

W.S. 758

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
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No. W.S. 758

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 758

Witness

Tom Kelleher,
The Post Office,
Cappoquin,
Co. Waterford.

Identity.

Member of Cappoquin (Co. Waterford)
Company Irish Volunteers, 1917-1921.

Subject.

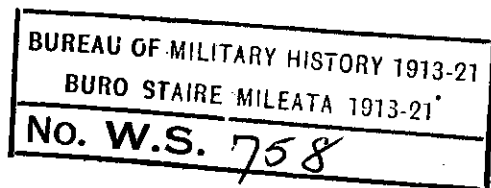
Activities of the Irish Volunteers,
Cappoquin, Co. Waterford,
1917-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. ...S. 2064.....

Form B.S.M. 2

ORIGINALSTATEMENTBYTHOMAS KELLEHER, THE POST OFFICE, CAPPOQUIN.

I was born in Cappoquin in 1901. My father was a native of Lismore and my mother was from Dublin and came of old Fenian stock.

I joined the local Company of Volunteers in 1917, at a reorganisation in Green Street, Cappoquin, which was attended by Pax Whelan and George Lennon from Dungarvan. There had been a small Volunteer Unit previously, but it had been allowed to lapse. As I was only a young lad at the time I am not conversant with the details.

Seán O'Brien was our first Company O.C. and Tom Lincoln, N.T. the Company I.O.

Our weekly parades were held in a field near the town, which had been rented from Sir John Keane ostensibly for a Hurling Club for the Volunteers were not popular with Sir John and his class, and he certainly would not have rented a field to Volunteers. During Winter and in inclement weather our parades were frequently held in the Sinn Féin hall in Chapel St.,

The strength of the Volunteers in the early stages in Cappoquin would be approximately twenty to twenty-five. Training instruction was normally imparted by Seán O'Brien and Tom Lincoln.

Unless for a few shot-guns and, perhaps, one or two revolvers, there were no other arms in the Company in 1917. I

have a recollection that there were possibly a few Redmond Volunteer rifles in the district, but I cannot recollect any particulars of them, or by whom held.

1918.

Our weekly parades continued during 1918 and we had the usual Sinn Féin and Gaelic League activities in conjunction with the Volunteers.

The strength of the Unit was about thirty, which increased to eighty during Conscription, and as quickly decreased to approximately its former strength when the crisis had passed. Our Company was no different to any others in this respect.

It will be remembered that the supporters of the John Redmond party were strongly entrenched in Co. Waterford at this period and were actively hostile to Volunteer and Sinn Féin elements. We were, in their view, all sorts of cranks, sore heads and dreamers, etc., However, the Volunteers of Waterford, ably supported by Volunteer assistance from other districts, helped to keep the Redmondite mob under control during the General Election of this year. Were it not that the Volunteers were on the spot and ready for all contingencies, mob rule would undoubtedly have prevailed.

Voluntary handing up of shot-guns, plus the raids we carried out on loyalists' houses, brought our stock of shot-guns up to thirty-two by the end of 1918. I was one of a small party which raided Villiers Stuarts of Richmond (near Cappoquin) at the end of this year, where we got two old type game rifles and some small amount of assorted ammunition.

1919.

Unless for the weekly drills and occasional public parades, together with the normal activities of kindred organisations, e.g. Sinn Féin and Gaelic League, including propaganda, public meetings, etc., there was very little other activity of note during 1919. The youth of the country generally was in sympathy with the objects and aims of the Volunteer movement, but, despite this, only a comparatively small percentage of them gave the movement their active support.

1920.

Parades and other activities continued in 1920, and it was noticeable that the tension showed a gradual increase, and some of the more enthusiastic Volunteers were anxious to be up and doing. Isolated incidents in other parts of the country, such as, attacks on barracks and police patrols, etc., had led to a quickening of interest, and myself and many of the other lads in the Company felt it was up to us to get a move on. What gave an impetus to this feeling was the fact that the local R.I.C. and those of the surrounding parishes became increasingly active in their observation of Volunteer activities and a number of arrests for various reasons had taken place in the district.

SPECIAL ACTIVITIES.

September, 1920.

Our first job of any importance was the seizure of mails from Cappoquin station in September, 1920. This seizure was carried out in co-operation with the Villierstown Volunteers

and had been discussed and sanctioned by Brigade Headquarters beforehand. These were the local mails which arrived at 5.40 a.m. in Cappoquin station for delivery in Dungarvan, Kilmacthomas and Kilmeadon districts. At this time I was a railway employee and knew all about the mails and when they were received and forwarded, and where they were received from or where going to, as the case may be.

