

W. S. 967

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRE MILITIA 1913-21
No. W.S. 967

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 967

Witness

John (Jack) Lynch,
Listowel,
Co. Kerry.

Identity.

Member of Kilflynny Coy. Irish Vol's Co. Kerry,
1913 - ;

Lieut. Lixnaw Coy. Irish Vol's. Co. Kerry, 1917 - .

Subject.

Kilflynny and Lixnaw Irish Volunteers,
Co. Kerry, 1913-19 21.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

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Statement by Mr. John (Jack) Lynch, ex T.D.

Listowel, County Kerry.

I was born in Kilflynn, Stack's Mountain, in the year 1891. I went to the local National School until I was 15 years of age.

I first joined the Volunteers at Kilflynn when they were first formed there in the year 1913. Two men, ex-British soldiers named Collins and Sheehy, were the drill instructors. The strength of the Company was about 100 men. About August, 1914 our two drill instructors as well as a number of men in the Company were called up as they were on the British Army Reserve. This, as well as Redmond's call on the Volunteers to defend the shores of Ireland, was the cause of the breaking up of the Company and it ceased to exist.

It was not until early 1917, that the Volunteers were reorganised at Lixnaw, Lixnaw. I and a few other men in the area had got into touch with members of a Volunteer Company which had been in existence in Tralee for some time previously, so we decided to reorganise the Lixnaw Company. Our first Company Captain was Tom Shanahan. I was 1st Lieutenant and Paddy Mangan was 2nd Lieutenant. The Company strength then was about 80 men. We had regular parades and drill instruction. Our arms at the time consisted of two rifles and a few shotguns. On occasions we had a practice shot with the rifles.

In 1918 at the time of Conscription we got into the Company all the available men in the area and the strength increased to about 110 men. We had by now about six revolvers, the two rifles as well as a large number of shotguns. After the Conscription scare things became slack and attendances at meetings and parades dropped considerably. The General Election took place at the end of the year but as the

Sinn Fein candidate, Jim Crowley, was returned unopposed the Company took no part in the election.

When the Dail Loan was floated in 1919, I, with the most active members of the Company, in co-operation with members of the Sinn Fein Club, made a collection for the Loan in the area. Later in the year I took part in the establishment of the Sinn Fein or Republican Courts.

In 1920 we continued weekly parades. In the March of this year there was an I.R.A. attack on Ballybunion R.I.C. barracks. I, with other members of the Lixnaw Company were detailed to take up positions adjacent to the road between Lixnaw and Ballybunion to prevent reinforcements being sent to the Ballybunion R.I.C. barracks. I was armed with a revolver and shotgun. The other men of the Lixnaw Company had either shotguns or revolvers. No reinforcements were, however, sent from Lixnaw and after a couple of hours we were dismissed.

About a month after the attack on Ballybunion R.I.C. barracks, the Battalion staff decided to capture and burn down the local R.I.C. barracks. Tom Shanahan was in charge. The R.I.C. in the barracks which was a wooden hut, numbered six men. It had been decided that the attacking I.R.A. would occupy the Parish Hall next door to the Barracks on a Saturday night and that on the following Monday morning while the most of the R.I.C. were at Church that it would be a simple matter to rush into the barracks and overpower the one or two men on duty.

I, with about twelve men of the Company, assembled in the Parish Hall on the Saturday night as arranged. The next morning all but two of the R.I.C. went out to Church. This left one R.I.C. man only

on guard while another one, who was friendly to us and who had been on duty the night before, was in bed. Shortly after the R.I.C. had gone to Church, the man on duty at the barracks happened to go out into the yard of the barracks. He saw us as we made for the door and succeeded in reaching it and chaining it before we got there. Before the end of that week this barracks was evacuated by the R.I.C. The nearest R.I.C. barracks to Lixnaw was now at Ahabeg three miles from Lixnaw.

The R.I.C. at Ahabeg were reinforced by a number of Tans in the month of May or June of 1920. With these Tans the total strength was about ten men. A patrol of six of these R.I.C. and Tans usually called to Lixnaw P.O. for the mails. The Company Captain and other officers of the Company decided to hold up and capture the arms of this patrol. The practice of the Tans was for three men to go to the Post Office and collect the mails, while the other three went into a nearby pub and waited for the three collecting the mail to rejoin them in the pub.

It had been arranged that we should first of all overpower the three Tans first into the pub, and having put them out of the way for the time being, to await the three Tans with the mails to come in and treat them in a similar fashion.

On the 26th July, 1920, thirteen I.R.A. in charge of Tom Sharahan went into this particular pub. armed with revolvers and shotguns. Seven I.R.A. including myself were detailed to overpower the three Tans as they passed through the pub. to a backroom. In another pub on the opposite side of the street a further six I.R.A. armed with either shotguns or revolvers were placed in case of anything going wrong in our pub. They had instructions to open fire on the Tans only if they had escaped from the pub where we were.

