

U.S. 785

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRE MILITIA 1913-21

No. W.S. 785

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 785.....

Witness

Daniel Browne,
Thomastown,
Charleville,
Co. Cork.

Identity.

Lieut. Meelin Coy. Newmarket Bt'n. Cork Brigade;
Member, Brigade A.S.U. Cork IV Brigade;
Q.M., 2nd (Newmarket) Bn., A.S.U. Cork IV Brigade.
Adjutant, 2nd (Newmarket) Bn. Cork IV Brigade.

Subject.

- (a) Cork IV Brigade, 1917-1921;
- (b) Ambush at Rathmore, Co. ~~Enniskerry~~ Kerry,
April 1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No.S.2098.....

Form B.S.M. 2

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STATEMENTBYMR. DAN BROWNE,THOMASTOWN, CHARLEVILLE.FORMERLY OFMEELIN, NEWMARKET, CO. CORK.

I was born near the remote village of Meelin, five miles North of Newmarket, Co. Cork, in the year 1888. I had for schoolmates the late Paddy McCarthy, the hero of the Mallow Barrack capture (September, 1920), also M.B. McAuliffe, who was Secretary of North Cork Executive of Sinn Féin, 1917-1921, and later Registrar of North Cork District Courts, 1919-1921. I had also for a pal and companion a youth of the parish, Michael O'Sullivan, who was later O.C. of the Battalion and O.C. 2nd Battalion and A.S.U., Cork IV Brigade, and it was from his inspirations and convictions that I helped him form a small section of Volunteers in 1917. This little village was, in January, 1921, to witness one of the worst British reprisals, the first official use of incendiary bombs used by the British military after the ambush of a Black and Tan raiding party while carrying out a raid on my father's house.

This ambush, in which about 50 I.R.A. took part, was planned by M. O'Sullivan, S. Moylan and self, and it was expected to take place early in the day, January 4th, and the Column had withdrawn from their positions and new positions had to be hurriedly taken up on a different road when a party of three lorries of military unexpectedly turned up in the evening, and though we inflicted casualties

without capturing any arms, however, some of the cars got through and returned with reinforcements and burned and sacked the village. This was also the first day of the British Government decree that the penalty for carrying arms was death, and Con Murphy of Millstreet, who was arrested at his father's house on that day, paid this penalty.

Here is the list of official burnings and reprisals carried out after the Meelin ambush by the British military: Mrs. M. Browne, Farmer (widow), dwelling-house completely demolished. Herself and her daughter had to be forcibly removed as she refused to leave her house; John Browne, farmer, had his dwelling-house, out offices, corn, etc., completely burned out; Timothy Murphy, Blacksmith - dwelling-house burned out; Mrs. Quinlan, Shopkeeper - house burned; Timothy Curtin, Stone-Cutter - house completely burned out; Denis O'Callaghan, farmer - vacant dwelling-house partly bombed. The place was such after these reprisals that Madam Gonne McBride and several other members of the White Cross arrived on the scene a few days after, and photos of the burning appeared on the Press later.

It is here worthy of note that although on the day the ambush took place, after the raid on my father's home and before the ambush, one of the party asked another how many gallons of stuff did they want to burn him out, the house was never touched nor entered by the military during the reprisal.

Before I leave my native village, I'd like to give the background history of it. In the days of the White Boys,

a family of Cotters lived there, who were members of the White Boys organisation of that period. One night when 'on the run' I called at the house of one of the descendants - a Cotter, too. Before going to bed the old man of the house showed me a trap door inside in a cupboard and leading to the roof, and told me if there would be a raid to open this door and, said he, "You will be as safe up there among the rafters as the old White Boys were long ago". Nobody only myself ever knew of this and, though I often stayed in the house, I never had occasion to use it.

The village and country around after the White Boys' period was a scene of stirring events during the Land League. The then young Curate, Fr. Kennedy, organised the whole parish and whenever or wherever a meeting was held a party of horsemen, called the Meelin Cavalry, always protected it from the "Peelers", and wholesale arrests were the order of the day.