On this morning with Willie McCarthy in charge, Tom Lincoln, seven or eight others and myself proceeded to the station and seized ten letter bags and handed them over to members of the Villierstown Company, who had a pony and trap in readiness. The mails were conveyed to Villierstown district for censoring and after censoring they were returned within a few days to Cappagh Post Office. I do not think any important information resulted from this raid, only that the military and R.I.C. became very active for some days afterwards.

This raid was made by us more in the nature of a test than anything else.

OCTOBER, 1920.

(1) There was a Coursing fixture in Cappoquin on a Sunday in October, 1920. I was present at the Coursing and met Bill Foley and a few others from Clashmore district. They were armed with parabellums, which were got, I understand, off a boat which arrived in Dungarvan a short time before. Bill and the boys were very keen on having a crack at any of the R.I.C. who made an appearance at the Coursing. As a result of

our conversation I cycled into the town to see how the land lay and, on passing Harrington's Hotel, I saw Sergeant Walsh and Constable Rea, R.I.C. standing outside and I presumed they were waiting to escort District Inspector Robinson to the Coursing. (Robinson, who was the D.I. in Cappoquin, was a nephew of Sir Edward Carson).

On reporting back with this information to Bill Foley, he and his three other pals took up positions in an old limekiln on the way to the Coursing field. The R.I.C., however, did not turn up so Bill remarked that he would have a shot at some of them later that night in town.

Perhaps I should mention that about this period the local curate - Rev. Fr. Meskel - had sought the assistance of the Volunteers in clearing the public-houses at night as the R.I.C. were not making any appearance on the streets late at night. The Volunteers had carried out the curate's request, and subsequently D.I. Robinson had sent word by the R.I.C. to those of us who were fairly prominent in the Volunteers that the usurping of the police duties by the Volunteers would have dire consequences for us should the practice be continued. This threat caused us no worry.

To get back to Bill Foley's intention of having a pot shot at any R.I.C., I arranged with him that Willie McCarthy and myself would be available that night and each of us would have a gun. After my tea I went down to where the guns were planked and on my way back with the guns I heard some shots in the street, which had been fired from a passing motor car, and Constable Rea had been fatally wounded for he died that night.

Following this shooting the R.I.C. fired a number of verey lights seeking assistance from Lismore Military Post, but none came.

Later that week there was intense military and police activity, but no arrests were made. Of course, the R.I.C. knew that the shots had been fired from a passing car, which, I suppose, exonerated the locals in their view.

(II) On the following Saturday night three members of the Brigade Column - Mick Mansfield of Dungarvan and two others - entered Cappoquin. The Brigade Column was at this time only in the process of forming.

While they were in town they shot a Constable Quirke, R.I.C. on his way to the barracks. Quirke was very badly wounded for he died on the following Tuesday. This shooting led to a large influx of military on the next evening (Sunday). The local Company did not know what this portended, but a large number of us considered it inadvisable to sleep at home that night. Six of us agreed to seek shelter for the night in a railway lodge about $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles from the town; three of us went out by the railway line and the remaining three were moving out by road. Tom Lincoln, Pat Curran and myself went by the railway line and, on arrival, we waited for some time for the others to turn up. Eventually, as there was no sign of them, we decided to return to town as when the others made no appearance we presumed that the military party had left town. We reached the outskirts of the town at a point called Shanbally, where I lived at the time. We saw what seemed a large crowd of people in the moonlight and we were full sure it was a crowd

of the townspeople discussing the raid. We were within about twenty or twenty-five yards from the crowd and, when passing my own house, we heard a whisper saying "Who are ye?" It was my sister, Elizabeth, who was at the window. I replied asking who was there, and she warned us to fly - that the crowd were military. We immediately cleared over a small wall near hand and took to the fields. Tom Lincoln and Curran ran along parallel with the road, and I ran down the field. There were loud commands of "Halt", which we ignored, and, simultaneous with the commands, they blazed away shots galore after us, but nothing happened as the darkness saved us. We all got away and we were lucky for we had some despatches and other Company documents, including a number of Ant-Oglacs on us.

The military raided several houses that night, including my own: however, I had not gone home and remained out all night.

Previous to this I had been told by both Brigade and Battalion Headquarters not to become too prominent or make myself conspicuous in Volunteer activities due to the fact that I was responsible for rail intelligence in the area as far as movement of troops or military stores were concerned and, in addition, Cappoquin was the centre for all dispatches for Brigade Headquarters at Dungarvan which were personally handled by me. The normal method of sending dispatches was to enclose them in an official railway envelope addressed to the "Goods Agent", Dungarvan. This envelope was then handed by the Guard of the train to Mr. Crowley, the Goods Agent. He was very reliable and knew to whom to pass them. With very few exceptions I could safely say that almost every railway man was trustworthy and if not an active Volunteer, was fully sympathetic and would help

in every possible way. The splendid response of the general body of rail workers in the Munitions Strike (Movement of enemy armed troops) proved this fact, very conclusively.

