

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILÉATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 609

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 609

Witness

Feidhlim S. MacGuill,
70 Howth Road,
Clontarf,
Dublin.

Identity.

Brigade Intelligence Officer, Co. Antrim,
1921-1922.

Subject.

- (a) National activities, Co. Antrim and Co. Down,
1915-1922;
- (b) Raid on Ballycastle R.I.C. Barracks, 1920;
- (c) Sinn Fein Organisation, Co. Antrim, 1920;
- (d) The Rising in Co. Antrim, and Co. Down, 1922.

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Nil

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STATEMENT BY MR. PHELIM MCGUILL,

20 Howth Road, Dublin.

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Statement of Phelim McGuill,70 Howth Road, Clontarf, Dublin.

I was born of an Irish Ireland family in Larne, County Antrim. My people originally came from Feystown, Glenarm, and came to live in Larne. When I was about three years old my father died and my mother sold out the property in Larne and went to live in Belfast.

One of the first important events which I remember was the occasion of a lecture delivered by Padraig Pearse in St. Mary's Hall, Belfast in 1915. My brother, Aodh (Hugh) and I attended the lecture. I was then about sixteen years of age. I don't know if the lecture was part of the commemoration of the Manchester martyrs or the Robert Emmet Commemoration. I remember on that occasion we met near St. Mary's Hall Seán O'Sullivan, a native of the south of Ireland whom we knew, and who was a pioneer Republican and a hard worker in the Republican Cause. When Seán saw us he pointed to two bulky figures who were standing in a shaded spot on the opposite side of the street, and said, "Look at those two fellows freezing". The two were "G" men.

Pearse was in uniform at this lecture. After the lecture a procession formed after a band and marched up the Falls Road as far as Willow Bank Huts. This procession was really a recruiting parade for the Irish Volunteers and after it my brother and I joined the Volunteers.

In 1916 we were not mobilised as we lived in an outlying district away from the Falls Road area. We were both young and outside of being linked up in the Volunteers we were not asked to do any training. I remember being in the Huts at Willow Bank and seeing the Volunteers training and taking part in Rifle practice before 1916.

In 1917 I came to Dublin as a student in the Agricultural College, Glasnevin, and I remained there for about twelve months. On Labour Day, 1917, all over Dublin - and I expect all over the country - a general close-down took place on all forms of work. This amounted to a general strike and was organised to show the British Government and people that the Irish were united in their determination to resist conscription. The College authorities would not grant us a free day so a number of us took French leave and absented ourselves from the College. We found later that any of us who went away that day were black-listed by the College authorities.

The following year I went to Athenry Agricultural College Station as a student. The present Assistant Secretary of the Department of Agriculture - Jack Dempsey - was House Master in Athenry at the time. I got the 'flu in Athenry and I went down to Belfast.

We owned a house in Waterfoot at this time which we used as a summer residence and where we had been living on and off for many years, and we were all well known to the locals in that district. This 1918-1919 period was the building-up period for Sinn Fein in the Glens. There was a concert organised by the local Parish Priest of Waterfoot at which my brother and sister sang "The Bold Fenian Men". The last line of this song, which goes "All who love Saxon laws - Native or Sassenagh - out and make way for the Bold Fenian Men", annoyed the Parish Priest - Father McCartan - who was sitting in the front seats with Mr. Joseph Devlin, M.P. Our house in Waterfoot was a meeting place for Republicans and a dispatch centre for that part of the Glens. I remained in Waterfoot from that time onwards.

About the end of 1919 or early in 1920, Paddy McLogan came along and discussed with me the possibility of forming a Company of the Volunteers in Glenarriff. I agreed to sound a few of the local lads and I arranged a further meeting with him. On the night we held our first organising meeting about seven or eight men joined the Volunteers. Paddy McCafferty was elected our first Company Captain. Paddy McLogan did not approve of any man being in the Volunteers who was fond of intoxicating liquor and McCafferty was fond of a 'drop', but I carried my view that he would be a most useful man and make a good Captain notwithstanding his little weakness. Amongst those who joined that night were Paddy McVeigh and Charlie McAllister, both of whom were later killed in May 1922 on Active Service against British Forces. Another who joined at the same time was Paddy Graham who took part with McVeigh and McAllister in the same action in which they were killed. Graham had a marvellous escape in this affair as a revolver in his holster at his side was struck with a rifle bullet.