Later (1910-1916) the parish got divided into two Camps - one a Redmondite and the other O'Brienite. Owing to the fact that a member of the Cork County Council was a large farmer in the parish and a pro-Redmondite, or a Molly Maguire as they were then known, his following was much stronger than the O'Brienite party. Feeling always ran high at Election time, as the O'Brienites had always a candidate elected M.P., named Guiney, a Kanturk man. Barry was the local County Councillor, and you had always a party following either Barry or Guiney. This was the position up to 1916 and for a short time after until in 1917 Seán Moylan and M.B. McAuliffe started Sinn Féin in the parish. I remember that

the first response was very small; although there were plenty of young men in the parish (over 100 men enrolled in 1918 when Conscription hung over them) none paid heed to the new Movement; indeed there were very few who would part from their respective party - if you did not belong to Barry's or Guiney's you did not count at all.

Still, with about a dozen Sinn Féiners, as we were known then, we kept going. We had an empty house for Club meeting and one night the local Sergeant, Sergeant Scott, (afterwards transferred to Carrigtwohill,) ~~was~~, thought to get in to see what we were doing. We refused admittance and this led to a baton charge by the local R.I.C. For a time a few of us had to keep out of home at night; they dare not arrest in the daytime, but if the young men did not join us neither did they join the British Army. A Recruiting Agent, Saunders by name, from Charleville thought to hold a meeting but we saw to it that only a few attended and only about three joined up in the whole parish. On the night before the meeting slogans such as "No Partition" - "No Home Rule" - "No Recruiting" - "Join the Volunteers" - were hung from the village telegraph poles.

Early 1918 saw a good few joining up the Volunteers. We had changed over from Sinn Féin, though we still held Sinn Féin meetings. We now started drilling the new Volunteers. As we had no guns we used brush handles and hurleys for the purpose. Soon we began to attract attention, especially as the R.I.C. kept an eye on us. Immediately Conscription was in the air, Priests and people, Barryites

and Guineyites, flocked to the ranks of the Volunteers, and let me say straight - never was there a better or tougher body of men put together in one parish; only a few of those who joined the Volunteers then ever dropped out until the Truce.

It was necessary now to appoint Officers over the men, and it was decided to leave it to a vote of the Volunteer Company, and, although my friend and comrade - M. O'Sullivan - did all the work up to then, a new Captain was elected, Dan Bourke, a fearless man who did his work well. He, Bourke, resigned in 1919 for family reasons from the Volunteers and M. O'Sullivan was once more made Company O.C.

From 1918 to 1920 the Meelin Volunteers drilled once a week, held parades openly, collected arms and shotguns from the few that were in the parish; some were given voluntarily, others had to be taken. Here is proof of the change the Volunteers made and the discipline shown by its members. As the local County Councillor had a shotgun, revolver and .22 rook rifle which he refused to hand up, it was decided that a few of us should raid the house and take them. One of the first to volunteer to do the job was his (Barry, County Councillor) greatest follower and supporter a few months before. We raided for the arms and took them.

Before I leave the Meelin Company, I want to pay tribute to the O.C. of that Company, 1920-1921 - Philip Curtin - who succeeded Michael Sullivan when he volunteered for Active Service with the Brigade Column in September, 1920.

Philip Curtin kept the Company together and spared himself neither time nor trouble, and many was the time when the A.S.U. was in his Company area. He was there with men to guard them, and when an engagement outside his area was arranged he had his men there and took part in these engagements and had to return to take up the duties of the Company and had to be 'on the run' the whole time.

In September, 1920, I joined the Brigade A.S.U. - Liam Lynch's Column. It was decided at Brigade meeting in August, 1920, to form this Brigade Column, and Battalion O.Cs were requested to get a few men from each Battalion to volunteer for active service; if possible, men already 'on the run'. The Brigade was then 4th Brigade and our Battalion (Newmarket) 2nd Battalion. M. O'Sullivan and I were both 'on the run' at the time and volunteered from the Meelin Company; Paddy McCarthy, whom I mentioned was a Meelin man who had gone to live with his Aunt in Freemount since he was 16 years and at this time was on the run after his escape from Manchester Prison (October, 1919) had already joined the Brigade Column as its Q.M. near Mallow. That made three men from Meelin Parish as A.S. men in the Brigade Unit; another from the 2nd Battalion was Dan Vaughan; from Millstreet Battalion Seán Healy, P. Healy; from Charleville Battalion Paddy O'Brien and Tom Coughlan; from Fermoy Battalion Danny Shinnick, Jim O'Neill and Jer. O'Donovan. Then there were already in the A.S.U. George Power, G. Lennon, together with Ernie O'Malley, and with Liam Lynch as O.C. Jim Brislane and Pad John O'Brien joined the Column before the Mallow Barrack attack. I arrived with

P. O'Erien, D. Vaughan and M. O'Sullivan about the middle of September, 1920. The Column was then stationed at or near Burnfort and arms drill and bayonet exercise was the daily routine.