NOVEMBER, 1920.

(I) Word was received from Brigade Headquarters on the 1st November, 1920, to block all roads and cut all communications. We carried out this instruction and all roads were heavily blocked and wires cut. This was the night of the Piltown ambush, and also it was on this day that Kevin Barry was executed in Mountjoy Prison.

(II) The Tans arrived in Cappoquin about mid-November, 1920, which brought the strength of the local R.I.C. garrison up to thirty-two, including twenty Tans and twelve R.I.C. I have already mentioned that the local D.I. was Robinson, a nephew of Sir Edward Carson.

We made several attempts to get Robinson but he proved himself a bit too wily for us. A lad named Willie Healy and myself lay in wait for him on at least three occasions, but nothing doing as he did not come along when we expected.

There was a fairly big number of loyalists residing in the vicinity of Cappoquin, and after Church Service every Sunday it was the custom of Robinson to accompany some of them to dine with them at their homes. Usually there was a lady or two in the car when one could not shoot. We remained in wait on a few occasions to attack him on his way back but he failed to make an appearance and we heard later that he had gone from one house across a field

or two to another loyalist house. Whether this was for the purpose of foiling any possible attack on him, or just pure luck, I am unable to say.

Some years later I heard from a northern I.R.A. man that Robinson was a decent type of man.

(III) About a week or so after the Tans had arrived, Tom Lincoln, our local I.O., came to me and said the outward mails must be raided for the purpose of securing the home addresses of the relatives of the local Tans who were living Cross-Channel. Tom Lincoln's sister, Fanny, who was then a post office employee, was to arrange in the course of sorting operations to have all the Tans' letters placed in one bundle.

On the night arranged for the raid only four of us turned up - Willie McCarthy, Tom Lincoln, Tom Ahearne and myself. At least four others had been detailed for the job but for some reason did not appear.

The mails were in the Waiting-Room at the station, as I had taken them in myself earlier in my capacity as a railway employee.

In view of the small number of us who were present, we had not enough to scout around or for armed protection duty. However, we went ahead with the job and secured the bundle required. As a cover we ripped up all the other bundles as well, because, otherwise the job might lead to suspicion on the Post Office staff.

After securing the information required, we dumped those

particular letters for a few days, and then, foolishly perhaps, I put them into a large envelope and posted them back to D.I. Robinson. Had I posted them direct in the normal way a lot of trouble could possibly have been avoided, but our intention was to show Robinson what could be done under his nose. A big lot of activity occurred later and several people were interrogated, including all the railway staff and this included myself. I told Robinson I took in the mails on that day in the ordinary way and deposited them in the Waiting Room, which was the normal practice, and that I knew nothing further about them, which seemed to satisfy him, at least, on the surface.

(IV) It was the practice about this time for a plane from Fermoy Aerodrome to make a flight over the district nearly every day. On one occasion the pilot of the plane dropped a dispatch which was intercepted by one of our lads. The message read "Finnisk Bridge demolished": this message was intended for the local R.I.C. Finnisk Bridge had only been destroyed on the previous night, which was an indication that the pilot's reconnaissance was of a high standard.

As there were no telephones in Cappoquin in those years other than the railway telephone, it was the practice to send a basket of four pigeons from Fermoy Post to a Constable Lindsay of the R.I.C. in Cappoquin - Lindsay was the I.O. to the R.I.C. Post. These pigeons were sent a few times a week. They were sent by rail and many a time I took up a fist of loose corn and threw it into the pigeon basket, when a basket was waiting for collection. One day I noticed two pigeons eating corn at a wagon on the station and a comrade and myself shut the wagon door and caught the pigeons. One of them had

a small container on the leg which read "Nothing to report - visibility low". The second pigeon had no message. Obviously the pigeons on their homeward flight had landed at the station for something to eat.

1921.

January, 1921.

On Sunday, January 11th, the Modeligo Volunteers sent in a number of shot-guns to a field near Cappelquin without consulting the Cappelquin Company - they were carried in by donkey and cart, and apparently it was the intention of six or eight of the Modeligo Company to come in later and take up an ambush position to attack any patrol that may happen to be in the vicinity.

The Tans, however, found the guns that evening, also the donkey and cart. I do not know how they found out about them. They conveyed the guns to the barracks on the cart.

