kind of shape did not appeal to me. This meeting was held, as far as I can now recollect, in the first week of January, 1921. I appointed Eamon Aylward as Battalion Quartermaster and David Pollard of Callan as Battalion Adjutant. [19]. About two or three weeks later I received a despatch from Kilkenny (I cannot now recall from whom there) to carry out an attack on enemy forces in my own area on the following Sunday night. Later I received a further despatch to postpone the attack for a week until the other battalions would be ready to attack enemy posts in their areas. I decided that our best plan would be to go into Callan and after kidnapping any soldiers who might be promenading about the street, to attack the barracks.

Owing to the strength of the garrison, both military and R.I.C., and to the fact that the barracks was so well protected with steel shutters, sand bags and barbed wire, I knew that there was no use in going in. With the idea of attempting to capture the barracks, but if the order was to be carried out then Callan was the best place to carry it out. Again, at the time there were only six service rifles available to us, and any in excess of that number could only be armed with shotguns, revolvers or Martini rifles, of which we had about twenty..

Before going to Callan on the Sunday I selected the following four men: Eamon Aylward, Patrick Ryan, James McKenna and Patrick Lutteral, and, with myself these men from that date became the Battalion Active Service Unit. The late Seán Quinn became a member of the A.S.U. about two weeks later. On the Sunday night we (the newly formed A.S.U.) and about 24 Volunteers occupied the Fair Green in Callan while scouts moved around the streets to see if there were any military out of the barracks. The scouts reported that there were no soldiers or police to be seen on the streets and we then moved into positions around the barracks. About 10 p.m. [20]. we opened fire and the police replied with rifle and machine-gun fire. They also sent up Verey lights and from time to time fired rifle grenades. As the roads were blocked I felt that there was no immediate danger of reinforcements arriving for the garrison, so I kept the men in position for something more than two hours.. It was a good opportunity of getting them accustomed to being under fire. Shortly after midnight we withdrew to Garryricken, about 3 miles away, and left the garrison still blazing away from the barracks. We suffered no casualties that night. Press reports later stated that two members of the Devonshire Regiment were wounded. This attack was carried out on February 13th, 1921. Gowran R.I.C. barracks was attacked by members of the 5th Battalion on the same night.

Aylward, who had returned from South County Kilkenny, told me that he had been asked by Pat Walsh of Clogga to bring down 5 or 6 riflemen, as he (Walsh) considered that there was a good chance of ambushing a police patrol on the road between Fiddown and Mullinavat. On the morning after the attack on Callan barracks, we (the A.S.U.) set out for Clogga and reached it on the third night. Pat Walsh took us to Barden's of Kilnaspic, where beds had been put up for us on a loft over an outhouse. Next night Aylward went with Pat Walsh to attend a meeting of the local company, where arrangements for the ambush were to be made. On his return Aylward said "We had better get away, Jimmy, we are not wanted in this district. Pat Walsh is alright but the others don't want any trouble

around here". We left next morning but were not more than half a mile away when Barden's was surrounded and searched by British military [21].from Waterford accompanied by R.I.C. men from the local stations. On our way back we stayed a night at O'Shea's of Mullinbeg and discussed with local company officers the question of an attack on Fiddown R.I.C. barracks. it was arranged that we would meet the local men next night at Piltown before going on to Fiddown, but when we went to Piltown there was no one to meet us. I then decided to return to our own battalion area. Here I received a dispatch from the late Commandant Denis Sadlier, who was in charge. of the A.S.U. in the 7th Battalion of the South Tipperary Brigade, inviting us to join With him and form a fairly strong force for a few engagements. We met on the following Monday. Sadlier had 10 well armed men in his A.S.U. and we decided to occupy the ambush position near Nine Mile House to try again for the two tenders of Auxiliaries, but again we were disappointed for they did not come.

