

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MÍLEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 559

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 559

Witness

James J. Smyth,
Income Tax Collector,
Clones,
Co. Monaghan.

Identity.

Battalion Adjutant,
Lisnaskea Battalion, Leitrim Brigade, 1920-1921.

Subject.

The I.R.A., Co. Fermanagh,
1920-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

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Brief History of the I.R.A. in Fermanagh.

The Volunteer movement during the time of the "Old Irish Party" was very strong. After the split only one Company remained actively in support of the late P.H. Pearse. That was a Company in the Enniskillen area that drew most of its members from the western end of the town, Mullylogan and Ashwoods Districts, plus a number from the town itself. Mr. Fras. O'Duffy, Ministry of Education, Marlborough Street, Dublin, was in charge of this Company and was in direct touch with H.Q. in Dublin.

The Rising in 1916 gave new life to this Company. With the spread of Sinn Féin came the strengthening of the Volunteer movement and in 1917 we find Companies in Tempo, Arney, and Cavanacross. Mr. O'Duffy was placed in charge of these. Other Companies began to appear in more or less disconnected manner.

During the Autumn of 1918, Mr. O'Duffy left Enniskillen. Mr. Hugh McManus, presently residing at the Customs House, Dungarvan, Waterford, then took charge. He continued the work of organising throughout the county. He was assisted by a small number of active Volunteers in the different areas. About the spring of 1918 there were Companies in Enniskillen, Tempo, Arney, Cavanacross, Irvinestown, Belcoo, Wattlebridge and Lisnaskea. It was about this time also that the late Frank Carney, T.D., became connected with the Movement, firstly in the capacity as a Drill Instructor. Mr. Carney soon had the Companies throughout the county under proper discipline and doing rifle and open formation drill. About June 1918

Mr. McManus asked H.Q. to relieve him of his position as he had not sufficient time at his disposal to cope with the increasing responsibility. Mr. Patrick Nulty succeeded him. Mr. Nulty, who is attached to the Department of Posts and Telegraphs, Dublin, left Enniskillen at the end of 1918 and was succeeded by the late Comdt. Frank Carney, T.D.

At this period occasional raids for arms were being made by the Volunteers. Police Barracks were being vacated. (Time, early in 1920).

It was during the winter of 1919/20 that there was a general defining of areas. The Wattlebridge, Roslea end of the county was transferred to Monaghan, Lisnaskea, Killyrover area was placed under Mr. Jas. Reilly, Tempo, Coa, Cavanacross area under the late Phil Breen, Irvinestown Ederney area under Mr. S.B. McManus, Belleek, Monea, Derrygonnelly, Toora, Rosinuremore, Boho area under Mr. Sean Carty, Arney, Derrylin, Kinawley and Enniskillen area under Mr. James McManus.

Mr. Carney was Officer in Charge of the whole area. In Enniskillen he gathered around him a number of helpers. These boys who often held no rank were always in the confidence of Mr. Carney.

Early in 1920 plans were being laid to burn vacated Police Barracks and Income Tax offices. Each Batt. area had its work set out for them. Before these plans matured Mr. Carney was arrested in company with Messrs. H. McManus, Greg Cassidy and some others. Mr. John Maguire, C.E., Belcoo, then took over charge during the Comdt's absence. Mr. Sean Sheehan, presently residing at 1, Grove Avenue, Blackrock, Dublin, became actively connected with the Movement before Mr. Carney's arrest and he helped with the others in completing the plans for the burnings

throughout the county.

About Easter 1920, Letterbreen, Arney and Trillick Barracks were burned and Income Tax Records were destroyed at Lisbellaw and Ballinamallard. In May 1920 the Enniskillen Income Tax office was burned.

After Mr. Carney's release plans were laid for further activities. Raids for arms were an every night occurrence. In the Tempo Batt. area these raids were made exhaustice and in Enniskillen every possible means were used to procure arms, such as buying them off the Military and stealing them from the same source.