I was arrested same evening and escorted as a hostage on foot around the district where the guns were found. Some others were arrested also. The Tans made a close examination of the field and lifted up a lot of big stones and started digging in a few places, apparently trying to locate the ammunition. During this digging one of the Tans remarked why should they do the digging when they had prisoners there who could do it. I then said that I would do no digging. They got very aggressive and threatened all sorts of penalties; however, they calmed down after a bit when they saw I was determined to make a stand. A

little later a Tan named Price brought me away and closely questioned a number of residents in adjoining houses, without any result. I must admit that Price was nice to me.

The other prisoners were let off, but I was escorted into town. On passing my own house my sister enquired if I was coming to my tea and the Tans remarked that I would get it in the barracks to-night.

On reaching Kenny's pub, the Tans kicked in the door and shouting to Mrs. Kenny "Where were the boys"? Kennys were strong supporters of ours. I was left on the street with a Sergeant and six or seven R.I.C. This Sergeant was a stranger to me. He enquired after a short time if I had any friends in the street and when I told him I had he told me to get away immediately as the Tans may create trouble when they came out of the pub. I got into a friend's place and remained indoor until the party returned to barracks. I slept away from home that night and, from what I learned next day, it was imperative that I should go "on the run". The Tans had raided my house twice the night before and evidently they were determined to make an arrest following the discovery of the guns.

Next morning I went to Dublin "on the run". I remained in Dublin in Clontarf district for about two months, where I was in touch with the local Volunteer Unit, and during this period I delivered many dispatches to Kingsbridge station as I happened to know a lot of the engine drivers and railway guards who used to travel to and from the South.

During this period I was in touch with Willie McCarthy of

Cappoquin who was also "on the run" and who was staying with a step-brother who was a priest in Liverpool. Both of us decided to return home and join the Brigade Flying Column. This we did in March, 1921; although we missed participation in the Burgery ambush which took place on March 18th-19th. I took part in a number of the Column actions.

At Ballylynch, Durrow, the Column, under George Lennon, attacked a troop train. The strength of the Column at this time was about twenty-seven. Every member had a rifle, as a number of rifles and ammo. had been captured in the Burgery ambush. I do not know the extent of the casualties in this attack.

I was later transferred with the late Mick Morrissey back for duty to Brigade Headquarters which was then located at Bohadoon, where Pax Whelan, Brigade O.C., Benny McCarthy, Adjutant and "Fox" Greaney and a few others were present. I used to accompany Pax to the Despatch Centre, usually not too far away from the Brigade Headquarters.

I was only a short time there when Pax Whelan was anxious for a general check up of the Companies in our Battalion area. He instructed me to contact Willie Healy and that we were personally to visit every Company to examine how they were situated as regards strengths, weapons and organisation, etc., We were also to supervise road blocks and to create as much difficulty for the enemy without actually engaging them. This was a rather big assignment as at the time it was a question of foot slogging all the way as enemy activity was so intense one would be taking a big risk in using even horse transport.

We did, in time, visit every Company and were in a position to report back to Brigade later of the general condition of the Units.

APRIL, 1921.

Sometime about April, 1921, the Divisional O.C. (Liam Lynch) decided, with the concurrence of the Brigade O.Cs. concerned, that all our Companies lying north and west of the River Blackwater would become part of Cork No. 2 Brigade - the Companies concerned included Tallow, Ballyduff, Melleray, Knockanoré, Ballysaggart, Cappoquin and Lismore. This reorganisation was found necessary for operational and communication purposes as the Blackwater presented a difficult obstacle, having only one bridge between Fermoy and Lismore, and no bridges between Cappoquin and Youghal. This Unit became known as the 4th Battalion (Lismore) Cork No. II Brigade. The Battalion O.C., was Frank Ryan, Tallow, and the Adjutant was W.J. McCarthy, Cappoquin. The O.C. Cork No. II Brigade was George Power and the Vice O.C. - Paddy O'Brien, Liscarroll.

MAY, 1921.

(I) During my stay in the battalion area the local O.C., Maurice Meade, arranged to ambush a party of Tans who were in the habit of going to meet the Rosslare Express passing through Lismore. I think Maurice had Brigade sanction for this job. About eighty men, mostly armed with shot-guns and some with revolvers, assembled at Maurice Meade's house at Kilnacarriga, Scouts had been sent out and they reported in the early morning

that either a Tennis Pavilion or Golf Club house had been destroyed the previous night and the military parties from both Lismore and Fermoy were out and were searching over a wide area. Some of the local Volunteers had carried out this burning on their own without telling anyone, with the result that the whole ambush had to be called off. This, from my experience, was not an isolated act, and many other things had been done, without that co-operation and co-ordination which are essential if successful planning is to be achieved.