Sadlier and Aylward then took the two A.S.U.s down south County Kilkenny, while I remained doing some work with the companies. They had no engagements and on their return I linked up with them at Kyleaskeough, from where we went on to Crook's Cross near Ballingarry. This was in the 2nd (Mid) Tipperary Brigade area. Here at Crook's Cross we lay in ambush from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. for a patrol which we expected would come from The Commons to Ballingarry R.I.C. barracks, which was about half a mile from the ambush position. About 5 p.m. Sadlier, who had field glasses trained on the barracks, remarked to me "No patrol will come out this evening". He handed me the glasses, and when I looked I saw a priest, who had passed by the ambush position earlier in the afternoon, knocking at the barrack door. This was what [22] prompted Sadlier's remark. The Tipperary lads then went away towards Drangan and I returned with my A.S.U. to Ballymack in my own battalion area. it was on a Friday night that we parted with Sadlier and his unit at Ballingarry We went to Teehan's of Shipton and spent the night there. On the following Sunday Sadlier and some of those who were with him at Ballingarry were surrounded by British military in a stable at Knockroe near Drangan and three of Sadlier's men were killed. The first news I got of this tragedy at Knockroe was on the Monday when a local doctor - Dr. Phelan of Callan - called to Muldowney's of Ballymack to attend to one of our men who was ill. On the Sunday evening our scouts had reported that large convoys of military were gone towards Drangan, but, as I said, we knew nothing then about the happenings at Knockroe.

We were still in Ballymack when the military were returning from Drangan on the Monday night. In the meantime they must have got information about our whereabouts, for one of our scouts reported on Monday night that the lorries, about 40 in number, with only the drivers in them, had passed by Ballymack Cross on the Callan-Kilkenny road and that the lorries were stopping further along the road towards Kilkenny. Then I heard dogs barking in the distance. With the assistance of the scout, we succeeded in getting to the main road and across it before the military had completed forming a ring around the area. We left the scout at Ballymack Cross, where minutes later he was captured. [23].Two days later I received a despatch saying that the officer in charge of the British forces in Mullinahone had gone with 3 soldiers in a commandeered motor car to Tipperary Town. I cannot now recall what his correct name was but we always called him "the foxy officer". We assumed that he was attending some kind of an inquiry into the shooting at Knockroe on the previous Sunday. The six of us (i.e. the A.S.U.) and Sean Hayes of Moyglass, who had come to Ballymack with us from Ballingarry, went that evening to Cappagh Cross, about 3 miles from Mullinahone on the Mullinahone-Fethard road, in the hope that we could ambush "the foxy officer" and his party on their way back from Tipperary Town. it was a desperately cold night and we waited until 3 a.m., but no sign of our quarry. Next day at Tobin's of Kyletolea we received word that he had returned to Mullinahone by another route the night before and that he. had left again that morning, presumably on another visit to Tipperary Town where the headquarters of his regiment, The Lincolnshires, was situated. Reinforced by three local Volunteers with shotguns, we occupied the ambush position at Cappagh Cross again that night. Again we remained there until 3 a.m., but again we were disappointed.

On the following day, Friday, we got word that he was back in Mullinahone, and that night we decided that Sean Hayes would go to Drangan for a few extra men and that we would meet him on Saturday night and go into Mullinahone for a further attempt to get "the foxy officer". After Hayes left for Drangan, the six of us left for Garryricken House.[24]. Garryricken House was then owned by the Marquis of Ormonde, but he was not in residence there at that time. A caretaker named Lutteral and his family lived in apartments in the house and a herd, also named Lutteral, lived with his family in a house in the farmyard. Both the caretaker and the herd were brothers of Paddy Lutteral, who was a member of our A.S.U. The house itself (Garryricken House) was situated in a lonely, desolate wooded part of the country, and in more peaceful times the Marquis of Ormonde used it as a shooting lodge. When we arrived there we went to the herd's house first, where all six. of us had tea. About midnight Paddy Ryan went to bed in this (the herd's) house and the remaining five of us went to "the big house", where, after playing cards until 4 a.m., Aylward, Quinn and myself went to bed in a room

upstairs.. Two local Volunteers named Carney and Cody who were on the run' were asleep in this: room and we made them get up and go out on scout duty. Paddy Lutteral and James McKenna went to bed in a room downstairs. The door of this room was locked as, I believe, it was always reserved and in readiness for Lord Ormonde, so the two lads got in through the window. All six of us were armed that night with rifles and revolvers. About 7.30 a.m. one of the scouts,, Cody, thinking that the place was quite; safe, went away and left the job to Carney. It was, however, at about this time of the morning that the military, R.I.C. and Black and Tans were surrounding the house. Three parties of them left their lorries at Curragh, at Springmount and at Garrythomas and advanced cross-country towards the house, while a fourth party, on [25] bicycles, entered by the avenue gate. Carney, the scout, was captured in a breen before he could give warning. Some of the British forces were from Callan and the remainder were from Kilkenny.