Derrylin Courthouse and Barracks were burned in June 1920. Also in this month an unsuccessful attempt was made to burn Lisbellaw Courthouse and Barracks - while preparations were being made an outpost fired on an onlooker and in a minute the Village was in arms. The Volunteers under the late Comdt. Carney, Sean Sheehan and the late Phil Breen, had their work cut out to carry out a successful retreat. This they did with only one casualty. Volunteer M. Goodwin was seriously wounded. Several of the inhabitants of the Village were wounded. This Village was 99% hostile.

Plans for the capture of several Barracks were at this time being formulated. Those for the capture of Belleek were the first to mature. The Belleek Volunteers, under the command of Comdt. Sean Carty, gave Mr. Carney every help. The actual capture was carried out by Enniskillen Volunteers on 5th September 1920, but the local Company co-operated before and after. This was one of the most spectacular stunts of the Anglo-Irish war and was very highly praised by the late General Collins.

Mr. Carney had organised, at this time, a Flying Column and a hiding place in the mountains outside Belcoo so as to give anyone 'wanted', because of his activities, a definite place to go to.

On 23rd October 1920, Mr. S. Sheehan took charge of a very risky operation in Enniskillen - that of stopping a Whist Drive. This was done on account of the Hunger Strike of the late Terence MacSwiney and the death of one his fellow strikers. This turned out to be dangerous as several of the Military were present and it transpired later that these were armed. The raiding party had only two revolvers. Two Volunteers with these took charge of the Military present and the remainder brought the Whist Drive to a close. A round-up followed but no detentions were made.

On 25th October 1920 Tempo Barracks was captured. The Sergt. in charge was mortally wounded. The late Comdt. P. Breen was virtually in charge, but Comdt. Jas. Reilly, Lisnaskea and Jas. Smyth, Lisnaskea, were in charge of the major operation. It was a fight from the outset; a fight to get in and a fight to get out. When the Volunteers got possession the U.V.F. opened fire from outside. The car appointed to take away the arms could not pull up at the Barracks door, so the Volunteers had to fight their way out carrying the captured arms, etc. The police on patrol were held up and disarmed and the whole village was isolated by the surrounding Companies. Comdt. Phil Breen was shot dead that night as a reprisal. Two attempts were made to capture Carngreen Barracks in the Southern end of the area but without success. In September 1920 a S.L. & H.Co. Rly. train was held up and raided for mails by the Mullaghduin Co. Also in September there was a general cleaning up of all arms. A stunt to ambush police near Belcoo and to have for its climax

the capture of Belcoo Barracks was planned but did not come off as the District became too hot. Another ambush was planned for the Double-Corners, near Enniskillen. Several of the Volunteers were actually on the scene of the ambush when they were informed that the stunt was off.

Minor activities were continued in 1921. Early in 1921 Mr. F. Carney was promoted to O.C., 1st Nor. Div., and Mr. Sean Sheehan was placed in charge. At the same time Tempo Batt. was transferred to 2nd Northern, Lisnaskea to 5th Northern, Belleek and Mulleek to 1st Northern.

It must be remembered that during this period that there were strict orders that permission would have to be given for major stunts. Mails were raided at Killinure by Breagho and Cavanacross Co. In June 1921 bridges were blown up at Fetterweir by Tempo Co., Cooltrain by Coa and Breagho Co. and Killinure by Cavanacross Co. The late Chas. Daly (executed in Donegal) spent a lot of his time in the Tempo Batt. area and had to be guarded. On the 3rd July 1921 the Cavanacross Co. under Mr. F. Corrigan, fired on a police patrol outside Lisbellaw.

Other activities in the area during the troubled times were raiding for B. Men's bicycles, cutting telephone and telegraph wires, blocking roads, enforcing decrees of Sinn Féin Courts and carrying out the Belfast boycott.

