

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 991

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 991

Witness

Owen Harold,
3 Plunkett Terrace,
Mallow,
Co. Cork.

Identity.

Member of Mallow Company Irish Volunteers, Co. Cork,
1913 - ;

Captain same Company later;
V/Comd't. Mallow Battalion.
Subject.

Irish Volunteers, Mallow, Co. Cork,
1913-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

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STATEMENT BY OWEN HAROLD

3 Plunkett Terrace, Mallow, Co. Cork.

I was born in Mallow on December 26th 1890.

I have no recollection that my parents had at any time any connection with the political parties of their time, nor, as far as I know, did they display very much interest in such matters.

I joined the Irish Volunteers in Mallow in the autumn of 1913. The pioneer members were Dan Hegarty, Bryan Kelly and Chris O'Connell. I think that the Volunteers were organised following a meeting which was held in the Town Hall. It was addressed by Captain Talbot Crosbie. This unit was in Cork Brigade.

There was a good muster of Volunteers at the early parades. The membership would be in the neighbourhood of 80/100. The first officers elected were; Dan Hegarty, O/C., Chris O'Connell, 1st Lieut. and Bryan Kelly, 2nd Lieut. There was a committee also in charge, but I cannot recollect the names of the members.

The only form of drilling carried out in the early stages was foot-drill. The instructor was John Ievers, a British army reservist. Later on, in early 1914, we had wooden rifles with which we practised arms drill. Before the summer of 1914, the strength of the unit had increased to nearly 200 and it was then divided into two companies - one on the town side of the bridge on Mallow-Cork road, and the other across the bridge in Ballydaheen area. I have an idea that the division was based somewhat on the political alignments of the time. The town company were Redmondite supporters, while the Ballydaheen Company were mainly O'Brienite supporters.

This was the position in Mallow at the time of the split in the Volunteer Executive following John Redmond's appeal for recruits for the British army. Following this split, the Volunteers broke up into the Irish Volunteers and the Irish

National Volunteers. I continued to serve with the Irish Volunteers and the other body gradually faded out. I may say that a goodly number of the latter took their leader's advice and joined in the fight for, as alleged, the freedom of small nations.

National

Towards the end of 1914 when the Irish/Volunteers were nearly extinct, a meeting to re-organise them was held in the Town Hall. This meeting was presided over by Rev. Father Ahearne. On the platform were several serving and ex-officers of the British army including Colonel Paget, Major Weaver, Colonel Williams and Major Coote. The meeting proceeded in the normal manner for about ten minutes but then it gradually developed into a recruiting meeting for the British army. In order to impress those present, one of the speakers said that if the Germans came the first thing they would do would be to hang Father Ahearne (the chairman). From the back of the Hall (where the Irish Volunteers were congregated) came the remark from "Darkie" McCarthy "They couldn't do worse than the British". At this, the meeting broke up in disorder and that finished the Irish National Volunteer organisation in Mallow.

The Irish Volunteer Company in Mallow at this time had a strength of 35/40. This figure remained constant up to Easter Week 1916. At this time and during 1915, we were endeavouring to collect any arms available. I know that the officers of the company and some of the members had revolvers, while about twenty of the members owned shotguns. We also had two or three .22 rifles.

On St. Patrick's Day 1916, there was a Volunteer parade in Cork, but we did not attend.

On Easter Sunday 1916, about 40 members of the Mallow Company marched to Beeing Cross where a parade of all the neighbouring companies was being held. We were accompanied from Mallow by about ten members of Castletownroche unit who

had come to Mallow by train that morning. After taking part in some exercises in a field at Beeing's Cross, the parade was addressed from the roadside fence by Tomas McCurtain who was Brigade O/C. at the time. He was accompanied by Terry McSwiney and another officer whose name I did not know.

After the address the parade was dismissed and, after having some refreshments, the Mallow Company reassembled and marched home. I cannot recollect the trend of the Brigade O/C's. address.

On the following Monday evening when news of the fighting in Dublin came to hand we were all anxious to know whether any action was to take place in our district, but no orders arrived during the week, as far as I know.

During the first week in May 1916, Dan Hegarty (O/C.) and Chris O'Connell were arrested. They were later interned in Frongoch.

The remaining Volunteers continued to remain active and to meet for drills and discussions in small bodies of three or four, except when we moved into the surrounding country where we selected quiet spots to carry out our drills.

This was the position in early 1917 and, up to the time of the release of the prisoners in June 1917. About this time we began to recruit new members. The new recruits were generally carefully selected in advance by the company officers and were then invited to join. Towards the autumn of 1917, the strength of the company was between 50 and 60. At this stage the following were the officers:- Captain, Owen Harold (witness); 1st Lieut. Jack Cunningham; 2nd Lieut. Dan Looney.