Our first ambush position was near Bartlemy village and the wires were cut to draw out the R.I.C. but nothing happened.

We had another ambush position near Fermoy with the same results.

On September 28th, 12 men of the Column were selected to rush the Military Barracks at Mallow. Willis, Bolster and P. McCarthy were already inside. O'Malley rushed the sentry. /P. O'Brien and I were on his heels. Inside the Barrack my job was to collect equipment from the rooms. On the second storey one room was occupied by an Officer and the door locked when O'Malley and I forced the door and marched the Officer out to the other prisoners who were under Tom Coughlan. Had this Officer been armed he could have shot down our men from the top window.

After walking into Mallow to the Town Hall the previous night and then out to Burnfort after the raid we drilled as usual that day and O'Malley said we could now call ourselves the North Cork Lancers. (There was a British military regiment in North Cork called the North Cork Militia at one time). Soon after the Column came to Cooleen, near Charleville, for further drill and exercise.

About 10th October the Brigade Column ambushed two military provision supply cars close to Kanturk

Liam Lynch,

(Ballydrochane). After taking their arms and ammunition we had to retreat quickly as reinforcements were near - one mile from Kanturk. There were a few casualties on the British side.

On November 20th, 1920, some of the Brigade Column took part in a fierce engagement with drunken Black and Tans who were wrecking the town of Millstreet. No previous arrangements were made - O'Malley and Liam Lynch were gone to G.H.Q. and we only got word a short time before we went into positions that the Tans were on the move about the town. Con McCarthy and I were placed at a gateway to enfilade the street. Paddy McCarthy and Tom Coughlan were nearby in an archway. Soon after fire was opened on the Tans: the street was empty and poor Paddy McCarthy - my boyhood friend and comrade - was shot dead in a nearby archway (the casualties of the Tans were not known). His body was taken to a farmhouse at Gurtareha and was buried two nights after at Kilcorahan graveyard near Kanturk.

Soon after the Millstreet ambush the Brigade A.S.U. was divided out, each Battalion member to return and form a Battalion A.S.U., as there was now sufficient arms captured to arm at least 5 Battalion Squads, as we were now called. My old comrade - M. O'Sullivan - of 1917 days in Meelin was appointed O.C. 2nd Battalion, A.S.U., and I was made Quartermaster of the same Unit. The others were: Bill O'Keefe, Johnny Jones, Dan Vaughan, Con Murley, Davy McAuliffe, Tom McNamara, Jim Cashman, Jim Reardon, Bill Moylan, Denis Galvin, Denis Mullane, Jack Dwane, Dan Reardon, Jack Cronin, Willie Barrett and Tom McNamara.

On 4th March, 1921, after waiting in ambush position for two or three days at the Bower, near Killarney, the Battalion Columns retreated to Clonbannin and attacked an armoured car, three lorries and a touring car. The armoured car, after colliding with the touring car, opened fire with a Lewis Gun and a Vickers. From my position, with J. Jones and J. Cash, we had full view of the occupants of the touring car as they jumped out and opened fire. After prolonged fighting with the enemy Seán Moylan came up to our position and ordered our retreat as our position was now too exposed. As we crossed the road we were raked with machine gun fire. Another few minutes delay and we would have to fight our way out. The only arms from this ambush was a neat silver plated small revolver dropped by General Cummins when he was shot. It was trodden into the mud and found by a woman a few days after and was given to the late Denis Galvin.

There is one ambush which was carried out so successfully - only one Tan escaped out of ten, with all arms captured - that I would like to recall here, especially as only a very small party of I.R.A. took part, and, although followed all day by military and aeroplanes, we got safely away.