The next affair of local importance was the raid on Ballycastle R.I.C. barracks in 1920. The principals in this affair were Paddy McLogan and a Liam Healy. Healy at this time was engaged in County Antrim as a Sinn Fein organiser. I was not much involved in this affair myself. I got a dispatch from Ballycastle to call on Dan Lynch, Cushendall, and get from him two new Rudge Whitworth bicycles and bring them to Glenravel, which I did. McLogan and Healy had crossed the mountains on foot and the cycles were intended to enable them to get clear of the area quickly after the raid had taken place. The plans to capture the barracks took the form of a ruse which proved most successful as the garrison of police were overpowered and their arms and military

equipment taken. I will leave the description of this operation to be told by some of the actual participants.

Our Company strength never rose above fifteen men. Some of these men were not inclined to take part in much activities and were Volunteers more in name than in^{the} spirit of the organisation. During 1920 we carried out several raids for arms in the Company area. We also raided poteen-makers and captured and destroyed three or four poteen stills.

In the year 1920 the Orangemen threatened to invade the Glens. The whole parish of Cushendall was organised by the Volunteers, under Paddy McLogan's leadership, to resist this invasion and to defend the approaches to the two local Churches - Glenarriff and Cushendall. Paddy McLogan was at this time Brigade O/C., Antrim Brigade. The threatened invasion was called off. This affair helped to direct attention to the Volunteers in the Glens and increased their local prestige.

Some time after this Liam Hely came to me and told me that Harry Osborne wanted to appoint a Superintendent to the Irish National Insurance Company for County Antrim and he told me he had recommended me for the position. I told him I knew nothing of insurance work, but Liam told me I should take the appointment as it would be a good cloak for moving about the County and would tend to allay suspicions as to my movements. I accepted the appointment and left Waterfoot and made Ballymeena my headquarters.

At this time I held no definite appointment nor any definite rank in the Volunteers. I was always available to do any work asked of me. I went a couple of times on messages with Father James Smyth to Belfast. Father Smyth was in the habit of collecting ammunition and equipment in

Belfast from sources he knew and I travelled with him when necessary to take responsibility for the stuff in case of a hold-up or search by British forces.

On one occasion in a Ballymeena street I met Archie McAllister and Jim Martin. Archie said to me, "You are just the man we want to see". He then explained that a motor lorry bringing stuff from Belfast to Loughgiel contained rifles, ammunition and electrical equipment. The rifles were placed in a drawer underneath the body of the lorry and on the journey the fastenings on the drawer loosened and the rifles fell out on the road. The lorry had travelled a considerable distance before the crew of the lorry knew that the rifles were gone, and when they discovered their loss they dumped the remainder of the stuff on the lorry behind a recess on the side of the road. The empty lorry drove on into Loughgiel expecting that when the rifles were found on the road they would be followed by the police, as they were. When the police arrived in Loughgiel they found them loading furniture at the house of Jim Martin, which they were told was for Belfast, moyah!! This was the only thing they could think of at the time to explain their presence with an empty lorry. The police accepted the explanation and went away. Later that day McAllister and Martin went back with the lorry and were shown where the stuff was dumped about five or six miles from Ballymeena. Being strangers in the district they came into Ballymeena looking for me. They gave me a description of the place where the stuff was and I remembered that there were a few friendly houses in the vicinity. I got a bicycle from Jim Martin and accompanied by Archie McAllister we cycled out and located the stuff. Police cars passed and repassed us many times on our journey out. The discovery of the rifles had caused great police activities.

I found the stuff was dumped a few hundred yards from Jim Byrne's public house and the house of Charlie Shannon adjacent. Shannon was Captain of the local Company - Tanaghmore. I went and saw Shannon and told him what had happened and we arranged to bring the stuff to one of his fields. Archie and I went again to the spot and after a careful preview of the surroundings to guard against surprise, in case the stuff had been located by the police and were waiting for us, we packed it into two bags and removed it to Shannon's farm where we dumped it in small parcels along the fences in one of his fields, the idea being that some of the stuff might escape detection if a thorough search was made. The district was mostly Unionist and a lot of the young men were members of the B/Specials and it was possible that some of them had seen us dumping the stuff. Some time after this on a Saturday evening I was having lunch in McVeigh's Hotel in Ballymeena and Miss McVeigh came in and told me that Father James Smyth wanted to see me in a private sitting-room. Father Smyth told me that he had been in the R.I.C. barracks the previous day looking for a licence for his motor bike and that he saw my name on the 'wanted' list. The police in Ballymeena up to that time made no move to apprehend or question me and apparently they did not connect me with the name on the 'wanted' list. I did not want to go on the 'run' until I actually had to by the police making some move to arrest me. Later that evening a message came from Mrs. Logue's stating that my mother was in her place and wanted to see me. I knew she must have some serious reasons to come herself to Ballymeena. She told me that my brother, Aodh, and Tom Cleere had been arrested in Hannaghstown, Belfast, the previous night. She also told me that the police who arrested them burned the Hamill Hall in Hannaghstown after they were arrested and that they were sitting in the lorry whilst this operation was being carried out. She also informed me that only for the

