

ROINN COSANTA

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STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S 966

Witness

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Identity

Adjutant Graiguenamanagh Company Irish Vol's. 1916 -
O/C 5th Battalion Kilkenny Brigade, 1920 -

Subject

Graiguenamanagh Company, Irish Volunteers,
Co. Kilkenny, 1916 - 1921

File No. S 2287

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I was born in the year 1895 At Newtown, Graiguenamanagh, Co. Kilkenny. I attended the local National School, i.e., Graiguenamanagh National School, as a pupil until I was fifteen years of age, when I was appointed acting monitor in the school. In this capacity I remained in school for a further three years. When about eighteen years of age I took up a clerical position in the corn and wool stores of the late Mr. James Nowlan, Graiguenamanagh. Graiguenamanagh and the surrounding districts had close associations with the rebellion of 1798 in Wexford, and in my young days many families in the district often told of their predecessors' connection with the Battle of New Ross and other incidents of that era. Again, local tradition had it that the Tithe War of 1832 commenced in Graiguenamanagh when the people collected there and prevented the Tithe officers from collecting the Tithe Dues. It appears also to have been the centre of an active branch of the Fenian organisation around the years of 1865 and 1867. I often heard some of the old men tell of how they were sworn in to the Fenians, of places where they drilled and of where they concealed their pikes. Despite this background of previous years, there was no Company of Irish Volunteers in existence in the district prior to the formation of a Company subsequent to the rising of 1916, nor, as far as I am aware, was there any Circle of the I.R.B. or a branch of Sinn Féin. I am not sure whether a branch of the Gaelic League existed, or not, but one of the Catholic Curates of the parish - Fr. J. [2]-Dunne, C.C. - conducted Irish classes on one or two nights weekly. These classes, which were attended mostly by schoolchildren, were held in the Infants' school and in the local C.Y.M.S. club rooms, but I cannot say if they or the teacher had any connection with the Gaelic League which was then active in other areas. Once a year - in November - a commemoration ceremony to honour the memory of the Manchester Martyrs, Allen, Larkin and O'Brien, was held in the town. This ceremony consisted of a procession headed by the local (i.e., Graiguenamanagh) brass and reed band through the principal streets. The band played Irish-Ireland airs and the people just fell in and walked behind the band. There appears to have been very little in the way of organisation behind this ceremony. I cannot recall any occasion on which speeches were made or an oration delivered in connection with it. It was just something that was carried on from year to year. It was, however, always accompanied by two or three members of the R.I.C. from the local barracks.

Politically, during the six or seven years preceding the Rising of 1916, there was no opposition in the area to the Irish Party then led by the late John E. Redmond. The representative in the British House of Commons for South Kilkenny, which constituency included Graiguenamanagh, was a Mr. Matthew Keating. Mr. Keating was, of course, a member of the Irish Party.

Sometime about the late autumn of 1913 a meeting was held in the market place in Graiguenamanagh at which a Company of the Irish National Volunteers - or, as they were afterwards known, the Redmondite Volunteers - was formed. I cannot now recall who the principal speakers were, but they included some of the leading business men - [3] in the town. For a time the formation of this Company caused a certain amount of stir in the district. They were drilled in foot drill by an ex Sergeant-Major of the British Army of the name of Nolan who resided in Graiguenamanagh, at the time. Some months, perhaps three or four, after their formation the Company was supplied with wooden rifles which they carried on one or two route marches. The sight of men marching armed with wooden rifles led to a great deal of derision from the onlookers and provided the local wits with ideas for jokes. The initial enthusiasm of these Redmondite Volunteers soon waned and by 1915 they had almost ceased to exist. As far as I know, they never had any effective arms. I may, however, be wrong on

this point as, for some undefined reason, I never joined up with them and so had no great interest in their doings.

Shortly after the outbreak of the first world war in 1914, two or three meetings were held in Graiguenamanagh for the purpose of obtaining recruits for the British Army. These meetings were held in the open air in the Market place and were attended by a British Army band. The principal speaker at these meetings was the Chief British Recruiting Officer for Co. Kilkenny. His name was Captain Loftus and he resided at Mount Loftus House, which is situated about six miles from Graiguenamanagh on the road to Goresbridge. On the platform with him were some of the local leading men in the Redmondite Volunteers. The speakers got a very poor hearing at any of the meetings. They - the speakers - were continuously interrupted by members of the audience, and these interruptions subsequently led to court cases when two or three men, whose names were taken by the R.I.C. men, were fined. As regards obtaining recruits for the British Army, the [4]-meetings were a complete failure. My recollection is that only one man offered himself as a recruit, and he was back home in a few days, being medically unfit for service. No further meetings were held in Graiguenamanagh by the British authorities for the purpose of obtaining recruits for their army. I should perhaps mention here a story which went the rounds at the time, and which I believe has some foundation in fact. The brass and reed band, which I have already referred to as taking part in the annual Allen, Larkin and O'Brien commemoration ceremony, had at this time made a name, for itself. Under the conductorship of an Englishman named Cooper, who had found employment in Graiguenamanagh, it won many prizes at brass band competitions in Kilkenny, Carlow, Wexford and the neighbouring counties. It was apparently rated highly, and the story goes that the band received an offer from the British Recruiting authorities that it should enter the British Army as a unit under its own conductor, for the sole purpose of attending and playing at recruiting meetings in Ireland for the British Army. This proposal was turned down by the members of the band. The accuracy of this story can, of course, be verified by any of the surviving members of the band, many of whom I am glad to say are still hale and hearty in Graiguenamanagh. My reason for mentioning these incidents of the British recruiting authorities' efforts to obtain support for their army is to show that even in the years immediately preceding 1916 there was a strong aggressive spirit amongst the people of Graiguenamanagh and the surrounding districts towards the British forces. Hurling and Gaelic football teams were in existence in Graiguenamanagh at this time, and had been for many years before. The members of these teams did not take much, if any, interest in politics. They just carried out their [5] practices and played matches from time to time with teams from other districts. On the formation of the Irish Volunteers in the district, i.e., after 1916, the members of these teams formed the backbone of the Company.

