

W.S. 604

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. *604*

ORIGINAL

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. **W.S.** 604.....

Witness

Patrick Fehily,
High Street,
Skibbereen,
Co. Cork.

Identity.

Officer Commanding Skibbereen Company
(4th Battalion) Cork Brigade.

Subject.

His national activities,
1917-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. **S.1884**.....

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**PATRICK FEHILY, HIGH STREET, SKIBBEREEN,
O.C. SKIBBEREEN COMPANY, 4TH BATTALION,
CORK III BRIGADE.**

I took part in the collecting and raiding for arms as well as collecting for the Arms Fund. I was running despatches for Tadgh O'Sullivan, first Company Commanding Officer in Skibbereen, before I was in the Volunteers at all. I took part in the burning of the Courthouse in the early Summer of 1921. There was an ambush at Goggin's corner in the town on a Saturday night and six of us attacked 14 (fourteen) armed R.I.C. This was in June, 1921. We had 2 (two) rifles and 3 (three) shot-guns and a few revolvers. It was a pitched battle while it lasted and the R.I.C. at length ran for the Barracks. Most of them were regular R.I.C. with a few Tans. They may have had casualties, though not that we could see. They left no arms for us to collect. The six of us left the town afterwards and came back quietly the following evening and we were not suspected. I was sworn into the I.R.B. at the same time as Stephen O'Brien, the Battalion Adjutant, that is about six weeks before the Truce.

The following are details of my activities including matters summarised above :-

Collecting Arms.

We collected one rifle which was the only one of its kind in this area. It had two triggers, one for first pressure and the second for actual firing. We got it from an ex-British Naval Officer, and some ammunition with it. At first he denied that he had it, saying that he had left it in England, but our information was good and we refused to accept this story. We told him that if he did not give it up he would have to come with us to an unknown destination. He still held on to the story that he had left it in England so we said "Alright, come along". Then his brother got afraid and said "Give it to them". There was no more trouble: he handed it over with ammunition.

Cutting Roads.

On the night that Rosscarbery Barracks was attacked we were engaged in cutting the road between Skibbereen and Tragumona. We had to run twice during the night as the military passed not far from us on the Castletownsend road, and back by the same way later on. We returned to our job and completed it. When coming back to town that morning I was in company with Cornelius McCarthy, the Company Quartermaster. As we were passing by his home I called in with him and we had tea. I then left and decided that the Railway line would be the quietest way to town. I was lucky in taking this line as otherwise I would have met a party of military in a lorry on their way to McCarthy's house which I had just left. They searched the house but McCarthy saw them in time and got clear away. That was about eight o'clock in the morning. McCarthy is now in America.

At the cutting of the main road between Skibbereen and Leap, which was at Smorane where there were two large cuttings made

close together, there were men from nearly every Company in the Battalion.

There were sixty men armed with rifles and shot-guns and as many more armed with picks and shovels. The latter were for the most part collected from local farms and were not Volunteers at all, but they did their work well just the same. We expected an engagement that night but it did not turn up.

There was a young Volunteer with me that night and when the arms were given out there was nothing for him. He was almost crying with disappointment. He was sent off scouting on the Leap Road. On his way he met two men from the Glandore Company. One of them had a shot-gun and some cartridges. He suddenly thought of a plan. He told the two men that he was sent to meet them and get the shot-gun and they were to go scouting to a position on the Leap road. He arrived back just as we were falling in and it was getting fairly dark. He slipped up along the rear rank until he found me and all excitement he whispered to me that he had a shot-gun. I whispered to him to shut up and fall in beside me or he would get into trouble. This he did, but he was so anxious to tell me the story that I had to warn him several times to keep quiet or the Battalion O.C. would hear him and we would be for it. This young Volunteer was Tommy O'Connell. He went to America later and was killed in a motor accident.

Burning - Skibbereen Courthouse.

This job was first handed over to members from Mohona as they could come in and get out without being noticed in town. The job was a failure as the oil and petrol which were used burned off the floor without igniting any woodwork. When the job had to be done later it was much more difficult as the building was occupied on certain nights by members of the R.I.C. We had to scout all approaches to it carefully from early evening. This we did and made sure that they were not in it. Then there was the possibility of a bomb inside the door but we had to take a chance on this. Two of us, the late Paddy Cooney and myself, drove in the door with a bar and found the coast clear. We then spread plenty of papers around the place and also some hay which we got from an adjoining yard, then a good supply of petrol and paraffin oil. While we were thus engaged there were some riflemen on duty outside so that we could not get surprised by the enemy. Having got everything ready we made sure that everybody was clear, and threw in some lighted matches, and before we were twenty yards away the flames came bursting through the windows. In a short time the roof caught fire and came tumbling in.

Goggin's Corner Ambush.

On this occasion our Company got the use of some arms - two rifles, three shot-guns and a few revolvers, and we were told we could have them only for a short time. On a Friday night we lay on a hillside over Bridgetown for some time after nightfall, with scouts watching for movements of Military, Police or Tans on the street. Nothing came our way that night

so we had to go to the country. On the following day we watched all day at places where soldiers were in the habit of walking with girls. Some of us were in the Abbey graveyard and others at Compass Hill. Nothing turned up and at nightfall we got together and came again to Goggin's Corner, this time on the street. It being Saturday night there were some people at the corner and a good many passing to and fro. We cleared all the people away and the street was soon clear. Then we had a short talk about positions and it was decided that Cornelius McCarthy and I were to cross the street to Minihane's porch, all the others to remain at Goggin's side. We were just half way across and in the middle of the street when McCarthy suddenly shouted "Halt". I looked and could just make out a dark figure at the railway crossing. McCarthy again shouted halt and the figure said "Who are ye - are ye military?" We immediately knew the voice to be that of a policeman and both of us fired. There was a whistle of bullets up the street, immediately and we had to make for the porch before we could do any more firing. After a short time we could make out the firing from the police had stopped. We sent a few more in their direction but they had retreated hastily to the Barracks. We learned later that there was a patrol of fourteen R.I.C. and a few Tans with Rifles at the ready. Their retreat was a stampede.

We went to the country and came back quietly on Sunday evening and lay low for awhile until we made sure that there was no activity or searching.

Signed: Patrick Fehily

Witnessed: [Signature]

Date: 3/rd October 1951