The difficulties under which the I.R.A. operated in County Fermanagh were constantly very great and often indeed were insurmountable. Company areas were isolated from each other and from their Batt. H.Q.s. Batt. areas were in the same position as regards their Brigades. It must also be remembered that the majority of those who were opposed to the I.R.A. were fully armed and constantly on the look out for any movement on the part of the I.R.A. This was clearly illustrated by the manner

in which the Pro-British element turned out to attack the I.R.A. both in Tempo and Lisbellaw.

On the 11th July 1921, there were no special services in the Brigade or any of the Battalions. The Batt. officers included O.C., Vice O.C., Adjutant and Q.M., and occasionally an Assistant Q.M. The Brigade was staffed in a similar manner.

With the coming of the Truce in July 1921, recruiting, training, etc., went on rapidly. In September 1921 training Camps were formed. The Fermanagh Brigade were served by a camp in Carrigallen, Co. Leitrim. The Tempo Batt. which was at this time in the 2nd Northern, had a Batt. Camp in Brochar Mountains outside Tempo. Later in September the county was re-organised.

Tempo Batt. was transferred from Omagh Brigade, 2nd Northern, to the Fermanagh Brigade which had been placed under the command of the 1st Midland Division. The Brigade now included, Enniskillen Batt. (1st); Belcoo Batt. (2nd); Derrylin Batt. (3rd); and Tempo Batt. (4th). These Battalions were fully staffed, the personnel of which appears on the list supplied to the Board of Referees. Each Batt. included the following Companies:

No. 1 Batt. Enniskillen:

- A. Boho
- B. Derrygonnelly
- C. Enniskillen
- D. Monea
- E. Rosinuremore.

No. 2 Batt. Belcoo:

- A. Belcoo
- B. Woobally
- C. Glan Lower
- D. Glan Upper
- E. Killinagh
- F. Mullaghdun.

No. 3 Batt. Derrylin:

- A. Arney
- B. Kinawley
- C. Kingarrow or Derrylin
- D. Mountain Road
- E. Killosher
- F. Wheathill.

No. 4 Batt. Tempo:

- A. Breagho
- B. Cavanacross
- C. Coa
- D. Tempo
- E. Toneyglaskin
- F. Trillick
- G. Whitehill (outpost).

During the Truce the Brigade continued to drill and arm. At the ratification of the Treaty the whole Brigade "stood to". Plans were laid to confine the Military and police to their various Barracks should the treaty be rejected.

After the ratification of the Treaty there was a large number who were inclined towards the extreme wing but the Collins-de-Valera pact smoothed these differences to a great extent.

Hostilities were resumed on the occasion of the cross border raid early in February 1922. This raid developed into a series of fights, one at Carson's of Killyreagh, one each at Cooper's and Elliotts of Enniskillen, and a final one at Belcoo. After this Fermanagh was a hotbed. Brigade and other officers scarcely ever slept at home. The Barracks in the Cavan end of the Brigade were taken over by the Brigade. In April 1922 the Volunteers in

Blacklion Barracks captured Belcoo R.U.C. Barracks.

After this came the Round-Up in May 1922. The majority of the Brigade and Battalion Staffs were arrested - only a few Officers escaped. Some of the vacated positions were filled but for practical purposes the I.R.A. was almost extinct.

The end of brief history I.R.A. in Fermanagh.

The foregoing history of the I.R.A. in Fermanagh was sent to me by Mr. Sean Sheehan, 1 Grove Avenue, Blackrock, Co. Dublin, (former adjutant and later O/C. Fermanagh Brigade) about 10 years ago. Mr. Sheehan sent this document to me for the purpose of checking over its contents. The document was prepared by Mr. Thomas Cox, a former officer in the Fermanagh Brigade.

As far as I know of the activities of the Fermanagh Brigade, the above document is an accurate account as far as it goes, of the I.R.A. activities in Co. Fermanagh.

Signed:

James J. Smyth

Date:

13/7/51

Witness:

John Mc Coy.
13/7/51.