I have already stated that, prior to the Easter Week Rising of 1916 there was, as far as I know, no company of the Irish Volunteers in existence in Graiguenamanagh. The late Dr. Ed. Dundon of Borris, Co. Carlow, whose dispensary district (i.e., the Borris and Marley Dispensary District) adjoined Graiguenamanagh must, however, have been in close association with the Irish Volunteers. From his residence at Borris a party of Volunteers from Kilkenny collected about thirty shotguns on Easter Monday of 1916, and I understand that the arrangement for the collection of these guns had been made prior to the Rising by Cathal Brugha. Dr. Dundon was arrested while on his honeymoon immediately after the Rising in 1916. His arrest was part of the general roundup of Sinn Féin and Irish Volunteer sympathisers at the time. He was very popular in the district and, after his release from prison in August, 1916, he was given a tremendous reception on his homecoming. While I cannot recall any occasion on which he took any active part with the Volunteers after 1916, he continued to be looked upon as one of the local leaders of the movement up to the time of the Truce in 1921.

In June of 1916 a Sinn Féin Club was formed in Graiguenamanagh. The prime mover in the formation of the club was the late Mr. Christopher Ennis - popularly known as Kit Ennis. I joined the Club at its inception and attended the weekly meetings which, were held in a small local hall in High Street. About a month after the formation of the Sinn Féin Club Ennis, at one of the weekly [6]- meetings, announced that he proposed to get in touch with some people, whose names I think he did not mention, with a view to forming a company of Irish Volunteers in Graiguenamanagh. There was no objection and at the very next meeting the Volunteer Company was formed. All the men present gave their names as willing to join. Ennis was elected the first Company Captain and I was elected as Company Adjutant. About seventy men joined the Company at that meeting.. As far as I can now recall, no officers other than Ennis and myself were then elected. The first public appearance of the Company was on the last Sunday of July, 1916, when we "fell in" outside the hall in Graiguenamanagh and marched to the Pattern of St. Mullins. This pattern, or gathering of people, is held each year on the last Sunday of July. St. Mullins is about four and a half miles from Graiguenamanagh, so that there and back we had a march of in or about nine miles.

Kit Ennis was in charge of the Company on that march. At the time of its formation and for some eighteen months or two years afterwards the Company was always referred to as the Graiguenamanagh Volunteers or, for short, the Graigue Volunteers. As far as I am aware, there was no battalion organisation until 1918 and any companies formed in surrounding districts were known by the name of their respective localities (i.e., the Raheendonore Company, The Rower Company, etc.). The only arms available to the Company at this time were four or five shotguns which were the private property of individual members of the Company. Beyond attending the weekly parades and doing some organisation work, there was very little activity during the latter part of 1916 and early 1917. In August, 1917, Mr. W.T. Cosgrave was elected Sinn Féin M.P. for Kilkenny [7] City. In this election, which was a bye-election, he defeated the Irish Party candidate - the late Alderman J. McGuinness of Kilkenny - by a large majority. Shortly after his election and in company with the late Sean Milroy, Sean O'Mahony and some others whose names I cannot now recall, Mr. Cosgrave visited Graiguenamanagh and addressed a large public meeting which was held in a field at Coolroe about a quarter of a mile from the town. All the arrangements for this meeting were carried out by the Volunteer Company and, although the R.I.C. in the town had been reinforced from other stations for that particular day, no attempt was made by them to interfere with the meeting. In fact, as far as I remember they remained in the barracks behind closed doors.

In the spring-time of 1918 the threat of the British Government to enforce conscription in Ireland brought new energy to the Volunteers. Men, who might not have otherwise joined the Company, now came along and attended the parades. Anti-conscription meetings were held and were addressed by speakers from Dublin, and some local speakers too, including some who were prominent in the ranks of the Redmondite Volunteers a few years before. Arrangements for the signing of the anti-conscription pledge in our Company area were made. With three or four other Volunteers I attended outside the church gates in Graiguenamanagh before and after the Masses on Sunday, 21st April, 1918, for the purpose of obtaining signatures to the pledge. This pledge, which was being signed throughout the country on the same day read as follows: "Denying the right of the British Government to enforce compulsory service in this country, we pledge ourselves solemnly, one to another, to resist conscription by the most effective means at [8] our disposal".

There was no difficulty in obtaining signatures. The people came along to the tables and affixed their signatures. Training of the Volunteers was intensified and some additional arms - principally shotguns - were procured by the Company. The strength of the Company at this time was approximately a hundred, and the training consisted of route marches, foot drill,

arms drill and field exercises, i.e., moving across country in extended formation. This training was carried out on week evenings after work and on Sundays after Mass. All police work at the anti-conscription meetings was done by members of the Volunteers. Here I should perhaps mention that the men who joined the Company at the time of the conscription threat remained loyal members up to the time of the Truce in July, 1921.

Despite arrests and men having to go on the run, the Company strength was eighty or ninety men during the period, 1918 to 1921. About August of 1918 the Kilkenny Brigade was organised into Battalions, and our Company was included in the 5th Battalion. The Brigade O/C was Thomas Treacy of Kilkenny, and James O'Hanrahan of Inistioge was elected O/C of the 5th Battalion. Kit Ennis was still O/C of the Graiguenamanagh Company and I was still Company Adjutant.