(II) About this period, the R.I.C. at Cappoquin were making very serious efforts in an endeavour to establish telephone communications between Cappoquin and Lismore, and urgent applications in this respect had been submitted to the postal authorities. This came to my notice while I was in the area and I informed all the local Companies concerned that under no circumstances should this line go through. On that day a small party of us cut the wires and a lot of telephone poles along the railway line, and also tore up a large portion of the railway line.

The wires and fittings for the repair of the railway telephone system were stored in Cappoquin Railway Goods Store. Our Company I.O. had arranged for an empty wagon to be left at the Goods Store door and, with the aid of some local Volunteers, the stuff was to be loaded into this wagon and then to attach the wagon to the rear of 5.40 p.m. goods train. The train was then to be halted near the Finnisk river where the stuff was to be dumped.

This plan also went for nought because some of the other Volunteers, without our knowledge, had taken it on themselves to raid a loyalist house named Wyses for guns, and the consequent enemy activity necessitated the calling off of the destruction of the telephone equipment.

(III) When I had been at Brigade Headquarters, the O.C. (Pax Whelan) informed me that on a few occasions a suspicious looking character had been observed in the vicinity of the Dispatch Centre, and from some information subsequently gathered it was thought he was from Cappoquin. After suspicion had been aroused the fellow had not turned up again, for it was intended if he did to arrest him. I got his description and on my return to the local Company I was satisfied as a result of enquiries that this individual was an ex-soldier, named Ryall, whose family, and especially his sisters, were very friendly with the Tans.

On my return to the Column I was questioned by the Column Leader, George Lennon, as to the possibility of an engagement with the Cappoquin Tans. I explained to him about Ryall and suggested he would be arrested as a bait for the Tans. He agreed and sent four of us - Patrick Kenneally, Kelly Donovan, Jack O'Brien and myself from Doon (near Ballinamult) to Cappoquin area to arrest Ryall. We got in touch with the local Company to put out scouts and report to us if Ryall was seen. After waiting for quite awhile no information was forthcoming, so we decided to enter the town and try and arrest him there. With the aid of two of the local Cumann na mBan - Fanny Lincoln and Miss D. McGrath - we approached the rear of the town near the

Convent. The girls had informed us that a patrol of R.I.C. and Tans, which had been around town, had returned to barracks, with the exception of one Tan who was very drunk and was still knocking around. We had a scout posted in a friendly house near Ryalls who was to report to us but failed to do so.

It was about 11 p.m. when we entered the town. I was scouting in Shanbally direction and Paddy Kenneally was about two hundred yards from me watching another direction, while O'Brien and Kelly Donovan knocked at Ryall's door and the mother, who answered the door, became suspicious and Ryall, himself, who was inside refused to come out and he ran upstairs. The mother and daughters then created an awful hullabaloo and could be heard all over the town. I ran down then towards the house and on observing Ryall at the upstairs window I fired from my revolver and shattered the window. This led to further commotion and we had to skip off without getting our man. Had we waited even a few minutes longer we would have got the drunken Tan, for apparently on hearing the shot and commotion he quickly soberised and ran down at the double, but unfortunately we had left, for even if we did not shoot him we would have brought him with us a prisoner.

JULY, 1921.

July 4th, 1921.

On July 4th the Column was in the vicinity of Cappagh and, on information being received of a troop train due to pass, decided to attack it. A very heavy barrage of shots was fired into the train, but I am unable to say what casualties were

July 9th, 1921.

A large detachment of military arrived in Cappoquin on July 9th, and Tom Lincoln, the I.O., obtained information that the enemy were commencing a big round-up. Tom Lincoln conveyed this information to the Column, which was then billeted in Ballintaylor district. On receipt of this information the Column Leader assembled all the men and at 2 a.m. moved to Ballinamult. On our arrival in Ballinamult area a party of troops also arrived there. I was sent back to Cappoquin by George Lennon to ascertain if these were the same troops which had been in Cappoquin. I returned to the Column later that night, having found out that these were the same troops. We then left for the Nire Valley and after going some miles were informed that troops from Clonmel were active in the Nire district. We then made an about turn and went on to Melleray district, reaching there on Sunday, July 10th, where we remained until Tuesday, July 12th, when we disbanded.

SIGNATURE:

Tom. Kelleher

(Tom Kelleher)

DATE:

4th Dec 52.

WITNESSED BY:

Thomas Halpin

LIEUT.-COLONEL.

(Thomas Halpin)

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