intervention of a friendly Sergeant they might have been found dead on the road instead of being prisoners. They were brought to Musgrave Street Barracks and my brother was closely questioned as to my whereabouts. She got all this information as a result of a visit she paid to Musgrave Street after their arrest when she took them tea and sandwiches. A friendly policeman told Aodh that if he - Aodh - wanted a message out to put it in the head of the flask for the tea and that he would have it delivered. This was how she got her information.

I then had no option but to go on the 'run'. I left Ballymeena and went out to stay with cousins of mine at Feystown. I would place this at about a few weeks before the Truce in July 1921.

The Truce was on the 11th July, 1921 and on the following day there were horse races at Waterfoot and all the boys who had been on the 'run', and had not much opportunity of seeing their friends and each other whilst on the 'run', met and fraternised at the Races.

The next work of importance was the job of organising the Brigade into Battalions. Before the Truce, Antrim was organised into local Companies and the whole county was described as a Brigade, but there was no proper organisation in a military sense in the area or co-ordination between the various Company Units. Brigade Staff Officers were appointed including those of the various special services. The area was divided up into Battalions and Battalion O/Cs. appointed. An I.R.A. training camp was set up at Ballyvoy near Ballycastle. Brigade, Battalion and Company officers were called to the camp for training which in each batch's case lasted for about two weeks. The men in the Companies were

later being trained by the men who had received training in the Camps. I remember going to Belfast with Tom Fitzpatrick and we took back to the training camp two prisoners whom we held prisoners. These men were suspected of some crimes but they were released by us after a few weeks.

The Brigade Staff after the Truce was as follows:

O/C. Tom Fitzpatrick (Bob McDonald),

Vice O/C. Denis O'Neill,

Adjutant: Felix McCurley,

Quartermaster: Brian McGuckian,

Engineer: Liam McMullen,

Intelligence: Phelim McGill (myself),

Medical Officer: Dr. Alick McSparran.

The organisation of Sinn Fein in County Antrim started early in 1920. Liam Healy came to the area and spent his time on this work. In about seven-tenths of the county the population was predominantly Unionist. The Nationalist pockets in this Unionist stronghold were along the coast road from Glenarm to Ballycastle. Inland - Armoy, Loughgiel, Glenravel, Dunloy, Cloughmills, Portglenone and Toome. Amongst the Nationalists the majority were Hibernians and their conservatism made their conversion to Sinn Fein a tedious process. The Volunteers in Antrim were the backbone of the Sinn Fein organisation with some of the older people assisting. The presence of a small section of extreme Republicans in a nationalist minority did not offer much scope for great political or military advances and as far as the Volunteers were concerned the best that could be expected from them was activity of a diversionary character designed to hold down a percentage of British forces who might otherwise be diverted to suppress activity in other better favoured areas.

Early in 1922 the Antrim Brigade got a supply of war material conveyed into Ballyhig House, Glenariff, in an oil tanker. This consignment included rifles, revolvers, ammunition, hand-grenades, electric equipment for detonating mines etc. and explosives, including War Flour. On the journey from Belfast to Glenariff the lorry broke down at Carrickfergus. A man named Charlie Connolly was driving it. It was after curfew at the time and a permit was got from the police in Carrickfergus to bring the oil-tanker back to Belfast for repairs. They resumed their journey to the Glens on the following day.

Tom Fitzpatrick and Denis O'Neill, with the local Company Captain Seamus McCrory and myself, were returning from a Volunteer parade called in connection with making preparations for the Rising. We halted opposite Logue's in Brushane Street. Tom Fitzpatrick asked me where they, O'Neill and himself, could stay for the night. I said, "You can stay in Logue's, but if you take my advice you should get out of Ballymena to-night. I have been a long time about Ballymena but somehow I don't like it to-night. I slept in Logue's last night, but I am sleeping in the Hotel to-night". When I had explained to them how they could return to their usual quarters in Glenravel and avoid the B/patrols, they agreed to take the chance and go the indirect route I advised. They had their bicycles parked in Fyffe's, next door to Logue's, and they went across to get them. Jim McCrory then said that he required cigarettes from Logue's and I went across with him. We remained in Logue's about ten minutes, and we did not see anything more of Fitzpatrick and O'Neill. As the sequel will show we must have been under close observation.