By the autumn of 1918 it became apparent that the British Government would not attempt to enforce the Conscription Act in Ireland, and our attention now centred chiefly on the coming general election. With some other members of the Company, I made a house-to-house canvas on behalf of the Sinn Féin candidate for our constituency. Eventually no contest took place as, when nomination day [9] arrived, the Sinn Féin candidate was returned unopposed.

Sometime about February or March of 1919 three members of the Graiguenamanagh Volunteer Company were arrested in their homes by R.I.C. from the local barracks. The arrests took place about 5.30 a.m. before the townspeople were astir, and the three men, whose names were Patrick Whelan, Michael Butler and, as far as I can now remember, Denis Byrne, were lodged in a cell in the R.I.C. barracks. A brother of Whelan's went to the church immediately after the arrests and rang the church bell. A large number of people, including members of the Volunteer Company soon gathered and demonstrated in a threatening manner outside the barracks. The door of the barracks was locked and bolted, the shutters on the windows were closed, and the question of rushing the barracks to effect the prisoners' rescue was unfeasible as we had neither grenades or small arms. The R.I.C., however, were faced with their own problem - that of getting the prisoners to Kilkenny prison twelve miles away. They - the R.I.C. - had no transport, and no offer or bribe would entice any of the local people who were in a position to do so to supply or drive a car to Kilkenny with the prisoners. Their problem was, however, solved that evening when a large force of R.I.C. men under the command of a District Inspector arrived in cars from Kilkenny and took the prisoners away. Bottles and stones were flung at the police escort as they moved away, but I do not think that any of them received any serious injury. The three prisoners were shortly afterwards tried on a charge of illegal drilling, sentenced to short terms of imprisonment, which they served, and then returned home to renew their activities with the Volunteer Company. [10]-From the time of this incident until they evacuated the barracks in June, 1920, the R.I.C. became more aggressive towards the Volunteers. They seldom left the barracks, or the vicinity of the barracks, except at night time and, when they did, they moved around the town in groups of three or four. Ennis's house was raided for him, but he managed to evade arrest. An attempt to arrest another prominent member of our Company, James O'Hanrahan - now Colonel O'Hanrahan of the Irish Army - also failed at this time. His place of business, the Anchor Hotel in Graiguenamanagh, was raided in the early hours of the morning, but O'Hanrahan managed to escape by climbing down a drain pipe at the back of the hotel and getting away before the place was completely surrounded. Despite the attentions of the R.I.C., we continued to hold our weekly parades. The Company was at this period well organised but, with the exception of the shotguns already referred to, we had no arms.

During the latter part of 1919 - say from August or early September to Christmas or shortly after it - was busily occupied in collecting subscriptions for the Dáil Éireann Loan. The loan was well supported in the Graiguenamanagh area. I forwarded all the subscriptions which I

received, together with particulars of the subscribers' names and addresses and the amount of his or her subscription to either Paddy or Eamon Fleming at The Swan.

In March, 1920, Hugginstown R.I.C. Barracks was attacked and captured by a party of Volunteers, drawn I think principally from Companies in Kilkenny City. After about half an hour's exchange of fire, the R.I.C. garrison surrendered. They - the R.I.C. - had one casualty, a [11] man killed. Although Hugginstown is only twelve or fourteen miles from Graiguenamanagh, our Company took no part in this attack; in fact, we knew nothing about it until the day after the attack. I would like to mention here that from the time our Company was formed in 1916 until the end of 1920 we were like an isolated outpost left to act and carry on as best we could. There were few, if any, Battalion Council meetings and we never had, to my knowledge, a visit from a Brigade or G.H.Q. officer during those years. We carried on our own, and rarely saw or heard from any of the officers outside our own Company area.

The first result of the successful attack on Hugginstown R.I.C. Barracks was that the R.I.C. were withdrawn from Inistioge. The village of Inistioge is situated about six miles from Graiguenamanagh and about the same distance from Hugginstown. On the 4th April, 1920, Ennis and myself took a party of twenty-eight or thirty men from our Company to Inistioge and destroyed the empty barracks there. This was done to prevent its re-occupation by enemy forces at a later date. About the end of April or early in May the R.I.C. evacuated a barracks about four miles from Graiguenamanagh at a village called The Rower. On the 16th May, with about the same party of men, Ennis and I went to The Rower and demolished the R.I.C. barracks there. At both Inistioge and The Rower we received assistance from local Volunteers. In June, 1920, the R.I.C. evacuated Graiguenamanagh. The barracks there was a large strong stone building situated in the centre of the main street. As it was flanked on one side by a bakery and bread shop, and on the other side by a chemist's shop, we could not destroy it by fire without grave risk to the houses on either side. Accordingly, I arranged for a full [12] Muster of the Company and instructed them to bring along all the pickaxes, shovels, sledge-hammers, etc., they could lay hands on. Scouts were placed at suitable points to give warning of the approach of any enemy forces. We forced an entry into the barracks and proceeded to demolish the roof and walls. We Razed walls to the level of the ground floor windows, broke up the doors, door jambs, windows, window sashes and floors, and piled up the rubble on the floor space which was enclosed by the remains of the four outside walls. This job was carried out in broad daylight on a summer's evening. The barracks remained in this condition until it was rebuilt by the Irish Government in 1924 for the use of the *Gárda Síochána*. On the same evening as we demolished the barracks, we destroyed books and papers which were kept in the Courthouse, Graiguenamanagh. These books and papers included court and income tax records.

A party of five or six members of the Volunteer Company were around this time selected and detailed to carry out police duties in the town. They were known as the Republican Police, and their duties included that of ensuring that the licensing laws were obeyed and that the public houses closed at the normal time. At the same time a Sinn Féin court was set up to deal with any cases brought by the Republican Police. I was a member of this court. On the whole, the people co-operated with the Republican Police, and we were troubled with very few petty or criminal cases. The court and the Republican Police continued to function up to the time of the outbreak of the Civil War in 1922.