During 1917 and 1918 the Volunteers were actually engaged in organising the political wing of the movement. (Sinn Féin) in the district. A strong Sinn Fein Club was formed in Mallow. The backbone of the Club was, of course, the Volunteer element and the members of their families.

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During the conscription scare in 1918 the strength of the Volunteers increased considerably. At one time the membership figure was approximately 300. Nearly all the shotguns in the district to the number of about 80 were collected at this time. They were mainly surrendered on request - the chief collector of shotguns at this time was Ned Fitzgerald, solicitor and chairman of the Urban District Council. He also obtained about a dozen small bore rifles and some ammunition for same. About this time I moved out to Donoughmore area where I spent a lot of time loading cartridges with buckshot. However, in the late summer, I returned to town one weekend and arranged a parade of the Mallow Company for Sunday evening. About 250 members paraded so we went on a route march round the Killa~~x~~ullen area and back to Mallow (about 16 miles). This march lost us 60% to 70% of our members and within a month (about the end of October) the strength of the company was reduced to about eighty. This was the normal figure for a long time afterwards. There was no change of officers at this time.

There was no activity in the area in connection with the General Election in December 1918 as Daithi Kent was returned unopposed. However, with about 25/30 of the members of the Mallow and Mourneabbey companies, I went to Waterford City to carry out protection duty during the election. We were in Waterford for about four or five days. A number of members of my unit got slight injuries during the course of many clashes with the "separation" women (British soldiers' wives) and the Redmondite supporters.

On 6th January 1919, the original Cork Brigade, which at the time was composed of some twenty battalions, was divided into three brigades. The Mallow Battalion, which at this time had the following companies - Mallow, Mourneabbey, Ahadillane, Analeentha, Burnfort, Dromahane, Lombardstown, Twopothouse and Ballyclough - became a unit of Cork II Brigade. The

battalion officers were: O/C. Liam Jones; Vice O/C. Tadhg Looney; Adjutant Jeremiah Buckley; Q.M. Patrick McCarthy.

The battalions in Cork II Brigade were: Mallow, Fermoy, Castletownroche, Kanturk, Newmarket, Millstreet and Charleville. The first officers of the new brigade were: O/C. Liam Lynch, Fermoy; V.O/C. Dan Hegarty, Mallow; Adjutant, Tom Barry, Glanworth; Q.M. George Power, Fermoy.

I think George Power and Tom Barry interchanged positions shortly after the establishment of the brigade.

I was arrested about the end of January 1919 and charged with illegal drilling. I was sentenced to one month's imprisonment in Cork Gaol. On my release I was again arrested outside the gaol gate and charged with the possession of illegal documents. On this occasion I was sentenced to two years' imprisonment. With a number of ^{other} political prisoners I staged a strike against prison conditions. As a result, I found myself in solitary confinement and, after five or six months of my sentence had expired, I was released sometime in late June or early ~~June~~ ^{July} 1919.

I resumed my Volunteer activities on release and there was nothing of note until early September when an attack was arranged to take place on a party of British military (East Kent Regiment) who usually paraded to the Wesleyan Church in Fermoy each Sunday morning. This attack was arranged by Liam Lynch, Brigade O/C., and was to take place on Sunday, September 7th, 1919.

Some days earlier in the previous week - about the 3rd or 4th September, I think - I was instructed by the Brigade Vice O/C., (Dan Hegarty) to arrange to have a car made available to go to Fermoy on Sunday morning (7th idem). He also advised me to be ready to travel and that Bryan Kelly and Ned Waters would also be with us.

With Jack Cunningham I approached Leo O'Callaghan (a Volunteer), who was employed as a driver at W.J. Thompson's Garage, Mallow. I informed him that we would be hiring a car

from his employer to do a journey on Sunday and that we required him as driver. He readily agreed to help us, so we then hired the car and asked Thompson's to send Leo O'Callaghan as driver. This was agreed to.

However, on the Saturday night (6th September 1919), prior to the date of the job, Leo O'Callaghan informed Jack Cunningham and myself that another driver was to drive us on the following day. We told him that this would not suit so he agreed to switch jobs with the other driver and to come with us.

Shortly before 9 a.m. on Sunday, September 7th, 1919, Leo O'Callaghan picked up the following party at Fair Street, Mallow: Dan Hegarty, Bryan Kelly, Ned Waters and Owen Harold (witness). He was driving a grey Buick car. We then proceeded in a roundabout way to Fermoy which we reached sometime about 10 a.m. We drove to the appointed meeting place at the back of the hospital. There we found a number of men gathered and we were all told of the proposed plan for the attack on the Church party. This engagement is now generally known as the Wesleyan Raid. The plan and the duties allocated to each unit were explained by Liam Lynch (Brigade O/C.)

With Dan Hegarty, Ned Waters, Bryan Kelly and Liam Lynch I went in Leo O'Callaghan's car to a point on the main Fermoy-Lismore road near the Gas Works. This position is east of the Wesleyan Church. The car was faced (west) in the direction of Fermoy. When the party of military were approaching the Wesleyan Church we drove slowly towards them and, just as they reached the Church, Leo O'Callaghan swung his car across the road behind them. His car was followed by another driven in a similar manner by Jack Mulvey, Rathcormac. I should have mentioned that in addition to the two carloads of Volunteers there were a number of other Volunteers in the vicinity.

Immediately our car had swung across the road, Liam Lynch blew a whistle and the parties in the two cars all jumped on

the military party and disarmed them. They were assisted by Volunteers who had been hanging around near the Church. The whole engagement was over in a few minutes and the rifles carried by the military party were loaded into the Mallow car which had been turned to face in the Lismore direction by Leo O'Callaghan, while the fight for the rifles was on. During the fight I only heard one shot fired. I don't know who fired it, but it must have killed one of the soldiers - Private Jones. Liam Lynch was also slightly wounded in the shoulder.

When the captured rifles had been loaded onto our car we also picked up Liam Lynch, Peter O'Callaghan, Pat Leahy and William Ahern in addition to our own party. Jack Mulvey in the second car picked up some more of the Volunteers, while the others made their way from the scene on cycles or on foot.

The two cars with their party were driven along the Fermoy-Lismore road to some place about five miles from Fermoy where we halted. In the meantime, the road had been blocked behind us by falling some trees. At this stage it was noticed that Liam Lynch was wounded. His wound was dressed by William Aherne who was a chemist.

The rifles were now removed from our car and, leaving Peter O'Callaghan and Pat Leahy behind us, we proceeded in the direction of Ballynoe. We continued through various by-roads till we reached the main Cork-Youghal road and went on to Youghal. Our party at this point were Liam Lynch, Wm. Ahern, Ned Waters, Bryan Kelly, Leo O'Callaghan (driver) and Owen Harold (witness). Some short distance from Youghal - about $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles or so - Liam Lynch and Wm. Ahern left our car. They went across the fields on the left of the road to the house of some friends of Liam's. We drove on to the Greenpark Hotel in Youghal where we had some refreshments. While in the hotel, I overheard a remark by a man who entered the dining room, who said to a companion of his that the military were holding up

cars. We immediately decided that it was time to be moving on, so we settled our bill and left for Cork.

We reached Cork without incident although when we came to Dunkettle Bridge on the Youghal-Cork road, about $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles from Cork, we found the military on duty there holding up cars. To this day I am unable to account for the fact that they allowed us to pass through without halting us. We remained in Cork for a short time and then came on to Mallow which we reached late in the evening.

I remained in Mallow for three or four weeks after this but I was advised about this time that I was likely to be arrested for Fermoy raid so I went on the run, moving out into the Mourneabbey and Dromahane areas. When I went on the run Jack Cunningham became O/C., Mallow Company. The other officers at this time were Tadhg Byrne, 1st Lieut., Leo O'Callaghan, 2nd Lieutenant.

During the remaining portion of 1919 and early 1920 while on the run, I took part in various raids for arms with members of the companies in whose areas I was staying. We also raided the mails and on a number of occasions, but got no information of any use. About this time also I was deputed by Brigade O/C. to organise Special Service units in the battalion area especially Intelligence. I was at the same time appointed Battalion Vice O/C. and being 'on the run' was able to devote my whole time to this work. I arranged contacts with Post Office officials in Mallow (^{Misses}~~Messes~~. Creedon and Barrett) also with Head Constable O'Connor, R.I.C.

When General Lucas - the O/C. British Forces at Fermoy - was taken prisoner by Liam Lynch and a party of Brigade officers he was brought to Brigade H.Q. at Lombardstown. About the same time the Mallow Company O/C. decided to kidnap the station-master, G.S.W. Railways at Mallow because he appeared to be hostile to Volunteer activities. At the time, railway men were

refusing to drive trains on which troops were travelling and it was observed that on each occasion on which there were enemy troops due to travel the stationmaster selected a married man as driver, although there were single men available. It was considered that by this means he was ensuring that the maximum amount of hardship would be caused, so it was decided to teach him a lesson. He was kidnapped and taken to Lombardstown area where I was asked to suggest the best place to keep him. I suggested McCarthy's, Creggane, Lombardstown, and when we moved him there we found that Lucas was already there as a prisoner, so we had to find another prison. We released the stationmaster - Slattery was his name - after a few days. It was under the above circumstances that I met General Lucas.

During the summer of 1920 I continued my activities as organiser and general factotum in the battalion area. The usual drilling and parades were carried out by the companies who were at this time getting a little musketry practice with .22 rifles.

There was no change of any significance until the Brigade column was formed in early September 1920, when it came into Mallow Battalion area at Mourneabbey to undergo a course of training under the Brigade O/C. (Liam Lynch) and Ernie O'Malley. The names of the column, as far as I can remember, were:- Liam Lynch, O/C., Ernie O'Malley (Training), Jack Cunningham (Mallow), Paddy O'Brien, Paddy McCarthy, Paddy Healy, Tom Coughlan, Dan Shinnick, George Power, Lar Condon. There were also others - about six or seven. The presence of the column necessitated more activity by the local company in scouting and posting guards. When the column had been in the area for some days it was decided to attempt the capture of Mallow military barracks which was occupied by a party of the 17th Lancers to the number of about fifty.

On September 28th, 1920, the attack was carried out successfully. About 25/30 rifles, much equipment, two Hotchkiss guns and some thousands of rounds of ammunition were captured. The job was carried out by the Brigade Column assisted by representatives of nearly all companies in the Mallow Battalion. On this occasion I was in charge of a large party of Volunteers who were engaged at Mallow Pike on the south side of the town, on the blocking of roads and ensuring the delay of any military reinforcements that might come from Cork.

When the raid was over and the column withdrew to the Burnfort area, I returned to Lackaneen, Mourneabbey, where I had been staying with Paddy McCarthy who, at this time, was Battalion O/C. Mallow. The other officers were: V.O/C. Owen Harold, Adjutant Tadhg Looney, Q.M. Mick Nagle.

A few weeks afterwards I was arrested in a sudden raid by the military on the Mourneabbey area. I gave my name as Wm. O'Connor. When taken I was lined up on the roadside with other prisoners. I was searched by Lieut. Orgyl of the Manchester Regiment. I had six or seven pound notes and some loose silver in my possession and Lieut. Orgyl took the notes. However, before we were placed in the lorries, I was again searched - this time by a sergeant of the same regiment - and he took the balance of the money. None of this money was ever returned to me and I estimate that on that day Lieut. Orgyl collected anything up to £80 from his prisoners.

One of the prisoners taken on the same day was Denis Barter, a Trade Union official in the area, who had called to McCarthy's, Lackaneen, to drive Miss McCarthy into Mallow to see her brothers (Donal, Paddy and Seán) who had been arrested the previous night. When passing Barter's house on the way to Mallow, the party stopped to raid it. In the house they found Liam Lynch's uniform which he had left there when he returned

from the funeral of Paddy Clancy in East Limerick the previous August. One of the soldiers dashed out with the uniform shouting: "Blimey, Blimey, we've captured a Brigadier General". (Poor Barter was only attached to the local company as an engineer). He was, however, later sentenced to death for his part in the Mallow Barracks raid, although he had not taken part in it.

Following my arrest I was charged with the murder of Sergeant Gibbs who had been shot during the attack on Mallow Barracks. With Barter and other prisoners I was taken to Buttevant where we were detained for some days. We were then taken to Military Detention Barracks, Cork, where a Summary of Evidence in the case was taken. We were then taken back to Buttevant where we were kept for a few days before being returned to Cork Detention Barracks. Considerable delay took place in bringing us to trial as the 17th Lancers were transferred to Galway and, in the removal, the Summary of Evidence which had already been taken was lost. The date of our trial by courtmartial had been fixed at this stage and it had now to be postponed.

A fresh Summary of Evidence was taken in Cork in our presence. When one of the witnesses, Lieut. McCreedy who came from Galway, had given his evidence, he was asked to sign by the officer in charge. The remark passed was: "Sign that and if anything happens to you the evidence will hold good". McCreedy went back to Galway and he was killed with Inspector Blake, R.I.C. Galway, about two or three weeks later. This led to a further postponement.

The party of the 17th Lancers concerned were then transferred to Cork. Shortly after their arrival they were sent out on a raid. A bomb was thrown into the lorry and nearly all the witnesses were seriously wounded. This led to further delay and it was May 1921, before we were finally tried by General Courtmartial. The trial ended on the day of Sean

Moylan's arrest in May. We were all found guilty and sentenced to death (Denis Barter, Donal McCarthy, John Murphy, Denis Buckley (not in I.R.A. at all) and witness (Owen Harold).

I was detained in the Detention Barracks, Cork, until December 1921, when I was removed to Cork Gaol. I was released following the ratification of the Treaty in February 1922.

My rank at the Truce was Battalion Vice Commandant, Mallow Battalion.

One of the most amusing incidents I can remember in connection with my imprisonment occurred on St. Patrick's Day 1921. The prisoners in the Detention Barracks were assembled in the gymnasium for a smoke when the O/C. - Colonel Morgan - came in ^{AND} made the following announcement: "As this is Ireland's National Holiday, there will be no courtmartials today".

Signed: *Owen Harold*
(Owen Harold)

Date: *14th August 1954*

WITNESS: *Phil O'Donnell*
(Phil O'Donnell)