At 4.30 a.m. next morning, I was awakened by Mrs. McVeigh's son. (I was sleeping in his house which was two houses away from the Hotel). He told me that they were raiding the Hotel and that they had all the residents out of their beds in their night shirts. I burned anything I considered committal in my pockets and then lay awake for a little while expecting a raiding party on the stairs. I eventually went off to sleep and awakened again about 7 a.m. When I remembered what had happened during the night, and the fact that I had not been disturbed, I got up. Young McVeigh came up and warned me to keep quiet as there was a sentry walking up and down at the back of the house watching it. This place where I slept was an annex to the Hotel where overflow guests were accommodated. The police who raided the Hotel did not realise this at the time, but they raided it about a week afterwards and charged McVeigh about a man who had escaped from the place where I slept a week previously. I learned later that on that night the police in Ballymena called for reinforcements from Ballymoney to make a simultaneous raid on all houses in Ballymena of Republican sympathisers. Logue's and Fyffe's in Brushane Street were battered in front and back. But "the birds had flown"!

In May 1922, a plan was agreed on by Headquarters in Dublin that a general Rising by the I.R.A. should take place in the six counties against the British forces there, and that the South would help by attacking from across the six county border. The importation of the arms and war material was part of the preparation for this Rising.

As far as the six counties as a whole was concerned the general Rising was a flop. I don't know the reasons for the failure in other places to carry out the plans that were made. In Co. Antrim, however, and in north Down, a general Rising took place, and as far as my personal experiences go I will try and give an account of what took

place.

Ballycastle, Martinstown and Glenarm Barracks were attacked. Ballymena Railway Station was burned. O'Neill's Castle in Randlestown was burned, as was also Crebilly Castle near Ballymena. The police were about to occupy Crebilly Castle. The I.R.A. were not able to take any of the Barracks which were attacked. Ballycastle and Martinstown were badly damaged. When it was found impossible to take the Barracks in the first surprise attack it was considered impossible to succeed later, and so the I.R.A. withdrew into districts where it was felt that they could hold their positions for some time. The B/Specials were very active in all areas where they had control and were patrolling the roads each night. The B/Men made no attempt to invade I.R.A. strongholds. The position then became a sort of a dead-lock. Increased British Forces were rushed to the areas affected by I.R.A. actions.

On the night planned for the general attack I was passing through Crebilly on my way to Headquarters in Glen Ravel about 11 p.m. when I met eight or nine armed I.R.A. and I asked them where they were going. They replied that they were going home as the attack was off and their Company Captain had not turned up. I informed them that their information was misleading as I was coming from Tanaghmore where the men were mobilised and preparing to attack Randlestown. Knowing that Ballymena station was to be attacked at 12 midnight, and being only a distance of a couple of miles away I said we should hear the fire bell going at Ballymena when the fire Brigade was called. I asked them to wait with me until then. The fire bell duly went, but some of the lads had not been in any action before and were very 'green'. Some of them said that the police were already in occupation of the Castle. I overcame their fears and they

came with me. Our information was that it was possible to enter the Castle from a window on the back which was generally left open. When we arrived at the Castle we found all the windows bolted and barred, and the lads thought there was no way to get in. I put my foot through one of the window panes on the ground floor and made an entry. There were about eight or nine men with me, including Jack Mills who was a splendid fellow and a great help to me in this operation. We had all the material with us to properly set fire to the entire building, including tins of petrol. The whole Castle was burned to the ground.

It was about six weeks after this first night of the operations that the British made their appearance in the various areas where the I.R.A. were holding out. When the British forces advanced into our area we had preparations made to resist their advance and positions occupied at Ardclinis where the road was mined. Also, the I.R.A. were in ambush position for at least 12 hours. After 12 hours, when no appearance of the enemy was reported, the men in position went home for some rest. When on their way back to take up their positions, three of them, Paddy McVeigh, Charlie McAllister and Paddy Graham, got into an action with Special police. The three men were up against overwhelming numbers. The shooting lasted for about three-quarters of an hour, when McVeigh and McAllister were killed and Graham escaped. Near Martinstown, Tom Fitzpatrick, Brigade O/C, and about 12 men attacked a force of B/Specials. This fight lasted for about an hour when the I.R.A. were forced to retreat, Fitzpatrick receiving wounds. Martinstown was a hostile area. We heard at this time of at least one incident in which the Regular Police fired on B/Men, under the impression that they were I.R.A., and that casualties resulted in the exchange of fire.