I should have mentioned earlier that a short time - at the most a month or two - before the R.I.C. evacuated [13] Graiguenamanagh, Ennis and I arrested a man named Ryan, who was suspected of spying for the R.I.C. This man was a stranger who had come to live in Bray's Lane, Graiguenamanagh, some time before. He was no relation of the James Ryan who later became Company Captain when Kit Ennis went on the run. He spent most of his time in

company with the R.I.C. men and often frequented the barracks. It was apparent to the Company officers that the R.I.C. were being tipped off from time to time, and naturally suspicion fell on this man. The matter was discussed by the Company officers and, while no definite charge of spying could be brought against him, it was considered that he was a danger to the movement, and it was decided to give him twenty-four hours to clear out of the country. With three other Volunteers, Ennis and I arrested him at his home and took him in a motor car to a point about four miles from the town. There we told him that he was getting twenty-four hours to clear out of the country and left him to his fate, I cannot say whether he actually left Ireland or not, but he never came back to Graiguenamanagh.

By July of 1920 all the men in Graiguenamanagh and district who held appointments as Justices of the Peace or "J.P.'s", as they were familiarly known, with the exception of one, had tendered their resignations to the British Government. The exception was an ex British Army officer, named Captain Howlett, who lived at The Rower, about four miles from Graiguenamanagh. Although approached on the subject by some members of the Rower Volunteer Company, he steadfastly refused to resign. Towards the end of August, 1920, a party of three or four Volunteers from the Graiguenamanagh Company visited him at his home. He again refused to tender his resignation, so he was placed under [14] arrest, blindfolded and taken away in a waiting motor car. The car was driven around the roads for some time and eventually arrived at a vacant house in a place called Ballyheagan, about a mile and a half from Graiguenamanagh, on the Co. Carlow road from Graiguenamanagh to Borris, where Ennis and I were awaiting its arrival. Howlett had no idea of our names, or of where he was held a prisoner.

On the morning after his arrest we gave him a copy of the 'Tipperary Star' to read. This appeared to convince him that he was somewhere in Tipperary. A Sinn Féin court, presided over by Mr. James Lennon, T.D. for South Carlow, was held in the house in which he was held prisoner to try him. When brought before the court, Howlett intimated his intention to resign. This he did, and a few days later we again blindfolded him and took him in the motor car to a point about two miles from his home where we released him. We had no further trouble with him. I cannot now say whether he continued to reside at The Rower or whether he left the country after his release. About July of 1920 a party of about fifty members of the Devonshire Regiment under the command of an officer arrived in Graiguenamanagh. They occupied the courthouse and a large private house in Chapel Street. Thus they held two posts in the town, and the distance from one post to another, that is, from the Courthouse to the house in Chapel Street, would be roughly 150 yards. A British ex soldier, named Kenny, accompanied the "Devons" whenever they went raiding. He pointed out the local creamery to them. The manager of the creamery - Mr. Jerry Ryan - was an active Volunteer. He managed, however, to get away before the Devons surrounded the creamery. Kenny next showed the raiding party my father's house in which I resided at the time. I was not at home when the Devons called and, from [15] this until after the Truce in 1921, I never slept at home and rarely visited the house in day time. Several raids were made on my home by parties of the Devonshire regiment and, later, by Auxiliaries from Woodstock, but I managed to evade arrest. To revert, however, to Kenny. He continued to reside with the Devonshires and to accompany them on their raids. As the Devonshires did not know the district, nor the names of the people of the town, they were absolutely powerless without him.

One morning towards the end of August, 1920, I was told that Kenny was seen earlier that morning on the road between Graiguenamanagh and Thomastown. He was alone, and was walking towards Thomastown. I sent a party of three or four Volunteers in a motor car to give chase and to arrest him when found. No sign of Kenny was seen on the road, but eventually he was located at the railway station in Thomastown where he was waiting for a train. He was arrested and brought back to Graiguenamanagh. On searching him, we found

amongst his possessions a ticket to Canada. He was also in possession of a good sum of money. The money and the ticket to Canada were apparently the award from the British Government for his services to the Devonshire regiment in Graiguenamanagh. We placed him with a guard of two Volunteers in a small house or hut on the banks of the River Barrow at Ballyogan, about a quarter of a mile from Graiguenamanagh on The Rower side of the river. This house or hut was commonly known as Blanchfield's Eel House, having been built by William Blanchfield, the proprietor of the land on which it stood, for the purpose of giving shelter to himself or his employees when engaged fishing for eels on a neighbouring weir. It was essential to deal with Kenny without delay. [16] He was only recently discharged from the British Army, he knew the country around Graiguenamanagh intimately and, if he succeeded in escaping, it was evident that he would get all the assistance and protection he required from his friends in the Devonshire regiment. We tried him by court martial. He had no defence to offer and was sentenced to be executed. It was decided to let him have the consolation of the Catholic Church before his execution. Christy (Kit) Ennis, the Company Captain, and James Ryan called to the Catholic Curate's house in Graiguenamanagh and told Fr. Gerry, C.C., that they wished him to come along with them to attend a spy who was about to be executed. Fr. Gorry inquired to know who the spy was and if he was a native of the district. On being told, he said he would come immediately. Fr. Gerry attended to Kenny in the eel house and then left, wishing us goodnight.

