

W.S. 946

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
W.S. 946

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. **W.S.** 946.....

Witness

Patrick Clifford,
The Demesne,
Mitchelstown,
Co. Cork.

Identity.

Section Commander
Mitchelstown Company Irish Volunteers,
1917-1922.

Subject.

Mitchelstown Company, Irish Volunteers,
1917-1922.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. **S.2253**.....

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Statement by Patrick Clifford,

The Demesne, Mitchelstown.

Section Commander Mitchelstown Company Irish Volunteers

and

Appellant to House of Lords in case of death sentence

imposed by Military Court.

I was born in Ballyarthur, Mitchelstown, on the 15th February, 1900. My parents were farmers.

I joined the Mitchelstown Company of the Irish Volunteers about June, 1917. The Company was, at that time, attached to the Galtee Battalion. The officers of the Company, who were elected by the members, were:

Captain - Michael Sullivan

1st Lt. - Seán Keane

2nd Lt. - Tommie De La Rue.

The strength of the Company was about 40. The usual training and weekly parades were held. A weekly subscription of 2d. per member was collected and placed in an Arms Fund.

During the Conscription scare in 1918 large numbers joined the Company, and the strength increased to about 150 at one stage. Many of those who joined at that time took no further part in the movement when the Conscription scare had passed and the strength of the unit fell to about 60.

All members of the Company took part in the work of the General Election in December, 1918. Approximately

ten members of the local Volunteers were sent to Waterford to help to keep order during the by-election in March of that year, and again at the time of the General Election. The Volunteers in general assisted in every possible way in the work of the Sinn Féin Club.

About November, 1919, when Cork 11 Brigade was organised by Liam Lynch the Mitchelstown Company was detached from the Galtee Battalion and became a unit of this Brigade. On the change-over a fresh election of officers took place and resulted as follows:

Captain - Dan O'Keefe

1st Lt. - Mossie Walshe

2nd Lt. - Paddy Luddy.

Following the re-organisation the strength of the Company increased to nearly 100 and the members became more active, engaging in the collection of arms (shot-guns, ammunition, etc.). I took part in a number of these raids for arms, including one on the gamekeeper of Kingston Demesne, Mitchelstown, where I now reside as a tenant. I think it only fair to state that in most cases arms and ammunition were surrendered voluntarily in this area.

About this time we were also engaged in enforcing the Belfast boycott. On one occasion I was instructed by Dan O'Keefe, Company O/C, to pose as a workman for the Steward of Kingston Demesne and to collect seeds and other goods from the railway station where they had arrived from Belfast. I obtained the goods from the railway authorities and destroyed them in accordance with instructions.

Some of the R.I.C. from Mitchelstown were at this time giving evidence in Cork about some of the Volunteers who had been arrested for the Wesleyan raid in Fermoy on 7th September, 1919. It was decided to shoot them, and for this purpose I proceeded to Ballindangan railway station one evening in mid June, 1920, when they were expected to return on a train from Cork. I was accompanied by my brother (Jerry Clifford), Mossie Walsh and Jimmie Walsh. This job was arranged by Mossie Walsh who was Company Lieutenant. The R.I.C. men were not, however, on the train. We were armed with shot guns.

In August, 1920, it was customary for a patrol of Black and Tans stationed at Galbally to visit Mitchelstown at irregular intervals. The unit was known locally as the Galbally patrol. The officer in charge of this bunch was known as "Shaky Head". The patrol usually travelled by cycle and in extended order. Although they numbered only about 12 they were often extended over a distance of about 800 yards. It was decided to ambush this party, and in company with my brother Jerry, Leo Skinner, Paddy Luddy, Tim Luddy, Liam Walsh, Mossie Walsh, Dave Walsh, William J. Ryan, Tom Coleman and two others whose names I can't remember, we took up positions about two miles from Mitchelstown on the Limerick road. I was armed with a shotgun, as were most of the others, but we had 3 rifles with 3 rounds of ammunition for each. We took up ambush position about 6.30 p.m. and remained until 11.30 p.m., when a report was received that the patrol had returned to Galbally via the Kilbehenny road. We then withdrew from our positions.

In September, 1920, two members of the Company - Mossie Walsh and Jerry Clifford - were sent to Mallow to take part in the raid on Mallow Barracks.

The Battalion Column was formed about this time. Tom Barry (Glanworth) was the Column O/C. I was anxious to join the Column but would not be permitted to do so by the Battalion O/C as I had to care a dump of arms and ammunition. This dump was built on a portion of my parents' farm at Ballyarthur. The dump was arranged as follows: A suitable wooden box was prepared, painted, greased, etc. and was built into the fence. The open end of the box was practically in line with the edge of the fence at a gap - the opening being closed by a stone of suitable size. The gap was then blocked with whitethorn bushes etc. which could be replaced after anything had been removed from or replaced in the dump and would obliterate all marks made by anyone working in the vicinity.

When the Battalion Column came into the area in December, 1920, to carry out the Glenacurrane ambush in conjunction with the East Limerick Column under Donnchadh Hannigan, I took part in the engagement. I was armed with a shotgun and 6/7 cartridges loaded with buckshot. We took up positions about 9 a.m. on the day of the ambush. Shortly after this a touring car and a Lancia car, both containing military, passed through the ambush position on their way from Tipperary to Fermoy. There was no other movement of enemy troops through the position until about 4.30 p.m. that evening when the same party passed into the position on the return journey. Advance notice of

their coming was signalled by scouts on the Mitchelstown side of the ambush position, and when the enemy were about to enter the line of fire the road was blocked by felling a tree.

The riflemen and Hotchkiss gunners then opened fire on the cars which were in the centre of the ambush position. Two of the military were killed and a number were wounded. The remainder of the party surrendered when called upon to do so. We collected the rifles (15 I think) and a box of bombs. We then set fire to the cars. I did not fire any shot in this ambush as the enemy did not reach the position in which I was. I was in position behind a fence about 50 yards from the road and on the opposite side of the road to the main body of the attacking party.

The enemy strength in this engagement was, I think, 15 - all armed with rifles. The officer in charge also had a revolver. Our party consisted of the Battalion Column (20), East Limerick Column (about 20) and four local Volunteers armed with shot guns. The names of the locals were: Tom Coleman, Paddy Clifford (witness), Wm. J. Ryan and Dave Walsh.

When the scrap was over I collected all the shotguns. As it was too dangerous to approach the dump at the time (because I did not know what moment military re-inforcements would reach the area from Kilworth etc.) I hid them in a ditch until the following night when I put them in the dump.

About early March, 1921, it was decided to ambush a patrol of R.I.C. and Black and Tans in the town of Mitchelstown. I received orders from the Company O/C (Dan

O'Keefe) to bring into Mitchelstown all arms and any suitable ammunition which I had in the dump. I brought in four rifles and five shotguns with about six rounds of ammunition for each rifle and about one dozen shotgun cartridges, loaded with buckshot, for each shotgun.

I dumped the arms and ammunition close to the position at Cahir Hill which had been selected for the ambush. This would be about 7 p.m. We took up ambush positions at about 8 p.m. and remained until close on midnight but the patrol did not turn up. I then had all arms returned to the dump. The following were with me on this occasion: Leo Skinner, Paddy Luddy, Tim Luddy, Wm. Roche, Dave Walsh, Dan Coleman, Wm. J. Ryan, Jack O'Neill, Mick Dunne and Dan O'Keefe who was in charge.

On the 23rd April, 1921, when I was a Section Commander in Mitchelstown Company I received a despatch from the Battalion Vice O/C (P.J. Luddy) instructing me to arrange for the destruction of Ballygiblin Bridge that night. All available Volunteers were notified by me to report to Ballygiblin Church that night at 9 p.m. Suitable instructions were also issued regarding the supply of the necessary tools (crowbars, pickaxes, etc.) and Volunteers in possession of arms were instructed to bring them along.

Accompanied by Michael O'Sullivan (Volunteer) I left Mitchelstown about 8 p.m. We cycled in the direction of Ballygiblin. About $1\frac{1}{4}$ miles outside the town on the Ballyporeen road we ran into an ambush of military who were lining the roadside fences just round a bend in the road. This party had apparently left their lorries and armoured car just before we reached the spot because they

had seen some people moving through the fields. I heard afterwards that the party in the fields were some Volunteers on their way to the meeting place who had heard the lorries coming and had taken to the fields. Both O'Sullivan and myself were armed. I had a .38 revolver with 4 rounds and he had a .32 automatic with 5 rounds. Before we could get off the cycles we were seized.

We were then handcuffed, placed in separate armoured cars and taken to Mitchelstown R.I.C. Barracks where we were thoroughly searched. We were then taken under military escort to Fermoy where we were held for about a week, when we were moved to the Detention Barracks, Cork, on May 1st 1921. We were tried by courtmartial on 3rd May, 1921, on a charge of being in possession of arms and were sentenced to death. We were defended at the courtmartial by Mr. J.J. Skinner, Solicitor, Mitchelstown.

When we were informed that we had been sentenced to death O'Sullivan arranged with a warder (military) in the Detention Barracks to send a telegram to our solicitor informing him of the sentence. This was done and Mr. Skinner travelled to Cork that day. When he called at the barracks and informed the officer-in-charge that he had received a telegram from the prisoners the news was, I believe, received with consternation. The authorities were unable to understand how prisoners under sentence of death could communicate with their solicitor except through official channels.

I have no recollection of meeting Mr. Skinner after I was sentenced to death but I think he saw O'Sullivan.

Mr. Skinner applied for a conditional order of habeas corpus on our behalf. This was granted but was refused on appeal. The case was then taken to the House of Lords and continued until the Truce. As far as I can recollect we were given to understand that while the Truce lasted our lives would be safe but if hostilities broke out again we would be executed.

I was released from prison about mid February 1922.

Signed: Patrick Clifford
(Patrick Clifford)

Date: 1st May 1954
1st May 1954.

Witness: Phil O'Donnell
(Phil O'Donnell)

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