Mrs. Lutteral, the caretaker's wife, was the first to give us warning. She woke the three of us, who were dead asleep, and told us the military were outside. We always slept at the time with all our clothes on, except our overcoats, coats, boots and leggings. I jumped out of bed and lay on the floor near the door of the room, keeping the stairs covered with my rifle. I shouted to Aylward and Quinn to get their boots on while I held the door. I could hear a lot of talk going on downstairs and I knew then that some of the, raiders were already in the house. Aylward took over at the door while I was getting on my boots and getting my sling of ammunition.

The next thing I heard was a shout of "hands up, in there" coming from a landing about 7 or 8 steps down the stairs. Aylward then fired three shots from his Colt automatic, and those on the landing - Captain Banim, the District Inspector of the R.I.C. in Callan, a military officer and a military sergeant - retreated into a little parlour. From a window in this parlour Banim spoke to the military on the lawn outside, telling them to hold tight, that they had the murder gang surrounded and what they would not do with them. I could see Banim from the window overhead as he put out his head and shoulders. The second time he appeared at the parlour window Aylward and I fired at him. One of our shots hit him in the neck and the other hit him in [26].the shoulder. We saw him flop on the window sill. The military in the grounds at the front of the. house then opened a rapid fire through the windows where we were. Quinn was inclined to be a bit excited and Aylward and I had some difficulty in making him keep down. We returned the fire of the military and moving along the upper floor, we fired out through windows in other rooms of the front of the house and this, I believe, gave the military the impression that there was a big force inside. I knew the lay-out of the house and its surroundings intimately, and I also realised that the longer we remained inside the house the less chance we would have when we went out. We moved along to a room from which I knew there was a ladder leading down to the ground floor and to a doorway which led, out on to the courtyard. Before descending the ladder I made a quick survey of the position in the courtyard from an end window. I saw one of our men, whom I mistook to be James McKenna, firing out through a doorway on the left hand side of the courtyard. I could not then see what he was firing at This gave me the impression that McKenna and Paddy Lutteral had got out of the downstairs room to which they had gone to sleep. I also saw a soldier with his rifle leaning on a gate which was opposite to the door by which we proposed to leave. He appeared to be covering one of the upstairs windows. The ladder broke when Aylward was descending it and he fell heavily on the stone floor. Quinn and I picked him up, but he was only stunned and in a minute or two was alright again. The three of us then decided that we would not surrender and we said what we thought [27].would be our last Act of Contrition. Having reloaded, I told Aylward and Quinn to be ready to fire at the soldier at the gate immediately I opened the door. I cannot say if the soldier was hit when they fired but he certainly did not fire after us as we doubled across the courtyard to the doorway where our companion was. It was only then I discovered that it was Paddy Ryan, who had slept in the herd's house, who was there and not McKenna. He was having a little battle of his own with Sergeant Moran of the Callan R.I.C. and a Black and Tan, who, from the cover of a low wall, were firing through the doorway at him. after the four of us had fired at Moran and the Tan, they disappeared behind the. wall and we thought we had got them. The doorway led to a big haggard,, from where we saw a group of soldiers in the herd's yard. They were. looking towards the main building and we fired a few shots at them which made them take cover. We left the haggard by the only route open to us, but we were not yet out of trouble, for in a grove in front of us there was a party of 3 or 4 soldiers and a Black and Tan. These soldiers fired on us and we fired as we ran in their direction. They left their position and moved to and across a low wall. The Black and Tan was still in our line of retreat. He had cover behind a tree in the grove. All four of us fired at him together and at least, three of our shots hit him. He fell dead immediately, and as I passed him by I saw that he had' an appalling head wound. Practically half the top of his head was blown away. His name was Riley.

Quinn picked up the Black and Tan's rifle and brought it with him. Under a cross-fire from the soldiers who had crossed the wall and from some others who were in a breen [28] on our right, we headed on for the wood at Curragh. The military gave chase but, in what I considered, only a faint-hearted kind of way, and an odd shot now and again from us kept them at bay. We crossed the road at Coolagh and reached the house of an old man named Synott who lived alone at Mallardstown. It was a very wet rainy day and Aylward had lost one of his boots. In addition, he was having trouble with one of his legs, which was hurt, but not seriously, when he fell from the ladder. We lit a fire in Synott's house and dried ourselves. Later we sent Synott to Callan to find out all the information he could. On his return he told us that there was feverish military activity in Callan. Lorries of troops were arriving from all directions and heading towards Garryricken; that three of the British forces were dead; that Captain Banim was badly wounded and that a British Army officer was missing.