As shots would be heard at the posts occupied by the Devonshires, it was decided to execute Kenny by drowning. We gagged and blindfolded him and, having bound his arms and legs, we dropped him into the River Barrow at a point just a few yards from the eel house. The water at this point would be eight or ten feet deep and, as an additional precaution, we tied a 56-lb. weight to his body before dropping him into the river. As far as I can now recollect, the date of Kenny's execution was August 31st, 1920. About two months later his decomposed body was washed ashore about three miles further down the river and, with two other Volunteers, James Ryan and James Mackey, I had the gruesome task of again tying weights and heavy stones to the body and dropping it into the river for the second time. The fact that the body was washed ashore must have come to the ears of the Auxiliaries then stationed at Woodstock House, Innistioge, for a party of [17] them visited the village of The Rower and questioned a number of people about the disposal of Kenny's body, but were given no information. The remaining members of Kenny's family - including his father who was a blind man - were taken away from Graiguenamanagh by a party of British forces. Where they were taken to, I do not know but we had no further trouble from spies in the area.

Immediately after the execution of Kenny, frequent raids were made by the Devonshire regiment to arrest Ennis, the Company Captain. He succeeded in evading arrest and went on the run. As he had to leave the district, James Ryan, later Detective Officer in the Garda Siochana, was elected to replace him as Company Captain.

In September, 1920, Woodstock House, Innistioge, was occupied by a party of the Auxiliary division of the R.I.C. Woodstock House at that time - it has since been destroyed - was a large mansion house situated in the centre of a large wooded demesne. It was the residence of a family named Tighe, but at the time it was taken over by the Auxiliaries the Tighe family were living in England, the house, gardens and grounds being under the care of a staff of servants. The demesne was bounded on the east or south-eastern side by the River Nore and on the remaining sides by a high stone wall. The strength of the Auxiliary garrison in Woodstock House was believed to be about thirty men initially, but this strength was increased as time went on to about seventy or eighty Auxiliaries. Sometime in October, 1920, I learned that the Brigade Headquarters in Kilkenny were preparing plans, or had prepared plans for an attack on Woodstock House. I got this information from, I think, O'Hanrahan, the

Battalion 0/C, together with an instruction that the Graiguenamanagh Company with all available arms and ammunition should be held in [18] readiness for the proposed attack.

Early in November a G.H.Q. officer - Ernie O'Malley - arrived in Kilkenny to take charge of the intended attack on Woodstock House. He - O'Malley - was captured by the Auxiliaries in a raid on O'Hanrahan's house (i.e., O'Hanrahan, the Battalion O/C's house). O'Hanrahan and a Volunteer by the name of Holland, who was acting as a guide for O'Malley, were arrested in the same raid. I understand that a copy of the plans for the attack on Woodstock House and a list of the names and addresses of the Kilkenny Brigade officers were also captured by the Auxiliaries in this raid. Thomas Treacy, the Brigade O/C, was also a prisoner at this time. I think he had been captured in Kilkenny a few days before O'Malley's arrival. For the time being at any rate, all thoughts of capturing Woodstock House were off. About two weeks after the arrest of O'Malley and O'Hanrahan, I attended a Battalion Council meeting of the 5th Battalion. This meeting was held in a field at Coolroe, near Graiguenamanagh. At this Council meeting I was elected as O'Hanrahan's successor, i.e., I was elected 0/C of the Battalion. The other Battalion officers at this time were as follows:-

Vice Commandant - Patrick White, Inistioge.

Adjutant - Patrick Nixon, Inistioge.

Quartermaster - William Duggan, The Quay, Graiguenamanagh.

Intelligence Officer - Thomas Ryan, Chapel Street, Graiguenamanagh.

My first action after election as Battalion 0/C was to visit all the Companies in the Battalion area. I Reorganised the Battalion on the following lines:-

-19-

A. Company - Graiguenamanagh and district -0/C, James Ryan.

B. Company - Raheendonore and district -0/C, John Lanigan.

C. Company - The Rower and district -0/C, Richard O'Keeffe.

D. Company - Thomastown and district -0/C, John Bookle.

E. Company - Inistioge and district -0/C, Edward Sutton.

The Company 0/Cs were elected at Company meetings which I attended. I entrusted Michael O'Carroll of A. Company with what funds were available in the Battalion and sent him to Dublin to get in touch with the Quartermaster General's Department to purchase what arms and ammunition he could. He succeeded in purchasing nine Lee Enfield rifles and a supply of .303 ammunition. These rifles and the ammunition were conveyed from Dublin to Graiguenamanagh by friendly boatmen who were employed on one of the Grand Canal Company's barges. I next formed and took charge of a small Battalion Flying Column of selected men, drawn principally from A. Company. This Column was subsequently strengthened by men from other Battalions. - See Appendix A. The Column was billeted in farmers' houses in the townlands of Knockeen, Ballyheagan and Coolyhune on the Co. Carlow side of the River Barrow, and about a mile or a mile and a half from Graiguenamanagh. In addition to the nine rifles which O'Carroll had obtained in Dublin, the Column was also in possession of three rifles, six or [20] seven shotguns and a few revolvers. I had a German Mauser automatic pistol (Peter The Painter) which I obtained, together with a supply of ammunition, from James Mackey, The Rower.

The Column was formed just before Christmas of 1920 in the month of December. During this month I attended a Brigade Council meeting in Kilkenny at which the late George O'Dwyer (afterwards Chief Superintendent O'Dwyer of the Gárda Síochána) was elected Brigade 0/C. I reported the position in my Battalion area and mentioned, of course, the formation of the Battalion Flying Column. The Brigade Council approved my action in forming the Column and promised support by sending men from some of the other Battalions to join the Column. I made it quite clear that there was no use in sending men to report to the

Column unless they were well equipped and in possession of a rifle and a fairly good supply of ammunition.

During the next two months - that would be in January and February, 1921 - eight or ten Volunteers from other Battalions in the Brigade reported for duty with the Column. All these men were armed with rifles and each carried a bandolier containing anything from fifteen to twenty rounds of .303 ammunition. I divided the Column into four sections - each section under a section commander. The section commanders were responsible for the training of the Column, taking it in their turns to instruct the men in physical culture, field exercises, foot drill and musketry.