Early in the morning in April, 1921, Denis Galvin, with a few of the Kerry A.S.U., assembled with Manus Moynihan, Denis Batt Cronin, Con Murley, Dan Vaughan, M. O'Sullivan, Bill Keeffe, Jim Cashman, Johnny Jones, Dan Reardon, James Reardon, myself and about four or five more locals. Denis Galvin and the Kerry lads had a spy,

who was executed, laid on the road about a mile from Rathmore. It was expected that when the Black and Tans would hear about this spy they would send out a few of their men to confirm the report and we could hold them up and disarm them. There was no hope of capturing their Barracks as it was too exposed to be surrounded. We took up positions on either side of the road where the spy was put. There was no cover at this point only banks of bog. Soon after day breaking we took up positions so as not to be seen by passers by. After some time the first person to come along was a girl with an ass and creamery car going to the creamery. As soon as she saw the spy and read the sign on his chest - "Spies beware" - she turned her car around but after going a few yards she changed her mind and drove quickly towards Rathmore. About an hour after we were surprised to see about nine or ten Tans coming straight out in extended order covering a good distance on either side of the road. Only one man was to be seen on the road and this man reached the spy long before his pals were within call. It was afterwards learned that they thought the spy was only a decoy and they came prepared. Now, after inspecting the spy, the man in the road was convinced that everything was alright and as he could see nothing suspicious he blew his whistle and all his men came on the spot together to view the dead body and we opened fire. Of course, they were at our mercy and could do nothing, but we, too, would be at their mercy if we attempted to disarm them. In a few minutes the whole lot were wiped out, all but one, who remained to protect their rear. As soon as fire was opened he made

for his Barracks and before we were gone very far reinforcements were after us all day long; finally we got clear away. We captured nine rifles and all the ammunition.

In May, 1921, West Limerick asked our assistance to attack a patrol of military that used come out every Sunday morning to tear down I.R.A. posters. About ten of our Column met Jim Collins and more of the West Limerick Column and entered houses in the town of Abbeyfeale during the night. In the morning the patrol came out as usual and we opened fire. One policeman was shot dead and his rifle captured. Others were wounded but escaped into the Barracks.

June saw us using the road mines successfully for the first time. From the wood in Rathcoole we blew up a convoy of British military cadets who were travelling in armour plated lorries to and from Kanturk to Millstreet. Here we had a prolonged fight as the Auxies got out and fought until most of them were casualties, but, as reinforcements were expected, a retreat was ordered and no arms or stuff were captured.

On the days preceding the Truce we had over a hundred Column men under arms, besides the local Volunteers, waiting to ambush a convoy between Newcastlewest and Abbeyfeale. The road was mined but up to 12 noon as no convoy came the attack was called off in accordance with the terms of the Truce.

As Dan Vaughan and a few others were taking up the mines the expected convoy came along, but though they

pulled up and wanted to disarm us eventually they, too, said they would respect the Truce. They asked us to exchange souvenirs. It was the first time, some of them said, that they saw 'the armed Paddies'.

There is just one thing I would like to recall here and that is at the Turengarriff ambush, January, 1921, when Major G. Holmes was shot dead. Someone shouted "Up Moylan". Reported in the press a few days after it was put down as "Up Meelin", and Meelin got a lot more attention after that. Raid after raid was taking place there and further reprisals threatened.

In October, 1921, the then Registrar of the North Cork Republican District Court, M.B. McAuliffe, was called to Dublin and I was asked to take over his duties in the Court, which at that time was crowded out with legal cases. One sitting at Lismire lasted a whole week and a hundred cases were disposed of. I held this position as Registrar of the North Cork District Court until the Civil War broke out on 1st July, 1922.

RANK HELD AT THE TRUCE.

I was a member of the I.R.B. and in the I.R.A. I held the rank of Adjutant, 2nd Battalion, Cork No. 4 Brigade, at the time of the Truce, in succession to William Barrett who was arrested in May, 1921.

Other men in our Battalion area who deserve mention here and who were always ready to participate in every engagement were Dan Corbett and Dan Flynn of Kiskeam, Joe Kenneally and Paddy (Bawn) O'Connor of Newmarket,

Tom Herlihy, Kingwilliamstown, Tade Galvin and Mike Murphy of Taur, Tade Coughlan and Dave Curtin of Rockchapel, Bob Keane and Jer. Brennan of Freemount, Johnny Linehan and Maurice Noonan of Tullylease, Con Kennedy, Con McAuliffe and Con Brennan of Meelin.

If there are other names not mentioned here, and I am sure there are, it is because they have slipped my memory for the moment.

Signed: *Daniel Browne*
(Dan Browne)

Witnessed: *C. Saurin* LT. COLONEL
(C. Saurin)

Date: 17-1-53.
17.1.53.

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