

W.S. 1,279

DUPLICATE

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

NO. W.S. 1279

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,279

Witness

Sean Clifford,  
Fedamore,  
Kilmallock,  
Co. Limerick.

Identity.

Captain Fedamore Company;  
Battalion D/C. 4th Battalion  
Mid-Limerick Brigade.

Subject.

Fedamore Company Irish Volunteers,  
Co Limerick, 1914-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. 9,2587

Form B.S.M. 2

DUPLICATE

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1918-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
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STATEMENT BY SEÁN CLIFFORD,  
Fedamore, Kilmallock, Co. Limerick.

I was born in Fedamore, Grange, Co. Limerick, in the year 1884. I was sent to the local national school until I was twelve years of age. When I left school, I went to work on my father's farm.

A company of Volunteers was formed in the parishes of Grange and Fedamore in the spring of 1914. Our strength was about forty men. Our drill instructor at the time was a man named George Clancy. He was murdered by the Black and Tans in Limerick City in March, 1921. After John Redmond's speech, offering the Irish Volunteers to England, the company did not last long, and ceased to exist until they were reorganised in the autumn of 1917.

I rejoined the company at the reorganisation, and became the first Company Captain. Tom O'Brien became 1st Lieutenant, and George Ryan became 2nd Lieutenant. The strength was around a hundred men. We met and drilled once a week up to the time of conscription in 1918. Our drill instructor then was an ex British soldier named Pat Brown. During the threat of conscription, drilling was intensified and our strength increased to one hundred and forty men. When it was over, all of our new men left and had nothing more to do with the company. Pat Brown rejoined the British army around this time. During the period, we collected a few shotguns. About this

time, our company and other companies in the area were formed into a battalion. We formed part of the 4th Battalion, Mid Limerick Brigade. Dick O'Connell became O/C, and Tom O'Brien, Vice O/C.

About the month of May or June, the local District Inspector, R.I.C., called on the parish priest, Canon O'Kennedy, and informed him that he would have the area declared a military area if the Volunteers in the parish did not cease drilling and parading. On the instructions of Canon O'Kennedy, the curate, Fr. Fitzpatrick, called on me and told me of the District Inspector's warning, and said that he himself would denounce us from the altar. A mission was being held in the church at the time, so I agreed not to drill or parade the Volunteers while it was in progress. The result of all this interference by the D.I. and clergy was that we lost more than half of our membership. Some short time later, however, Fr. Fitzpatrick was replaced by a Fr. O'Carroll who gave the local Volunteers every encouragement and subsequently accompanied us on ambushes and often heard our confession preparatory to an attack on the enemy. During the general election at the end of the year, ~~we canvassed for the Sinn Féin candidate, Dr. Hayes.~~ we canvassed for the Sinn Féin candidate, Dr. Hayes. On the day of the election, we were on police duty at the polling booths.

Routine drilling continued after the general election all through the year 1919. During the year, we managed to obtain a few shotguns. About the month of September, with a couple of the local I.R.A., I held up the local postman and seized all correspondence for

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 1279/1/108

(ii) How many documents have been abstracted: 1/1

(iii) The date of each such document: 4 November 1955

(iv) The description of each document:  
WS 1279 Sean Clifford (with own statement) p3  
name of individual and personal details.

(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.

the local R.I.C. barracks. A short time before, the R.I.C. had fired a number of shots into my house. This was the first outrage by them in Fedamore.

Early in the year 1920, \_\_\_\_\_ turned informer. Letters, written by him a short time after, addressed to the District Inspector of the R.I.C., William Street, Limerick, and to Pallasgreen R.I.C. barracks - the headquarters of this area - were found by sorters in Limerick Post Office and passed on to us. One of these gave the names of five members of Fedamore Company. At a court martial held in his absence by the Brigade Staff, \_\_\_\_\_ was found guilty and sentenced to be shot as an informer. The matter was reported to G.H.Q., Dublin, for their confirmation of the sentence. After some time, an order was received from G.H.Q. to fine him £100 and to burn down his house. I should have mentioned that, a short time previous to the court martial, \_\_\_\_\_ produced a threatening letter which he showed to members of the local Company, saying that he had received it through the post from the Black and Tans. The letter was something similar to one received by the Lord Mayor of Cork and other prominent I.R.A. and Sinn Féin leaders at the time from a murder gang within the Auxiliaries and Black and Tans. In \_\_\_\_\_ case, it was proved that the letter he produced was written by himself. The order from G.H.Q. was carried out by members of the local Company. Liam Forde, Sean Carroll, Paddy Hegarty and Paddy Barry of the Brigade Staff were among those who constituted the court. I attended but took no part in the proceedings.

As a result of information supplied to the R.I.C. around this time, they raided a hall one night in Caherguillamore where a dance was in progress, and arrested every Volunteer present.

About the spring of 1920, parish courts were set up in the area. I became president of the local parish court. Our court was composed of Volunteer, labour union and farmers' representatives. In the course of two years, we tried several cases. In one case, we arrested a litigant who had got a decree for 29 at the quarter sessions. At a re-hearing of the case in the parish court, we quashed the decree of the British court and heard nothing further about it. ~~James~~ Sean Clifford, Pat Kavanagh and Edward Moloney usually constituted the court. They were assisted on one occasion by Richard O'Connell, Battalion O/C, and on another occasion by D. Hennessy. A man named M. Keogh was court clerk. The local Volunteers did all the police work and carried out all decrees and collected fines.

Ballyneety R.I.C. barracks was evacuated about the summer of 1920. At a Battalion Council meeting one night, the Battalion O/C, Dick O'Connell, read an order from the Brigade O/C to have this barracks burned down and any other barracks in the Battalion area which became unoccupied by the R.I.C. Among the members of the Company who helped me to carry out this order were: J. Feely, P. Kavanagh, T. Conway, Ned Moloney, T. Dillon, J. Hynes, L. Barry, W. Hurley and T. Harrington.

In November, 1920, members of Ballybricken, Caherconlish and Fedamore Companies, under the Battalion

O/C, Dick O'Connell, took up ambush positions on each side of the road in the village of Grange, to ambush a convoy of lorries carrying military, R.I.C. and Black and Tans. A few of our men were placed in the Post Office. The attacking party numbered about thirty men. Five or six of these had rifles; the others had shotguns. We were in our positions about 5 a.m.

Some time in the afternoon, the convoy - which, to our surprise, numbered seven lorries - arrived. As they came into the ambush position, they were fired on by the ambush party. The enemy brought the lorries to a halt, and returned our fire. The engagement had only lasted ten minutes when the lorries were started up again and driven off, in the direction of Limerick. The attacking party then withdrew, suffering one casualty. At least one of the enemy was wounded. Among the members of the Fedamore Company who took part in the attack were J. Feely, Lieutenant T. Dillon, Lieutenant E. Moloney, L. Barry, P. Daly, J. Hedderman, J. Keogh, E. O'Connell, J. McNamara and P. Doran. Among the members of the Ballybricken Company who took part in the attack were M. Portley, P. Casey, M. Tierney, J. O'Shaughnessy, M. Hennessy, J. Hennessy, T. Power, N. O'Grady and T. Portley. Among the Caherconlish men were Richard O'Connell, Battalion O/C, J. Lynch, Captain S. Lynch and D. Connolly. The Fedamore Company were armed with three rifles, two revolvers and twelve shotguns on the occasion. Fr. O'Carroll, now Canon W.J. O'Carroll, Parish Priest of Rathkeale, was our Battalion Chaplain and took part in the ambush, and heard our confessions previous to the attack.

On the following morning, several lorries of R.I.C. and Tans raided and searched the area. Volunteers Tierney, Hartigan and Casey happened to be in a house in the vicinity, but managed to escape under heavy fire. That night, members of the Ballybricken and Fedamore Companies mounted guard on Ballybricken creamery, fearing it was going to be burned down by the enemy as a reprisal.

About this time, a Brigade Flying Column was formed. The men comprising the Column numbered about twenty men and had been on the run for some time. They were whole-time on the job of fighting or evading the enemy. Dick O'Connell, Battalion O/C, became the Column leader.