Auxiliaries from Woodstock who went to Garryricken that day brought blood-hounds with them. They found Aylward's boot and a few articles of clothing belonging to us, and with these the blood-hounds trailed us to Curragh Wood. Here the Auxiliaries stopped and surrounded the wood. They waited, however, until late that evening before entering the wood to search it. This delay on their part gave us a much needed chance, and that evening a publican named Edward Egan from near Dunamaggin came to Synott's for us, bringing some badly needed whiskey with him. As regards Paddy Lutteral and James McKenna, both [29] were captured. As I have said, the door of the room in which they slept was locked. When the firing started they could not get out the window, for it led out to the lawn where the British military were. When eventually they did succeed in breaking down the room door, the place was completely surrounded and they were taken prisoner. They were sentenced to death by courtmartial for levying war against His Majesty's forces in Ireland, but the death sentences were commuted to life imprisonment. There is one other point in connection with this fight at Garryricken to which I would like to refer.. At a subsequent British military inquiry into the affair it was stated, and it appeared in the press at the time, that Constable Riley died from two bullet wounds in the stomach and one in the head, and that the wound in his head was caused by a dum-dum bullet. None of our men was in possession of dum-dum ammunition, and it is my opinion that the bullet which hit him in the head first hit his cap badge and, or perhaps, the wire of his cap, and it was thus he received such a jagged wound. This fight at Garryricken House took place on 12th March, 1921.

Paddy Ryan at that time always wore an Irish Volunteer uniform. In his hurry out of the herd's house that morning he left the tunic behind him. It was, however, secured from falling into the hands of the British forces by Miss Alice Lutteral, who put it on under her own clothes. She also managed to save some field dressings which we had left in her house. That tunic is still in existence. Paddy Ryan brought it with him to the U.S.A., where it is one of his most treasured possessions. [30] That day and for days afterwards, the British forces carried out extensive raids in the area. On one night over ninety lorries were counted on the roads. In addition to those from Kilkenny and Callan, troops were brought to the area from The Curragh Camp, from Clonmel and Waterford. My home at Poulnacapple was raided twice one day and again that night, and my aged uncles and my sisters were interrogated and ill-treated. No dwelling-house was, however burned in reprisal, but this may have, been due to the fact that we had previously warned County Inspector White of the R.I.C. in Kilkenny by letter, that if a dwelling-house was burned in this district by the British forces, we would arrange to have the new house which he had got built at Rosslare for his mother sent up in flames.

Immediately after Garryricken the names and descriptions of Eamon Aylward, Sean Quinn, Paddy Ryan and myself appeared in the Police Gazette (The Hue and Cry) under the heading of "Wanted for murder". This proved that they (the British) were aware of the names of the four men who got away that morning. I should also mention that Seán Quinn, who escaped with us from Garryricken House, was killed by British Forces two months later at Tubrid near Kilmanagh.

Two weeks later Eamon Aylward, Paddy Ryan and a few others went to Mullinahone at night to have another try for "the foxy officer". They learned that he was drinking in O'Brien's public house with a military sergeant and a small party of troops. They also learned that in addition to their ordinary armament of rifles, and revolvers "the foxy officer" and his party had a Lewis machine-gun [31] with them. Aylward and his party went into an unoccupied house opposite to O'Brien's public house, and from there they proposed to attack when the officer and his party came out of the licensed premises. "The foxy officer's" luck was again with him that night. An R.I.C. man named Campbell lived next door to the house in which Aylward, Ryan and their party were.

He was at home on sick leave at the time, and, hearing noise, he went to the back door of what he thought was an empty house to investigate.. He was in uniform. Ryan saw him and, thinking that Campbell was one of a party of R.I.C. surrounding the house, fired at him with a revolver. Another member of the party who also saw him, fired at him with a shotgun and Campbell fell mortally wounded. Aylward, Ryan and their party, under the impression that their position had been discovered

and that they would have to deal with a strong force of military and police, left the house by the back door. They were surprised to find no opposition outside, but as the shots had made their presence known they decided to get out of the town as quickly as possible. This was the last episode in our efforts to get to grips with "the foxy officer". He was transferred from Mullinahone soon afterwards to where I cannot say.