On Sundays members of A. Company came out from Graiguenamanagh to take part in the training with the members of the Column. Early in December, 1920, the platoon of the Devonshire Regiment evacuated Graiguenamanagh. Patrols [21] of the Auxiliaries from Woodstock House now visited Graiguenamanagh at irregular intervals. These patrols consisted as a rule of about thirty men. They were armed with rifles and revolvers, and travelled in three or more lorry loads. In addition to his rifle and revolver, each Auxiliary carried a few Mills hand grenades attached to his belt, and one or two Lewis machine guns were carried in each tender. These patrols usually arrived in Graiguenamanagh via the Thomastown road. With the intention of attacking one of these patrols, I selected an ambush position at a place called Oldgrange, about half a mile from Graiguenamanagh on the road to Thomastown. At the point selected the road takes a sharp turn to the right, then continues on straight for about 350 or 400 yards, and then takes a fairly sharp turn to the left before entering the town of Graiguenamanagh. The idea was for the main body of the Column to attack the patrol from high ground overlooking the straight portion of the road and for two small parties, placed under cover at the right and left turns of the road, to enfilade the enemy's positions after the main attack had begun. On a number of occasions we trenched the road near the Graiguenamanagh end of the ambush position and the Column took up its positions, but on none of these occasions did the expected enemy force arrive. We generally remained in the ambush position for about two days on each of these occasions.

About this time James Ryan, the O/C of A. Company, was captured by Auxiliaries on one of their visits to Graiguenamanagh. His position as O/C of the Company was filled by the election of Michael O'Carroll whom I have already mentioned in connection with the purchase of the rifles from G.H.Q. [22] Early in February, 1921, and after consultations with officers of the 4th Battalion, I moved the Column to a position near the village of Paulstown. Here we felled trees across the road between Paulstown and Flagmount, and occupied an ambush position from which we could ambush the British forces if they came along to clear the felled trees. For two days and two nights we remained in the ambush position, but no British forces came along. I decided that it would be dangerous to risk the Column by remaining any longer near the ambush position, so after further consultations with the 4th Battalion officers, I withdrew the Column to Graiguenamanagh where it occupied its usual billeting positions. I subsequently learned that we were only about three hours left the ambush position when a party of British soldiers arrived in lorries and cleared the fallen trees. One night in February or March of 1921, accompanied by two members of the Company named James McNamara and, as far as I remember, Robert Doyle, I visited the village of Goresbridge which was in the 4th Battalion area. I had received information that some members of the R.I.C. in Goresbridge were in the habit of leaving the barracks after dark and going to some of the licensed houses for a few drinks. Armed with shotguns, we entered the village sometime about 9 p.m. We entered all the licensed houses in the village, but found no R.I.C. men in any of them. We then went in the direction of the barracks and, having encountered no R.I.C. men, we fired a few shots each at the windows of the barracks from about twenty yards range. We left the village immediately after firing the shots at the

barracks and returned to the Column in Graiguenamanagh without further incident. The police in the barracks did [23] not reply to our fire, nor did they come out to investigate the Shooting.

Early in April, 1921, George O'Dwyer, the Brigade O/C, visited the Column. He told me that he had prepared plans for an attack on Bagenalstown (now Muine Bheag) R.I.C. Barracks and that, in addition to the Flying Column, the services of all available men of A. Company would be required. What his plans for the actual attack were, I cannot now say, nor do I know what arrangement, if any, he had made with the Carlow Brigade in whose area Bagenalstown was situated. The strength of the garrison in Bagenalstown Barracks at that time would, I am sure, have been in or about thirty men comprised of R.I.C. men, Auxiliaries and Black and Tans. The date fixed for the attack was I think April 15th, 1921. It was a Saturday night. Shortly after dark on that night I arrived with the Column and a party of Volunteers from A. Company at a place called Slyguff, about three-quarters of a mile from Bagenalstown.

We had marched from Graiguenamanagh approximately twelve miles away. Here I contacted the Brigade O/C (George O'Dwyer) and, having halted the main party O'Dwyer and I proceeded along a footpath (commonly known as the tow line) beside the River Barrow in the direction of Bagenalstown. At the Royal Oak bridge we climbed on to the roadway about four hundred yards from the town. To our amazement, the first thing we saw was an armoured car without lights and manned by British soldiers, patrolling slowly and silently in the vicinity of the bridge. We immediately got back down on to the footway beside the river. Shortly after, O'Dwyer contacted some scouts, (members I think of the 3rd Battalion) who had entered the town earlier. The scouts reported that all the Streets in the town were being patrolled by British soldiers, accompanied by two or three armoured cars. The troops and armoured cars had arrived [21] late that evening from Carlow and the Curragh. Apparently no plans had been made to block the roads leading to the town or, if they had, they were timed to coincide with the time of the attack on the barracks. It was now plain to be seen that the enemy were well aware of our intention to attack the barracks that night and any attempt on our part to enter the town would have been sheer madness. O'Dwyer decided to call off the attack. I rejoined the Column and Volunteer party where they were resting at Slyguff. We fell in and the Column retired to the village of Ballymurphy, about eleven miles away. We attended Mass in Ballymurphy on the following morning (Sunday morning). The party of Volunteers from A. Company returned to their homes on the Saturday night. The Column occupied billets in Ballymurphy where we remained for a few days before returning to the Graiguenamanagh district.

