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ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURÓ STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1038

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,038

Witness

Michael Doyle,
Upper Rock Street,
Tralee,
Co. Kerry.

Identity.

Member of Irish Volunteers, Tralee,
Co. Kerry, 1913-1920.

Subject.

Irish Volunteers, Tralee, Co. Kerry,
1913-1920.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

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STATEMENT OF MICHAEL DOYLEUpper Rock Street, Tralee, Co. Kerry

I was born on the 2nd September 1875; I went to the local National School until I was 15 years of age. When I left school I got work on the Tralee and Dingle Railway. I joined the Royal Engineers in August 1897 and was all through the Boer War under Lord Roberts.

I returned to England in 1902. In 1906, while attached to the 7th Field Company, Royal Engineers, I was sent to Pretoria where I was stationed for three years. I returned to England in 1909 and was discharged from the army in August of that year, having completed twelve years' service. I subsequently worked in Birmingham in the Wolsey Tool and Motor Works as a carpenter. I then went to work at Aldershot at the Royal Engineers Depot as a civilian carpenter. When my wife died in Aldershot in the year 1912 I came home to Tralee.

After my return to Tralee I started on my own as a cabinet maker, having opened a workshop in Upper Rock Street. Next door to my workshop was the residence of a Miss Slattery where Austin Stack stayed. He was then a solicitor's clerk in the firm of O'Connell's in Nelson St., now called Ashe St.

Stack often visited my workshop and on occasions he was accompanied by Ernest Blythe. We became great friends during the year 1913 and when the Volunteers were formed in Tralee at the end of that year I was one of the first to join.

The drill instructors at the time were a man named Devine and a man named Ned Leen. It was I made the wooden rifles with which the Volunteers drilled at the time. I also made about twelve bayonets from one inch ribbon steel which could be fitted on to the barrel of a shotgun. It was at this time I was accepted into the I.R.B. by Michael J. O'Connor, who was the Tralee I.R.B. Circle Centre then. It was in my own workshop

that I was sworn in. Other members of the I.R.B. at the time I became a member were Joe Melinn, Eamon Connor and Paddy Garvey.

At the outbreak of the 1914-18 war our drill instructors with a number of other men who were on the British army reserve were called up. The strength of the Volunteers in the town of Tralee at this time was about 600 men. There were four companies - A, B, C and D. It was known as the Tralee Battalion then.

After Redmond's call on the Volunteers at Woodenbridge to defend the shores of Ireland there was a split in the local battalion. A, B and D Companies were anti-Redmond. C. Company, which was composed principally of members of the Ancient Order of Hibernians, were in favour of Redmond's policy and broke away from the other three companies and thereafter ceased to exist. A few men of C. Company were, however, anti-Redmond; these men joined one or other of the other companies. It was shortly after the split when one of the Volunteers - a man named Jimmy Scanlon, who was O/C. of Signals, had joined Kitchener's army, that I was appointed company captain of D. Company.

In the year 1915 I took part in Volunteer parades, rifle drill and military exercises generally. I promoted and subscribed to an arms fund and became entitled to and received a rifle and ammunition after the formation of the force under Patrick Pearse and Eoin MacNeill. Austin Stack at this time was Director of Organisation. He had been dismissed earlier in the year from his job as Collector of Taxes in Co. Kerry.

In February 1916, Patrick Pearse visited Tralee and inspected the Tralee Battalion. I was on parade with the battalion which had mobilised at the Rink, the headquarters of the Volunteers. We marched to the assembly ground at the sports field where the men were reviewed and addressed by Pearse

on their duty to Ireland and the responsibilities and work before them.

At the Rink the same night Pearse delivered a lecture on the 'Nature of Freedom'. The lecture was promoted by the Tralee Branch of the Ancient Order of Hibernians (Irish American Alliance). After the lecture Pearse was entertained to tea in St. John's Presbytery by Father Brennan, C.C., in company with Austin Stack, P.J. Cahill and a Father Breen. I understand that it was here that Pearse told Cahill that Easter Week had been chosen as the date of the Rising.

On Good Friday 1916, I was at the Rink on the return of Austin Stack from his journey to locate Roger Casement. Stack and other I.R.B. leaders went into conference to consider the position created by the capture of Casement. At the same time I mobilised all the available Volunteers I could find to form a party that could be used to carry out any duty that may have been necessary as a result of any decision which the conference reached.

The conference had lasted two and a half hours, at the end of which time an Irish teacher named Michael O'Flynn called to the Rink and delivered a verbal message to Stack from the District Inspector, R.I.C. with whom he had a conversation shortly before. The message was to the effect that Con Collins, who had come from Dublin and who had been with Stack in his search for Casement, had been arrested and was in the R.I.C. barracks and that he, Collins, wanted Stack to call on him. The conference then broke up without coming to a decision. Stack left to go to the barracks and I dismissed the party. The time was then about 6 p.m.

At about 7 p.m. word went round that Stack had been detained at the barracks by the police. A mobilisation of the battalion was immediately called by Cahill. The men paraded in full strength, fully armed. In view of the plans for the

following Sunday, any attempt to rescue Stack at this stage was deemed unwise. It was then known that Casement had been brought in from Ardfert where he had been captured and was a prisoner in the same barracks with Collins and Stack. All available officers and Heads of the I.R.B. knew that any attempt at rescue would mean an attack on the barracks and that such an attack would upset the plans for the landing of the arms from the arms ship on Sunday. The battalion was marched through the town just for a show of force and returned to the Rink and dismissed.

When the battalion was dismissed I went to the A.O.H. rooms at 4, The Square, Tralee. Several Volunteers and a few officers were there also. A visitor there was introduced to us as Mr. Murray, who joined us in a game of cards. About 11.15 p.m. the school broke up as the rooms were usually closed at that time every night. "Mr. Murray", in order not to create any attention to himself, left with the crowd. I learned afterwards that he had been intercepted by an I.R.B. man named Patrick Raymond on the instructions of Joseph Melinn, a Volunteers officer and I.R.B. Centre. What happened afterwards on that Good Friday night and up to 7 p.m. the following day can be told by Paddy Raymond.

On Easter Saturday evening I went to the A.O.H. Hall as was customary. There I learned that Mr. Murray was Monteith, who had landed with Casement, that he was accommodated there the night before and was still on the premises.

A conference of Volunteers and officers decided that it was dangerous for Monteith to remain on the premises any longer. Edward Barry, since deceased, was sent to the Rink to put the position with regard to Monteith before the officer commanding the Volunteers and to suggest that Monteith be conveyed to the Rink where there was a strong armed guard. Paddy Cahill, who

had taken over command after the arrest of Stack, and who had no previous contact with Monteith, after hearing Barry, refused to take over Monteith, giving as his reason that it may jeopardise the plans for the following day - Easter Sunday.

Barry reported back to us. After further deliberations Barry was again sent to Cahill to press to have Monteith taken over; the result was a further refusal.

Paddy Raymond then decided to go down to the Rink and discuss the matter with Cahill. Raymond later informed me that he placed fully before Cahill the feelings of those of us officers and Volunteers at the A.O.H. Hall. In particular, he pointed out the possible consequences of any attempt by the R.I.C. to arrest Monteith. In the end Cahill agreed to take over Monteith.

Having asked Raymond for details of Monteith's description, Cahill stated that he would put me in charge of the operation. He called over Volunteers Patrick Conway and Patrick Donohue, a railway fireman who had just arrived from the railway station with some information. Having received instructions from Cahill, Raymond, Conway and Donohue proceeded to the A.O.H. Hall where Cahill's instructions were related to me.

Late that Saturday night, having disguised Monteith to look like a railway fireman by blackening his face with soot, Conway, Donohue, Monteith and myself proceeded to the Rink. On the way I said to Monteith: "If the police stop us or try to arrest you we will open fire". We were armed with revolvers. Monteith replied: "I am the senior officer. I have more authority. There is to be no firing". We reached the Rink, however, without any interference by the police. When we arrived at the Rink the guard was strengthened.

On Easter Sunday morning I was informed that the manoeuvres which had been called for that day were cancelled. The three

companies, A, B and D, as well as companies from Dingle and Ballyferriter, assembled in the Rink that morning. In all, there were about 400 Volunteers present, all of whom were armed with either rifles, shotguns or revolvers. At about 8 p.m. that evening, A, B and D Companies were lined up outside the Rink. I was in charge of D. Company. Monteith was among the Volunteers in one of the companies. We got the order 'quick march' and proceeded in the direction of Ballymacelligott. When we reached a place known as the 'mile height' we were halted. Monteith was then handed over to the Ballymacelligott Company who had come out to meet us. After a while the three companies were reformed and marched back to the Rink and dismissed.

All Easter Week we were waiting for instructions. We knew the fight was on in Dublin, but here in Tralee, due to the arrest of Stack and Collins, we were in the dark and knew nothing of what was going on.

On the Saturday night of Easter Week, on the instructions of Father Breen, who was on the Battalion Council with Stack and Cahill, all arms were taken to the Rink where they were broken, and later sent by donkey cart to the R.I.C. barracks.

In the week following all the prominent Volunteers, including Cahill who had taken Stack's place, and a man named Healy, who was Battalion O/C. of Tralee area, were arrested. From this to the end of 1916 things remained very quiet, but we kept in touch with one another and with Volunteers in other areas.

In March of 1917, the local Volunteers met once again at a special meeting which had been called for the re-election of officers. I had remained company captain up to then. At this meeting I was appointed Battalion O/C. of the Tralee Battalion. Organisers were also appointed to visit and reorganise the different companies in and around Tralee. As well as the three companies - A, B and D - in the town of Tralee, the battalion

took in the following companies: Blennerhille, Ballyvoe, Oakpark, Curraheen, Ballyseedy and Fenit.

At this time we usually met in the Hibernian Hall at No. 4 The Square, Tralee. In about the month of June or July all of the prominent Volunteers arrested in and after Easter Week were released and were back in Tralee. During the latter part of the year we managed to obtain a number of rifles and ammunition, principally from British soldiers home on leave.

During the threat of conscription in the early part of 1918 the strength of the battalion increased to over 1000 men. It was then that the Volunteers intensified their drilling and parading. When the conscription scare was over, most of the new recruits remained loyal to the Volunteers and continued to take part in the military exercises.

At the General Election in the latter part of the year a large number of the local Volunteers went to Co. Clare and Co. Limerick to assist the Sinn Féin Candidate in these counties. Our candidate was returned unopposed.

The year 1919 was a continuation of the intensive drilling of 1918. I attended several battalion meetings during the year. In the latter part of the year the Brigade O/C., Paddy Cahill, issued instructions for the collection of all shotguns and arms held by civilians in the battalion area. I conveyed the order to each company captain. All shotguns and small arms were subsequently collected, the owners surrendered them for the most part without any fuss.

Early in April 1920, I took part in the destruction of Income Tax records at the Income Tax offices in the town. Paddy Cahill took charge of the operation. He had no difficulty in entering the building. I, with a number of men of the Tralee Battalion, assisted by men from other battalions, collected all documents in the building, took them into a yard adjoining the

Tax office and set them alight. Heavy ledgers and files were taken by pony cart some distance outside the town and destroyed there. While the job was being carried out, a number of men of the Tralee Battalion were on guard armed with revolvers. Some of the men who took part were Paddy Garvey, who later became brigade adjutant; Joe Griffin, John O'Sullivan and James O'Connell O'Connor.

In July of 1920, John O'Connor, company captain of D. Company, put before me a plan for the disarming of an armed enemy guard at Tralee Railway Station. His plan was to hold up and board a train a short distance outside the town and when the train arrived at the station to hold up the guard and disarm them. I told him to go ahead. He, with about 25 of the company, succeeded in their plan and were successful in capturing about eleven or twelve rifles.

After the death of Terence MacSwiney in October 1920, I received an order from the Brigade C/C. to carry out an attack on a Tan patrol in the town. On November night, 1920, the attack was carried out. A number of men from each of the three companies in the town were posted in various parts of the town and were located off the principal streets. Most of the men were armed with rifles or revolvers, while the local Fianna boys under the command of Mike O'Leary acted as scouts. Our men were in their positions at about 9 p.m. I had issued instructions that they were not to open fire until 9.30 p.m.

Some time around 9.30 p.m. a section of our men, under Paddy Paul Fitzgerald, located at Gas Terrace, received information from the scouts that two Tans were in conversation with a girl at the corner of New Road. These two Tans were held up and taken prisoner by Fitzgerald and his men and handed over to a section of I.R.A. outside the town. When the two Tans were handed over, Fitzgerald and two other I.R.A. who took part in

the capture returned to their post at Gas Terrace.

Shortly after his return to Gas Terrace, Fitzgerald received word from a couple of scouts that the patrol was approaching his position from the direction of Rock Street. As the patrol passed Gas Terrace they were fired on by the section located there. The Tans immediately ran for the barracks. In the attack two Tans were wounded, but they succeeded in reaching the barracks.

Shortly after the attack I dismissed the sections of our men in other parts of the town. Late that night the two captured Tans were executed by order of the Brigade O/C.

Some time around 12 o'clock on the same night the Tans came out in force and burned down the Town Hall and several shops in the town. On the following day and several days afterwards the Tans appeared to have gone absolutely mad. They shot and plundered all around them. Among civilians killed that week were two men named Conway and Wall. Several other civilians were wounded.

During this week all of the prominent members of the I.R.A. left the town. I was advised by Cahill not to do so as he considered I would be more useful in the town. At the time I was lodging with a man named Scanlon. In the same house Scanlon had a flat let to an R.I.C. man named Sergeant Costello and his family. Costello was friendly and from time to time gave me information about impending raids by the Tans to places outside the town. I subsequently passed the information to the Brigade I.O. - T. Kennedy.

In the month of November Cahill formed the Active Service Column from among the men who had left the town earlier and men from the other battalions in the brigade area. From this onwards the column was responsible for all operations in the area. I attended brigade meetings from time to time.

Early in March, the Brigade Adjutant - Paddy Garvey - formed a local battalion column from among the three town companies. One of their first operations was an attack on a lorry load of Tans in Bridge Street. They had asked me previously for permission to carry out the attack, to which I consented. Later this column was responsible for the shooting of Major McKinnon and Head Constable Benson, who were the officers in charge of the Auxiliaries and Tans. After the shooting of Benson things were more or less quiet in the town until the Truce.

Signed: Michael Doyle

Date: Nov 13th 1954

(Michael Doyle)

Nov.13th 1954

Witness: John J. Daly

John J. Daly

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