Speaking of Mullinahone reminds me of another incident when James McKenna, Paddy Lutteral and myself went there one night to fire a few shots at the military barracks. We did this not for any special reason other than that we were curious to see what would be the reaction of the garrison. As usual, they replied with rifle and machine-gun fire and sent up Verey lights. The only casualty of their heavy fire was a jennet [32]. which was shot dead. The "Irish Times" a few days later carried a report of this "attack" on Mullinahone, in which it was stated that a Mr. Jennet was killed in the fighting.

After Garryricken I spent some days in the home of Dr. Marnell, Rogerstown House, Kilmoganny, as I was very ill. Eamon Aylward took charge of the A.S.U., which was then joined by the following nine men, members of the battalion: Patrick Downey, James Kelly, Michael Maher, Patrick Tortie, Patrick Kearney, Ned Halley (V/C of the battalion), Nicholas Byrne, Edward Walsh, Michael Gibbs.

I rejoined the A.S.U. early in April at a place called Castlejohn, in the area of the 8th Battalion, South Tipperary Brigade. Meanwhile a man named John Brett of Mullinahone had joined the A.S.U. He was a member of the Tipperary football team that played in Croke Park on Bloody Sunday, and, if I am not mistaken, he remained in Dublin after that game and was a member of the Dublin Brigade. I know he had come from Dublin when he joined our A.S.U. and he had brought some "3 in 1" oil with him. I gave him an automatic revolver to clean as he related his experiences in Dublin to me. Having cleaned the revolver, he reloaded the magazine, put a bullet in the breech and laid it on a small table in the house we were in. A young boy of the house came along, pressed the trigger, and the resultant shot killed Brett. He lived for about 50 minutes after being hit. Fr. Larkin of Windgap was sent for and he arrived in time to attend to his spiritual needs. He was dead when Dr. Marnell arrived from Kilmoganny. [33] In an improvised coffin made by Michael Gibbs (a member of the A.S.U.) we buried him at midnight that night in the cemetery at Lamague. The British forces must have got some inkling of this tragedy, for shortly afterwards they visited local cemeteries in search of newly opened graves. We then disinterred the remains and reburied them in a ploughed field of Maher's of Cussane, where they remained until after the Truce when he was given a public funeral to his native Mullinahone.

The next incident, of note in this area occurred on the 13th April, 1921, and is generally referred to as the Kilbride ambush. As I was then down in the 8th Battalion area arranging for a proposed ambush on the road between Piltown and Fiddown, I cannot give you first-hand information about what happened, but I learned from Eamon Aylward that on that morning large forces of British troops carried out a round-up in which they combed out about 10 square miles of the countryside. Aylward and the A.S.U. managed to keep outside the ring of soldiers. Later in the day when the troops had been withdrawn, Aylward held up the mail car on its way to Callan from Mullinahone, took the mails and then permitted the mail car to proceed. He did this with two objects, viz. to let the police and military know that he was in the vicinity of their fruitless round-up, and secondly to draw out the military again. Two lorries of military did come out, and when they reached Kilbride, about 3 miles from Callan on the Callan-Mullinahone road, they were engaged by the A.S.U., who had split up into 3 parties occupying 3 separate positions. The engagement lasted for about 20 minutes, during which 8 British [34].soldiers were wounded. No road blocks had been laid down, and when reinforcements arrived for the British troops Aylward withdrew the A.S.U. without incurring any casualty.

About 10 days after this incident at Kilbride, the A.S.U. moved down to South County Kilkenny to the 8th Battalion area, where, as I have, already mentioned, I was planning to ambush a patrol of 8 or 9 R.I.C. men who usually (on Saturday mornings) patrolled the mile or so stretch of a road between the villages of Fiddown and Piltown. About 4 a.m. on a Saturday morning, with 10 members of the A.S.U., 21 Volunteers from Piltown and Hugginstown Companies and one man, John Power of the 8th Battalion, South Tipperary Brigade, I occupied a farmhouse - Dooley's of Beech Farm. This house was about midway between both villages. During the morning we cut loop-holes in the walls and in the laurel hedges which separated the road from Dooley's land and from behind which I had decided we would attack the patrol.