Towards the end of April the Column moved into the 3rd Battalion area where the Brigade O/C had selected an ambush position at Uskerty Wood. To reach Uskerty we had march a distance of about twenty-five miles. Most of this march had to be done across country so as to avoid towns which were held by enemy forces. On the morning of May 2nd, 1921, at about 9 a.m. we occupied the ambush position, which was in the wood at Uskerty and which overlooked part of the road leading from Coon to Castlecomer. About two hours later three lorries of R.I.C. and Black and Tans came along the road going in the direction of Castlecomer. We immediately opened fire at about one hundred yards range. The lorries stopped, the police dismounted, took cover at the side of the road and behind the lorries, and proceeded to reply to our fire with rifles and machine guns. They also fired some rifle grenades which fell to the rear of -25- our positions and set fire to the undergrowth in the wood which at this time was very dry. After about ten or fifteen minutes exchange of fire, we discovered that the lorries contained a number of prisoners and hostages and, so as not to expose the prisoners and hostages to further danger, O'Dwyer and I decided to call off the attack. We accordingly withdrew the Column from the ambush position and retired towards the village of Paulstown, about eight miles away. The police made no attempt to pursue us.

Shortly after the firing ceased, they remounted the lorries and continued on their way towards Castlecomer. The strength of our party on this occasion was twenty men and we suffered no casualty. The enemy had one man seriously wounded and their strength would have been about double ours. Amongst the prisoners in the lorries was James Comerford, Captain of F. Company of the 3rd Battalion, who was arrested that morning when on his way to join our party in the ambush position. He later emigrated to America, became a District Attorney in New York and is now a Judge in the Courts of that city.

After the attack on the police at Uskerty Wood, British forces carried out a large-scale round-up in an effort to surround the Column. The round-up lasted for a few days, but we succeeded in keeping on the outside of the British cordons and returned safely to our billeting places near Graiguenamanagh.

About the end of May 1921, O'Dwyer, the Brigade O/C, again visited the Column, and on this occasion he selected an ambush position at a place called Baltiglea, about two and a half miles from Graiguenamanagh on the Co. Kilkenny road from Graiguenamanagh to Borris, and near a point where a road leading to Goresbridge and Gowran [26] branches off the main road. His idea was to carry out a feint attack on the barracks at Gowran which would draw the Auxiliaries from Woodstock, and to ambush the Auxiliaries at Baltiglea on their way to the assistance of their comrades in Gowran. On the appointed night the Column occupied the ambush position, trees were felled across the road to block the way of the lorries, the feint attack on Gowran R.I.C. barracks was carried out by members of the 4th Battalion, but the Auxiliaries from Woodstock did not come out. We remained in the ambush position until late the following afternoon, but no enemy forces arrived. I should like to mention here that this was only one of numerous occasions on which we lay in ambush in various places for the Auxiliaries stationed in Woodstock, but without result. They never once came along when we were waiting for them, and on several occasions we had the annoying experience of learning that they passed by some of our ambush positions a day or two after we vacated them. In this connection I would like to mention that our intelligence system depended mainly on the observation of individual Volunteers in various parts of the Battalion area. There were no telephone exchanges where messages could be tapped, and the telegraph service was rarely in use, as we had cut the wires and cut down a number of telegraph poles. We had no friendly contacts amongst the enemy forces in any of the enemy posts in our area.

Once, when returning alone from a visit to my home, I walked straight into a cycle patrol of twelve R.I.C. men at a turn in a narrow laneway called Killeen Lane. I was armed at the time with a Peter The Painter which I carried in a holster underneath my coat. Taken completely by surprise I could do nothing but continue to walk nonchalantly towards them. To my amazement, they made [27] no effort to stop me or to ask me any questions. They actually moved their bicycles in nearer to the side of the lane so as to permit me more room to pass. I recognised one of the policemen as an R.I.C. man who was stationed in Graiguenamanagh before it was evacuated, and I am sure he must have recognised me too.

About the middle of June, 1921, I again moved the Column northwards to the 3rd Battalion area. This time O'Dwyer (the Brigade O/C) had selected an ambush position at a place called Coolbawn near the town of Castlecomer and on the road between Castlecomer and Athy. His intention was to ambush a party of British military which frequently escorted consignments of gelignite from Castlecomer military barracks to Wolfhill coal mines. This was my first visit to this particular district, and the lay of the countryside was altogether unfamiliar to me as it was to most members of the Column. Here too we were to suffer our first serious casualties. During the period of darkness on the night of June 17th, or early morning of June 18th, we were brought into the ambush position. With Patrick Quinn, James Doyle, Michael O'Hanrahan, Nicholas Mullins and John Hartley - all member of the Column - I was given a position on rising ground overlooking the road about a quarter of a mile to the left of the main

ambushing party. George O'Dwyer, the Brigade O/C, took complete charge of the operation as he was a native of Castlecomer district and knew this part of the country intimately. His only instructions to my party that I can recollect were that the signal to open fire on the convoy would be one loud blast on his whistle and that the signal to retire would be two blasts of the whistle. Quinn, Doyle, O'Hanrahan, Mullins and Hartley were armed with Lee Enfield rifles. I had my German Mauser automatic [28] pistol (i.e., my Peter The Painter.).

Early in the morning, sometime perhaps about 11 a.m., Mullins, Hartley and myself were partaking of some food, bread and a bottle of milk which we were passing around from one to another, when suddenly a volley of fire rang out from a party of British troops who had silently occupied the dried up bed of a stream about 250 yards to our rear. John Hartley was killed by this first volley. Quinn, Doyle, O'Hanrahan, Mullins and myself took cover immediately and for some time returned the fire of the British troops. It soon became apparent to us that we were being fired on from both our flanks as well as from the bed of the stream. There appeared to be no hope of contacting the main body of the Column, and our only chance of getting away was to get on to the road, cross it and seek cover in a high meadow field which we could see across the road.

As I have already mentioned, the locality was altogether unfamiliar to us. Still under fire, we managed to reach the road safely. Quinn, Hanrahan and myself succeeded in crossing it and got into the meadow field. We crawled through the meadow field, using the ditches as far as possible for cover, crawled through three or four other fields and eventually got away. That evening we called to a farmers house (Brennan's of Ballyouskill) where we were hospitably received and given food and shelter. James Doyle and Nicholas Mullins attempted the crossing of the road a few yards to our right. Both were seriously wounded and captured by the British forces. Mullins died from his wounds that evening in Castlecomer Barracks. It was in Brennan's house on the night of the ambush that I learned of their fate. Until then I was [29] sure they had got across the road and made their escape through some of the other fields. Doyle was subsequently tried by a British court martial and was sentenced to death. He was under sentence of death when the Truce intervened the following month.

Next day Father McNamara called for us with a pony and trap and brought us to a place called The Lotts, near the Leix border, to which the Brigade O/C, with the main body of the Column, had retired from Coolbawn the previous day. Here I was to learn that, some time before the attack on my party, the Brigade O/C became aware that our position had become known to the enemy and that British forces were approaching cross-country from Kilkenny and Castlecomer. He decided to withdraw the Column from the ambush position but, through some hitch in the arrangements, the decision to retire was not conveyed to my party.

After a few days' rest at The Lotts, the Column returned to its usual billeting grounds near Graiguenamanagh. Here again we managed to keep on the outside of another big British round-up in which some thousands of British troops were employed. One morning some hundreds of lorries dropped troops at various points along all the roads around Graiguenamanagh, thus surrounding an area of about thirty square miles. The troops lined up in extended order along the roads and, after linking up at various points, they proceeded to converge cross-country on the town. On entering the fields, the troops would run for a short distance, then lie down for a few minutes, up and run another few yards, and then down again. They kept this up as far as possible until eventually they closed in on the town where late that evening they mounted their lorries and [30] drove away again. This was the last big effort on the part of the British to capture the Column. It was a complete failure as not even one member of the Column was arrested. At one period during the round-up, in company with a few members of the Column I watched from a place called Coolyhune Hill just a few hundred yards to their rear, the antics of the troops as they dismounted from their lorries and crossed the fields.

The only incident of note which took place in my Battalion area between the time of the round-up which I have just referred to and the date of the Truce on July 11th, 1921, was the capture of two Auxiliaries near the village of The Rower, by members of C. Company under James Mackey. Both Auxiliaries were in civilian clothes and, at the time of their capture, they were found measuring the road. Apparently they were engaged on intelligence work under the guise of County Council engineers. They were both armed. After being captured and disarmed, both prisoners made a dash for freedom. One of them was shot dead, but the other succeeded in making his getaway. That evening a large force of Auxiliaries from Woodstock visited the village of The Rower, questioned and ill-treated a number of the residents and, before leaving, set fire to some houses in the village, including the licensed premises of Mr. Tom Butler.

I first learned of the arrangement for the signing of the Truce and of the cease fire order which came into operation at twelve noon on July 11th, 1921, through the public press. After the cease fire the members of the Column returned to their homes and many of them resumed their normal vocations. I was, however, fully occupied with [31] the work of the Battalion. Organisation and training had to be kept up in case of a breakdown in the negotiations which were taking place with the British Government. The work of the Sinn Féin courts and of the Republican police took up a good deal of my time. I also assisted in the arrangements for the escape and getting away of a large number of prisoners from Kilkenny prison. This escape took place during the Truce period. It was, as far as I can recollect, in October, 1921. Amongst those who escaped were the Rev. Fr. Delahunty, C.C., and James O'Hanrahan - now Colonel James O'Hanrahan, Collins Barracks, Cork.

I have prepared a list of the names of the members of the Column. It will be found attached to this statement (Appendix A.).

In conclusion, I would like to pay tribute to the good people of Graiguenamanagh and district who assisted us and who fed and billeted the Column at great expense and inconvenience to themselves. In a special way I would like to mention Mrs. Boland of Tinnehinch, Keatings of Ballyheagan, Ryans of Knockeen and Gahans of Coolyhune. Edward Galivan of Carriglade, on whose farm we had a dump or secure hiding place for the arms of the Column, was also one of our best and loyalist friends. Though possessed of little of this world's goods, these people welcomed us at all hours of the day and night, and provided food and shelter for us, knowing full well that, if we were captured in their houses, their homes and -32- belongings would, in all probability, have been destroyed by the British forces.

Signed: John Walsh
July 1st 1954

APPENDIX A.

Names of Members of Flying Column.

1920 and 1921.

John Walsh, Newtown, Graiguenamanagh, O/C of Column.
James Doyle, Tinnehinch. (Wounded and taken prisoner at Coolbawn.)
Christopher (Christo.) Doyle, Tinnehinch.
James Ryan, Knockeen, Captain of A. Company, 5th Battalion.
Michael O'Carroll, Newtown, Graiguenamanagh, Captain of A. Company, 5th Battalion.
Patrick Quinn, Graiguenamanagh.
Nicholas Mullins, Thomastown. (Killed at Coolbawn).
John Hartley, Glenmore. (Killed at Coolbawn).
James J. Delaney (Matty), Kilkenny, (now Colonel J. Delaney, Irish Army).
Michael O'Hanrahan, Innistioge.
Martin Bates, The Rower.
John Keane, Kilkenny.
Michael McSweeney, Kilkenny.
Kiernan Cody, Kilkenny.
Michael Ruth, Kilkenny.
Kiernan Tobin, Kilkenny.
Edward Holland, Tullaroan.
John Wall, Threecastles.
Robert Doyle, Ballymurphy.
James Purcell, Garryduff, Paulstown.