Once the British Forces moved into our area they soon had control and we were in a most uncomfortable position. Since the Rising in the North had not been general as was first planned, it allowed the British to concentrate their forces on the areas where partial Risings took place.. It soon became evident to us, after our Rising had failed, that to remain on in Co. Antrim was almost an impossibility for those who had taken part in the Rising. Round ups and mass raids were the order of the day, not only for those who took an active part in the operations during the Rising but also for all who were known to have Republican tendencies. Many active men were 'on the run' and trying to escape the drag-net which the British authorities were relentlessly using. Every day the possibility of evading arrest became more difficult. An order came to us that all the active men in the area should make an effort to travel to Dublin where they would be sent on to a training camp at the Curragh, Co. Kildare. This camp was to be set up for the purpose of giving all the men from the six counties willing to avail of it a course of military training which would fit them as soldiers, and that when their training was completed they would be properly equipped and would return to their own areas to take up the struggle afresh.

I went in to Belfast, and with some others, set up an organisation to receive and hide men travelling through Belfast from our Brigade area and to make arrangements for their travelling to Dublin, and provide the means to do so.

In all about 40 men from our Brigade area travelled to Dublin. Those men moved out of Belfast in twos and threes, and on their arrival in Dublin were sent on to the Curragh where they were accommodated in some army huts, known as Harepark Huts. When all the men who were anxious to avail of this scheme had left the area, Seán Murray, Jack O'Loan and I were asked to travel to Glasgow to contact a man who

had left the Glens immediately after the Rising in the North. This man was under suspicion of having misappropriated a sum of money - part of the proceeds of a raid on a bank in Cushendall. This bank was raided under official orders on the night of the Rising in Co. Antrim. There was a sum of about £400 unaccounted for when the cash was transferred officially to the Brigade, and the man we were asked to contact in Glasgow was suspected of having held on to the money. At least, his leaving the area hurriedly without official permission tended to throw suspicion on him. We travelled to Glasgow and contacted this man. We questioned him and each of the three of us came to the opinion that the man was innocent of keeping any part of the missing money. We returned from Glasgow and proceeded immediately to the Curragh.

We went to the Camp, and on arrival there we found that some of the 3rd Northern Division Officers had joined the National Army, including Sean O'Neill, Felix McCurley & Seamus Woods. Paddy McLogan, who was acting as Brigade O/C at this time, Denis O'Neill, Willie Lynn, Archie McAllister and Tom Fitzpatrick went back from the Curragh to Antrim to see how things were in Antrim and to explore the possibilities of resuming the fight. There had been no raids on trains for about two months. When the train we travelled on was steaming into Bessbrooke (Mainline) Station, we saw the platform lined with police. All male passengers were ordered out of the carriages. Tom Fitzpatrick had a gun on him. He rushed into a lavatory and hid it there. It was not discovered. The police search produced nothing incriminating, and we all proceeded to Belfast. We divided up on arrival in Belfast. Willie Lynn and I kept together, Paddy McLogan and Denis O'Neill went together, and Tom Fitzpatrick went on his own. As we arranged before we separated in Belfast we all met at Benvan, Murlough, near Ballycastle.

The day after we arrived, Paddy McLogan and Denis O'Neill went off over the mountains in the direction of their old Headquarters in Glenravel. Willie Lynn and I stayed in Murlough in a dug-out for about two weeks. We found the Republican population in a most depressed mood. The feeling that the South had let the North down was widespread, and as the Civil War was raging in the South the prospect of having any further military operation in the North seemed madness. Paddy McLogan was captured at Glenariff. The rest of us returned to the Curragh to report on the position in the North to the other men from the Brigade area.

The position at this time was that a lot of six county men were joining the National Army as a result of the appeal of some of the Northern I.R.A. Officers who had already joined the Army. We had a meeting in one of the Barracks in the Curragh, at which Seán O'Neill and Felix McCurley were making a final appeal to the men in the camp to join the Army. Some asked Seán O'Neill a pertinent question in connection with army service which O'Neill was somewhat slow in answering. At the physiological moment an electrician came in to test the lights, and whilst waiting for O'Neill's reply, some of our boys remarked, "There's light on the subject".

Most of the County Antrim men cleared out of the Curragh after this. Some emigrated and some made their way back to Antrim. All returning to Antrim were forced to remain more or less on the run.

Signed:

Feidhlim S. MacGuill
(Feidhlim S. MacGuill).

Date:

15th Nov 1951

Witness:

John McCoy
(John McCoy)
15/11/51

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