About 10 a.m. a Black and Tan, accompanied by a girl, passed along the road. Subsequently I learned that he was going to investigate a robbery of fowl. We did not interfere, with him. We expected, the patrol to come along about 11. a.m. and at that time the Black and Tan returned alone. We took him prisoner and locked him in a room in Dooley's house. We remained in the ambush position all day, and as there was no sign of the patrol coming I decided at 5 p.m. to withdraw towards Mullinbeg and to take the Black and Tan with us. While passing through Bessborough Demesne [35].I noticed the gleam of sunshine on the steel helmets of British soldiers in extended formation about two

or three hundred yards in front of us.. I drew Aylward's attention to this and at the same time the Black and Tan exclaimed "They are there, they are there, and that's all about it". We took cover in a grove, and as we did so the British party opened fire on us with two Lewis guns and rifle grenades. We replied to this fire. with rifle fire.

Then, leaving the grove, we moved in twos and threes to another position along the banks of a nearby stream and, using the banks of the stream for cover, we reached a wood and passing through it we came to the demesne wall. Having crossed the demesne wall and the road, we moved up to a place called Dowling's Hill overlooking Bessborough Demesne. From here I could see the military lorries parked' along the road and armoured cars moving to and fro. The demesne itself was swarming with soldiers, and, as there was no sign of any pursuit, I concluded that the military had lost sight of us and were under the impression that we were still in the demesne. The Black and Tan jumped into the stream when the firing started and we did not see him afterwards. We continued on our way to Mullinbeg, where I dismissed the local Volunteers and then took the A.S.U. on to Kilmoganny. For this intended ambush I made no effort to isolate the barracks³ either at Fiddown or Piltown. There was only a distance of about a mile between both posts, and to cut the telephone or telegraph wires would only arouse suspicion. We depended entirely on the element of surprising the patrol and then making a quick getaway. I have no doubt but that, information of our position at Dooley's farmhouse was given to the police at either [36].Fiddown or Piltown barracks in time to prevent the patrol coming out. The British military came out from three points - from Carrick-on-Suir and Clonmel by road and from Waterford by train to Fiddown railway station. The press reports of this engagement - probably supplied by the British authorities - stated that the I.R.A. were seen to carry their wounded across country. This was untrue for we had no wounded. In fact, I was the only casualty, for on the day previous I had given my right knee a bad wrench or twist and it was causing me a lot of pain and trouble.

For the next two months or so, not only had I to rest my knee but I also had to lie up with a serious stomach ailment. On account of the frequent raids by British forces I had to be moved to various houses in the Kilmoganny district, where Dr. Marnell attended me Meanwhile Eamon Aylward acted as Battalion Commandant and as O/C of the Active Service Unit. During these months the British forces moved only in strong convoys protected by armoured cars. These were much too strong for the A.S.U. to attack, so Aylward gave his attention to an intensive campaign of road blocking and trenching and this, to a large extent, confined the British forces to their main posts. Shortly before the Truce, the Ahenny Volunteer Company (8th Battalion, South Tipperary Brigade) made an effort to stage an ambush, but without success. Immediately afterwards they arrested a man who had come into this area dressed as a tramp and Who they suspected was a spy. He had a dog with him which they shot. They sent for me to interrogate him. I spent two hours [37] questioning him. His sole possessions were a few cards of studs and some boot laces which he was peddling around, and four taws (marbles which boys play with). I could not make out what the significance of this latter item was, except that it might be some form of identification. He told me his name was McHenry, but it could have been anything. I was not satisfied with his answering, and again, not only did he look young to be a tramp, but the skin on his face and hands was fair and soft, not like that of a man accustomed to being out in the open.

I told the Ahenny Company Officers to send him to their brigade headquarters at Rosegreen, that I could not deal with him as I was in the Kilkenny Brigade. That night the prisoner escaped from his guards and made his way to Clonmel military barracks. The military in Clonmel started preparations for a round-up in the Ahenny district. I learned of this from our intelligence officer in Clonmel, so, accompanied by John Power, now an officer in the Army, I crossed the River Suir into the County Waterford, with the intention of remaining there until the round-up was over. As far as I can now recollect, the round-up did not take place, and this may have been due to the fact that the Truce intervened about this time. I remember that I was in Co. Waterford when I received the news of the Truce, and I may add that I considered it very welcome news at the time.

Signed : James Leahy

Date: 31st December 1955