As the first three Tans were about to enter the Pub as usual, one of our men in the Pub opposite accidentally discharged a shot through the roof with a result that the I.R.A. in the Pub opposite decided there and then to open fire on the three Tans about to enter the Pub where we were awaiting them. Two of the Tans were wounded. Tom Shanahan gave the order to get out the backway at once. Seven of our men succeeded in making good their escape, but the other five men and myself were caught in the fire of the three Tans who were collecting the mail. We succeeded in crossing a wall at the back of the Pub and took cover in a shed on the other side of the wall. After a while the firing ceased, so we decided, still armed, to return to the Pub.

After about ten minutes the two wounded Tans came into the Pub. They brought in with them a shot gun, rifle and a bandolier full of .303 ammunition. They threw their arms on the ground and the ammunition on a table. We immediately dressed their wounds while they complained about the "Shinners" having wounded them. One of our men immediately seized the ammunition and the two hats of the Tans and took the lot outside where he hid it. All this time we retained our revolvers. Shortly afterwards the other four Tans came into the Pub and questioned us as to what we were doing. We apparently satisfied their curiosity and they also complained about the "Shinners" having fired on them. They asked us to have a drink which we accepted. In the meantime one of the Tans returned to the Post Office and 'phoned for the military. When he returned he told us he had sent for the military and asked us to wait and they would escort us to our homes. This we ~~declined~~ ^{declined} and left immediately in case the military came along.

In this encounter I received a flesh wound in the leg from a ricochet bullet while I was taking cover in the shed. Soon afterwards my home was raided by the Tans. I then had to go on the 'run'.

All during the year 1920 I took part in road-trenching, felling trees and cutting of telegraph lines to prevent the passage of military lorries from one place to another.

On the 31st October, 1920, I took part in an attack on Sallyduff R.I.C. barracks. There was no detailed plan of attack. It was just a case of letting the Tans know that we were in the vicinity. In all about 30 men of the Lixnaw Company, in charge of Tom Shanahan, were concerned. We were armed with rifles, revolvers or shotguns. I was armed with a rifle.

When we had taken up positions in the street adjacent to the barracks, two Tans came out of a Pub further down the street. As they proceeded towards the barracks they were fired on by one or two of our men. They ran for the barracks immediately. One of them fell before he got to the door but he picked himself up and managed, together with his companion, to get inside.

After this we opened fire at random on the barracks for a period of half an hour. We had not much ammunition and did not want to waste the little we had. The Tans in the barracks returned the fire immediately, which they kept up for over an hour.

In January, 1921, the Flying Column for North Kerry was formed. Tom Shanahan, Paddy Mangan, Paddy Dunne and myself of the Lixnaw Company were in it from the start.

From the first day we mobilised, the Tans were hot on our trail. It was evident that they were well informed of our movements and that the person or persons supplying the information was someone in close touch with the I.R.A.

In all there were 30 men in the Column. Tom Kennelly was O/C. We mobilised at Duagh. After one night there we received word that the Tans were on their way to Duagh. We left immediately for Derk four miles from Duagh. Derk was a lonely place between two hills. Soon after we had left Duagh the Tans arrived there, so we decided to leave Derk and made for Glashnoon. Then we proceeded to Rathea where we stayed for one night and then left for Glenalema. We rested for a while at Glenalema and then proceeded to Stack's Mountain. At about 3 o'clock in the morning our scouts reported that they had seen the lights of about fifty motor cars and lorries proceeding along the road from Tralee to Listowel. The O.C. and men of the Column were of the opinion that these cars and lorries, which of course were Military and Tans, were about to surround Stack's Mountain and come up behind us. The O.C. then ordered the Column to retreat back to Glenalema as it was considered that we would have a chance of escape from there.

It so happened that they were not intent on surrounding us in Stack's Mountain. They made for Rathea which we had left one day earlier. In Rathea they searched the countryside and subjected the people living in the area to a very tough time.

We left Glenalema that morning and made for ~~Dysart~~^{DYBERT} near Lixnaw. We stayed in ~~Dysart~~^{DYBERT} for one night and next day crossed the River Feale to Ballyowneen. From this day the Tans appeared to lose track of our movements. In all this travelling it is obvious that the Tans and Military were well informed of our movements.

On the Sunday after the shooting of D.I. O'Sullivan at Listowel on the 20th January, 1921, most of the Column returned to Duagh. As the River Feale was in flood at the time, all of the Column did not reach Duagh this Sunday night, but on the following day all of the 30 men of the Column reported.

Sometime in February, 1921, we were located at Cahard when our scouts informed us that the Tans and Military were filling in trenches which had been cut in the road at Gunsboro about three miles from the town of Listowel. The Column under Tom Kennelly decided to go to Gunsboro and open fire on these Tans and Military. When we arrived at Gunsboro we discovered that they had commandeered a number of civilians from Listowel to fill the trenches. We decided not to open fire in the circumstances and to go back to Cahard.

On our way back to Cahard we were informed that nine Tans from Ballybunion were wrecking the house of Tom Kennelly (the Column O.C.) located near Lisselton railway station. Kennelly gave the order to double. We had to travel a distance of about three miles from where we were at the time. As we approached the railway station in formation the nine Tans saw us and immediately boarded a waiting train which was driven out of the station at once. We just managed to fire a few shots at the train as it left. One Tan who had got into the footplate of the engine fired a single shot. This shot passed through the trouser leg of a man in front of me and then passed through one of mine.

On the 21st February, 1921, the Column were located at Tullamore. It had been decided that we would attack Tan patrols in Ballybunion and Ballylongford. The Column was divided into two parts. Fifteen men were detailed for the attack on Ballylongford and fifteen men for the Ballybunion attack. I was with the party detailed for Ballybunion.

On the following night I travelled with our party to Ballybunion. Tom Kennelly was in charge. Our men took up positions in the side lanes of the town. I was detailed with Pat Clifford and Paddy Walshe to take up a position opposite the barracks. I was armed with a revolver and rifle. The other men had either rifles or revolvers.

Our job was to prevent any Tans leaving the barracks. We particularly wanted to get three Tans who were causing a lot of trouble in the town.

Soon after taking up positions we were told that the three Tans we wanted were in a particular public house. We also learned that a fourth Tan was down on the strand with a girl and that he was unarmed. It was decided to wait until this Tan would come along with his girl and capture him first. Unfortunately one of our men, Thomas Donohue, in a side lane opened fire on this Tan and his girl as they passed up the street. Donohue fired at least four shots without effect. The alarm had been given, so I and the two men with me, thinking that the three 'wanted' Tans had come out of the pub and were being attacked, opened fire on the barracks. The Tans in the barracks returned the fire immediately. Our men located in the side lanes retreated as soon as the firing started from the barracks. The three Tans in the pub did not put in an appearance so I and my two pals left our positions and rejoined our party after about a half an hour.

In the month of March, 1921, the Column decided to ambush a party of military which usually travelled in a train between Tralee and Listowel - the main line between Tralee and Limerick. On the night before, a man named Denis Quille of the Column and a native of Listowel, volunteered to go into Listowel for the purpose of sending a 'phone message to Lixnaw Post Office near Lixnaw Railway station - the point chosen for the ambush. The 'phone message was to let the Column know whether the military had boarded the train at Listowel as usual. A man had been placed in Lixnaw Post Office for the purpose of taking the message. The 'phone message never came. The Column had taken up positions at the Station. When the train arrived it was discovered that the military had not travelled that morning. I was armed with a revolver and a rifle on the occasion. The other men had either rifles, shotguns or revolvers.

In April, 1921, the most of the Column were located at Newtownsandies. There they had received reports that three certain Tans, stationed at Tarbert barracks and noted for their savagery, usually frequented a particular public house in Tarbert about six miles away. The Column decided to go into Tarbert and attack these three Tans as they left the pub. When the Column, which numbered about twenty men in charge of Jack Ahern of Newtownsandies, reached the churchyard near the village of Tarbert they were halted and told to remain there while Jack Ahern and another man went into the village to find out the position there from the local scouts. Ahern discovered that the three Tans were in the pub as usual and sent back the other man to tell us to come into the attack.

Before the other man reached the Column on the outskirts of the village, it seems the three Tans left the pub. Jack Ahern, on his own, immediately opened fire on them. He rejoined us some time later and we all left for Newtownsandies.

Shortly after the Kilmorna ambush of April, 1921, in which I took no part, the Column were disbanded for a week. When they met again, it was decided to split the Column into two parts, one part to be known as the 3rd Battalion Column and the other as the 6th Battalion Column. Tom Shanahan became O.C. of the 3rd Battalion area and Paddy Joe McEligott became O.C. of the 6th Battalion area.

Soon afterwards I got sick and was laid up for about four weeks. I returned to the Column about the 1st June, 1921. Later in this month the Column attacked a patrol of Tans in Ballyduff. Tom Shanahan was in charge. About fifteen men of the Column as well as the local scouts took part in the attack. We were all armed with rifles for this attack.

We had taken up positions around the village when two Tans left a house in the village and were making for the barracks. We opened fire on these two Tans. They were not hit and made for the barracks at the double and succeeded in getting inside. We then fired a few shots at the barracks itself but retreated after a few minutes to a churchyard about two miles away where we slept until daylight. This attack took place on the 28th June.

From this attack to the Truce there is nothing very much to record.

During the Truce I attended a Training Camp and later took part in the taking over of Ballymullen Military Barracks in Tralee. I was attached to the maintenance party which took over and was one of the first men on guard there.

(Signed)

John Lynch
(John Lynch)

Date:

7-7-54

7.7.54

Witness:

John J. Daly

(John J. Daly)

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