Early in the year 1921, O'Connell decided to ambush two lorries carrying a District Inspector and twelve R.I.C. and Black and Tans, who travelled regularly to Fedamore R.I.C. barracks for the purpose of paying the garrison there. The place selected for the attack was Drumkeen, between Caherconlish and Pallasgreen. A fortnight previous to the attack, I received a despatch, to report to the Column at Caherconlish and to bring Tom Harrington with me. I was in this area for about two weeks, and then went to the Murroe area with the Column. Murroe was only a few miles from Drumkeen. Here, we occupied an old disused house. Soon after, we were joined by Donnchadh O'Hannigan, O/C of the East Limerick Flying Column, and his men. We were all assembled at 1 a.m. on the morning of the 3rd February, 1921. At 1 p.m. we took up ambush positions on each side of the road and in some houses at the point selected. All of the East Limerick men



Were armed with rifles, while the majority of the Mid-Limerick men also had rifles - some had shotguns. The road had been blocked at the Pallasgrean end by local Volunteers. We had not long to wait when the two lorries arrived. As soon as they reached the ambush position, O'Hannigan, who was in charge, ordered "open fire". In ten minutes, the convoy, with the exception of two Tans who escaped, was wiped out. Eleven R.I.C. men or Black and Tans had been killed. We collected their eleven rifles. Our only casualty was one wounded man, Liam Hayes, an officer of the East Limerick Brigade, who had a finger shot off.

Around this time, two members of the Ballybricken Company, J. O'Shaughnessy and P. Casey, while carrying rifles, were taken by surprise by a patrol of Black and Tans in Ballybricken one day. After a considerable exchange of fire, they succeeded in disengaging the enemy and escaped.

About a month after the Drumkeen ambush, the Mid Limerick Column took up ambush positions in the Rockstown area, but the expected patrol did not turn up. After a wait of several hours, we eventually withdrew.

About the month of March, Richard O'Connell, the O/C of the Column and Battalion Commandant, was arrested. I was then appointed Battalion Commandant in his place. T. Dillon replaced me as Company Captain of Fedamore Company, and Seán O'Carroll of Castleconnell became O/C of the Column.

Around the latter end of March, Liam Forde, Brigade O/C, visited the area with the object of

attacking a Black and Tan and R.I.C. patrol in the neighbourhood. With the help of the local Company and a few members of the Column, Liam Forde, who was in charge, carried out the attack on the 13th April, 1921. The enemy strength in Fedamore R.I.C. barracks was six R.I.C. and fourteen Black and Tans. The barracks itself was situated on a hill, commanding a good view of the countryside. The Tans were in the habit of frequenting James Power's public house, night after night. On the night of the 13th April, seven of them were having a celebration in the pub, as two of them were to be married the following day. Liam Forde had placed a number of local men covering the barracks, to prevent reinforcements leaving the building. He also placed a number of men in the vicinity of the public house. After a short time, three of the Tans left the pub. As they did so, they were fired on. One was shot dead; the other two were wounded. At the same time, the I.R.A., under T.Dillon, covering the barracks, sniped at the windows for some time. Among the men who took part in this attack were Pat Kavanagh, Pat Daly, Stephen and Johnny Lynch, Mike Doyle and myself.

The following day, Tom Harrington's workshop was burned down as an official reprisal, while my house and that of a Mrs. Feely were raided and looted.

The Mid Limerick Column was billeted near Shraherla, on the Cork-Limerick border, at the latter end of April, 1921. On May 1st, we were summoned by D. O'Hannigan to ambush a cycling patrol of military who had travelled from Galbally into County Cork and were

expected to return by the same route. When we arrived in the Shraherla area, we ourselves were ambushed by another party of military in lorries who swept in, close behind us. Our Column of about thirty men got quickly off the road. Orders were given by Liam Hayes - the only man to know the ground - to retreat to Shraherla church. He led the way. Half the Column followed him and arrived safely at the church. The other half foolishly fought the enemy until we were almost surrounded. We succeeded, however, in making our escape, leaving behind us several men, killed or wounded. