

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILÉATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1095

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,095.....

Witness

Michael Sheehy,
Appletown,
Feohenagh,
Newcastlewest,
Co. Limerick.
Identity.

Battalion Q.M.

Drumcollogher Battalion, Co. Limerick,
1919- .

Subject.

Irish Volunteer activities,
Drumcollogher, Co. Limerick, 1914 - .

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

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N. S. 1,095

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BUREAU STAIRS MILITARY 1913-21
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S. 1,095

STATEMENT OF MICHAEL SHEEHY,

Appletown, Feohenagh, Newcastlewest, Co. Limerick.

I was born at Appletown, Feohenagh, in June, 1891. I was sent to the local national school until I was fifteen years of age. When I left school, I went to work on my father's farm.

The Volunteers were first formed in Feohenagh in April, 1914. I was among the members that first joined. We had two ex British soldiers, named Jack Flynn and Con Buckley, as drill instructors. We drilled with wooden rifles at first. We managed to obtain three long Lee Enfield rifles at this time, with which we practised rifle fire. The strength of the company was approximately twenty men.

When Redmond called on the Volunteers to defend the shores of Ireland, there was a split in the company. A few of the company were in favour of Redmond's policy. The company, however, continued to meet and drill at intervals up to Easter Week, 1916. In the early part of 1916, Ernest Blythe visited the area and addressed the company. He was reorganising the Volunteers in County Limerick at the time.

After Easter Week, 1916, the Battalion O/C, Michael Keane, issued instructions for the surrender to the R.I.C. of all arms in the battalion area. With the exception of Feohenagh Company, all companies in the battalion complied with the instructions. The few rifles which we possessed in Feohenagh were not surrendered for the reason that we knew that the R.I.C. were not aware that we had any arms in the company.

Up to the end of 1916 things were very quiet. There was nothing doing until about the spring of 1917 when the company was reorganised. A man named Dan Doody became Company Captain, Jim Doody, 1st Lieutenant, and I became Quartermaster. The strength of the company was thirty men. We paraded, drilled and carried out route marches during the year.

In this year I, with a number of men from the battalion area, attended a bye-election in Waterford to support the Sinn Féin candidate, Dr. White. Our party of Volunteers consisted of forty men and were in charge of Sean Finn and Michael Keane. We were located in a hall near Ballybricken Square, Waterford. During the election campaign we had several skirmishes with the supporters of the Nationalist candidate.

Early in 1918 during the threat of conscription, we got into the company approximately thirty more Volunteers. After the threat was over, most of the older men left the company but the younger men remained, which reduced the strength of the company to forty men. All during this period we had intensive drilling and field manoeuvres.

At the end of the year during the general election, we supported the Sinn Féin candidate, Dr. Dick Hayes, at the polling booths.

The year 1919 saw a continuation of drilling and route marches. After the capture of Sean Hogan at Knocklong in May of this year, Dan Breen, Sean Treacy, Sean Hogan and Seamus Robinson arrived in our company area. Breen and Treacy were wounded. The four men stayed at the home of one of our men, named Michael Keane, where they

remained for about a fortnight. During their stay I and other members of the company were on guard duty, armed with rifles. From Keane's they moved to the house of a Mrs. Kennedy at Castlemahon where they stayed for about three weeks. Mrs. Kennedy was a member of the Cumann na mBan.

About the autumn of this year I, with the members of the company, took part in the trenching of roads in the battalion area. Later on in the year, I took part in the collection of all shotguns in our area. It was about this time that I was appointed Battalion Quartermaster of the 3rd Battalion, or Drumcollogher Battalion, as it was known. I was responsible for the maintenance of all shotguns in the Battalion area as well as the three rifles and a few revolvers.

In the month of February, 1920, a stranger, who gave his name as 'Peadar Clancy' from G.H.Q., Dublin, appeared in our area. He was some time here, and then went to Tournafulla and other areas. In the meantime, he had been taken by two I.R.A. men, 'Slope' Reidy and Tommy Regan, to Mrs. Kennedy's where Breen and his comrades had stayed sometime previously. After some time, he disappeared. About six or seven weeks later, I received an order from Sean Finn, the Brigade O/C, to prepare a pony and trap and call to Mrs. Kennedy's of Castlemahon and take 'Clancy', who had returned to the area, to Abbeyfeale, to the house of Dr. Hartnett.

I went to Kennedy's, collected 'Clancy' and took him towards Tournafulla on the way to Abbeyfeale. On the way to Tournafulla, he said he would not go there as he had been there before and the R.I.C. might know him or

find out about his presence there. Before we reached Tournafulla, however, we met a Volunteer of the Tournafulla Company, named Ahern. 'Clancy' got out of the trap and spoke to Ahern, shook hands with him and kissed him. After some conversation with Ahern, 'Clancy' changed his mind and said he would go to Tournafulla as it was all the same to him, that he would be known anyway.

When we reached Tournafulla, we had a few drinks. By this time, I had become suspicious of 'Clancy', due to the fact that he had told me several contradictory stories. Having spent about an hour in Tournafulla, we left for Abbeyfeale. On the way there, a dispute arose between us as to where we should go in Abbeyfeale. When we got there, he wanted to have another drink in Leahy's public house in the Square. He had previously stayed at this pub. I did not want to go there. He insisted and tried to take the reins. After a while, in order not to create a scene, I let him have it. We eventually pulled up at Leahy's pub and went in. He ordered a drink for both of us. An R.I.C. man was talking to Mrs. Leahy from whom he had purchased a suit of clothes. The shop was a public house and outfitters combined. Behind the R.I.C. man's back, 'Clancy' made signs of pulling out an imaginary revolver which he pointed towards the policeman as if to shoot him. I told him to stop acting and said if there was a mirror in the shop, the R.I.C. man could see what he was doing. When the R.I.C. man had gone, Mrs. Leahy said to 'Clancy', "I suppose you did not like to see me speaking to the gentleman gone out". Clancy replied, "It does not matter", or words to that effect.

As soon as we had our drinks, I suggested getting back into the trap to go to Dr. Hartnett. We got into

the trap and went straight to Dr. Hartnett. When we got there, he asked Hartnett out to a hotel to have a drink. Hartnett refused, saying he would not like to be seen going into the hotel with a stranger. The three of us went into a nearby pub instead where we had one drink each. As I left the pub to get into the trap to return home, he said to me, "I have told different stories. If you keep your ears open, you will hear of Scartaglen (County Kerry) R.I.C. barracks being attacked within a week". With that, I left for home.

Within a week Scartaglen R.I.C. barracks was attacked as forecast by 'Clancy'. About three days after leaving him in Abbeyfeale, I attended a horse fair in Rathkeale. There I made it my business to see the Brigade O/C, Seán Finn. I told him of my suspicions of 'Clancy'. Seán Finn told me that he was going to G.H.Q., Dublin, in a few days' time, saying that there was a report in G.H.Q. that there was a spy on the track of the Knocklong men and that G.H.Q. would like to locate him.

Finn went to Dublin and returned after a few days, bringing Seán Hogan back with him. Some time after Hogan's arrival, 'Clancy' was arrested by the I.R.A. in Newtownsandes, Co. Kerry. After several enquiries and court martial, 'Clancy', whose real name was Crowley from Mitchelstown area, Co. Cork, was executed as a spy in a field at Moanroe, about three miles from Newcastlewest. Somebody found the body and informed the R.I.C. who took it to the house of a nearby farmer. I saw the body; it was that of 'Clancy' alright whom I had driven to Abbeyfeale. Later, I heard from Sean Hogan that the spy, before his execution, was attended by a priest named Fr. Twomey.

National Archives Act, 1986, Regulations, 1988

ABSTRACTION OF PART(S) PURSUANT TO REGULATION 8

**Form to be completed and inserted in the original record
in place of each part abstracted**

(i) Reference number of the separate cover under

which the abstracted part has been filed: WS 1095/18

(ii) How many documents have been abstracted:

2pp

(iii) The date of each such document:

19 February 1955

(iv) The description of each document:

WS1095 Wilson Statement Michael Sheehy p 6 & 7
names of individuals

(Where appropriate, a composite description may be entered in respect of two or more related documents).

(v) Reason(s) why the part has been abstracted for retention:

(c) Would or might cause distress or danger to living persons on the ground that they contain information about individuals, or would or might be likely to lead to an action for damages for defamation.

(These will be the reasons given on the certificate under Section 8(4).)

J. Moloney
Name: (J. Moloney.)

Grade: Col.

Department/Office/Court:

Date: 7 March 2003.

In the month of May, 1920, the Battalion staff under Con Foley, Battalion Commandant, decided to attack a Tan patrol at Cloonmore, about two miles from Drumcollogher on the road to Newcastlewest. A number of men from each company in the battalion area were selected for the job. We took up positions on one side of the road, behind a ditch. The patrol usually consisted of a lorry load of Tans which travelled from Drumcollogher to Newcastlewest and back on certain days. Con Foley, assisted by Ben O'Sullivan, Vice O/C, was in charge. I and a few of the other men had rifles; the remainder had shotguns. In all, about twenty men were selected for the proposed attack. On this particular day, we remained in position for several hours; the patrol never appeared and eventually the proposed attack was called off.

Some time afterwards, a farmer's man named Daly came under suspicion as a spy. It happened that Daly wrote a letter addressed to _____ of the R.I.C. at Newcastlewest, giving the names of I.R.A. men who had taken part in an attack on Kilmallock R.I.C. barracks in May, 1920. Apparently Daly, who was practically illiterate, did not address the letter correctly and it happened to be delivered to another man

This other _____ although an ex British soldier, handed the letter to the Battalion O/C of Newcastlewest. When the letter was examined, it was found that only a few of the names were correct and that most of the names were of I.R.A. men of the area who had taken no part in the attack.

The matter was reported to Sean Finn, Brigade O/C, who ordered the arrest of Daly. A court martial was held. The Brigade O/C and I acted as judges. Evidence

of the receipt of the letter from , the ex British soldier, was given by the Battalion O/C of Newcastlewest. Daly, when questioned, admitted writing the letter. He was sentenced to death. A priest - Fr. Wall, C.C., of Broadford - was sent for and heard his confession. That night he was executed on the roadside at Cloonmore and left there, with a label marked spy on the body. The execution took place on the 3rd August, 1920.

On the 20th September, Con Foley, Battalion O/C, (deceased), Ben O'Sullivan, Vice O/C, (deceased) and I attended a Sinn Féin court at Castlemahon in a case in which a number of I.R.A. men were involved. One group of Volunteer police, who had been drawn from the I.R.A., had found a number of I.R.A. men on licensed premises after hours. The men found on the premises had been summoned for the offence. They were fined small sums of money.

After the court case, I, with Foley and O'Sullivan, stayed that night at the house of an I.R.A. man named David O'Sullivan who was later ordained a priest. The following day, David O'Sullivan's house was raided by Tans shortly after we had left. While we were on our way home, we were surprised by a lorry load of Tans on the road. We were ordered to put our hands up, after which we were searched and taken prisoner to Drumcollogher. From Drumcollogher we were taken to Newcastlewest and from there to William Street, Limerick, R.I.C. barracks where we were left three days without food. We were subsequently tried by court martial on a charge of being members of an illegal organisation. We refused to recognise the court and were sentenced to three months imprisonment each, which

we served in Limerick Jail. On the morning of Christmas Eve, 1920, O'Sullivan and Foley were released. I was also about to be released with them but was held back because I had not washed my cell properly. I refused to wash the cell any further. However, I was released a few hours after them and was met near the jail by a friend with a horse and trap, and arrived home at 10 p.m. that night.

From Christmas, 1920, to May, 1921, I assisted in the trenching of roads and attended several battalion meetings. The Brigade Flying Column had been formed by the time Foley, O'Sullivan and I were released.

Early in May, Foley, O'Sullivan and I selected a few of the most active men from each company in the battalion for the purpose of carrying out attacks on enemy forces in the battalion area. Our first objective was to attack an R.I.C. patrol at Drumcollogher. Twenty men had been selected from the nine companies in the area. The battalion at the time comprised Drumcollogher, Broadford, Feohanagh, Kilmeedy, Ballygran, Clouncagh, Castlemahon, Feenagh and Killeedy Companies, or a total of about three hundred and fifty men.

On the evening of the 13th May, 1921, the column mobilised at Belville and marched to Drumcollogher. I and two other men had rifles; the remainder had shotguns. We arrived in Drumcollogher at 1 a.m. on the 14th May. When we got there, the Column separated. Ben O'Sullivan, with ten men, occupied the house of a man named Paddy Quaid. Con Foley, in charge of another ten men, occupied the upper portion of a restaurant owned by a Lil Connors. It was about 2 a.m. on the 14th before the

column had settled down for the night. I was attached to the section under O'Sullivan. The plan was that, when the Angelus bell rang at 6 p.m. on the following evening, our section was to occupy two public houses owned by people by the names of Ahern and Coghlan. These pubs were situated opposite each other in the Main Street, which ran east and west, and were about a quarter of a mile from the R.I.C. barracks which was situated outside the town. The section in Connors' restaurant would remain in their position, which commanded a view of the entire length of the main street and the approach of enemy forces from the barracks at the opposite end of the town.

Early on the morning of the 14th, several farmers from surrounding districts arrived in the Square and Main Street, as a bull sale was being held that day. About 11 a.m. a couple of lorry loads of military arrived and mounted machine guns at every exit from the town, where they remained until about 3 p.m. after which they withdrew. In the meantime, three military officers called to Connors restaurant and had a meal there while our men were overhead.

At 6 p.m. as the Angelus bell rang, we left Quaid's house, which was a single story thatched house situated behind some shops on the south side of the main street, and entered the pub on our side, by the back door. In the meantime, one of our men in Connors, Dan Liston, left there and crossed over to the post office to disconnect the phone there, so as to prevent reinforcements being called by the Tans. On his way back to Connors, he met a Tan who took no notice of him. A quarter of an hour after the Angelus had rung, two Tans appeared opposite our

position, Ben O'Sullivan gave the order, "Open fire". One Tan was shot dead; the other ran for safety into a lane. After a while, this Tan reappeared and was fired on again. I, with Michael Dwane, left the pub we had occupied, crossed the street and square to occupy the public house opposite. This pub commanded a view of the R.I.C. barracks. When we got to the back door of this pub, a local I.R.A. man named Garry Dwyer, whom we had posted there for the purpose, opened the door and let us in. Just as Dwane and I had taken up positions at an upstairs window, a patrol of about ten Tans left the barracks and proceeded towards the spot where the dead Tan lay on the ground. The sergeant in charge of the Tans apparently observed Dwane and me at the window, for he opened fire on the window. We replied to the fire and succeeded in driving back the ten Tans to the barracks. One of these Tans was wounded but, with the help of his companions, succeeded in reaching the barracks.

Ben O'Sullivan's section then came out of their pub and marched down the street in the direction of Newcastlewest, while Dwane and I covered their retreat. After some time we left our positions and later rejoined our section under Ben O'Sullivan; the section under Con Foley rejoined us some time later. Later that night we dispersed to our own company areas. Among the men who took part in the attack were John Harold, James Doody, Dan Doody, Michael Dwane, Michael Creedon, Martin Cushion, Patrick Wall, Owen Sullivan, Tim O'Shea and Mick Sheehy (Drumcollogher).

The next day the Tans arrived in great force in Drumcollogher and carried out reprisals. They fired several shots in the air and burned down three houses -

Owen Sullivan's, who was Battalion Adjutant, Murray's, a business premises, and John Quaid's, which was a farmer's house.

On the 7th July, the Battalion O/C, Foley, Ben O'Sullivan and I, with a couple of men from the Battalion area who were attached to the Brigade Flying Column, went to Tournafulla and there met the other members of the West Limerick Column. A Column under the command of Sean Breslane was there from North Cork area. The two columns were united under Breslane, Michael Colbert of the West Limerick Column being Vice O/C.

It had been decided to ambush a convoy of four lorries of military which travelled occasionally from Newcastlewest through Abbeyfeale to Listowel. The place chosen for the attack was at Barna, between Newcastlewest and Abbeyfeale.

We took up positions on one side of the road in extended formation. This side of the road was slightly higher than the road itself. The great majority of the joint columns (which numbered approximately eighty men) were armed with rifles; the remainder had shotguns or revolvers. In addition, the men of the North Cork Column had a machine gun. Previous to occupying our positions, the road had been mined with box mines to which electric wires, with detonator attached, had been inserted. I believe the mines were laid by members of the North Cork Column who were also in charge of the battery for exploding *them.*

We remained in our positions for several hours during the day of the 7th July. That night Breslane, owing to the number of men who required to be billeted in the

vicinity for the night, ordered the local men to return to their company areas and to report at 10 a.m. on the following day. I, with the other members of the local companies returned to our company areas and reported next morning as ordered. We again took up our positions that day and the following day, the local men returning each night to their company areas. In the three days, there was no appearance of the enemy.

On the fourth day - it was the morning of the 10th July - the four lorries, for which he had been waiting, passed through the ambush position on their way to Listowel.

We did not open fire as our intention was to attack them that evening on their way back to Newcastlewest. They did not return that day. The next day, 11th July, 1921, as the mines were being removed, the four lorry loads of military appeared. It was some time after twelve noon. They halted for a while, then drove off. The Truce had come into effect.

SIGNED: _____

Michael Sheehy
(Michael Sheehy)

DATE: _____

19th February, 1955

19th February 1955.

WITNESS: _____

John J. Daly
(John J. Daly)

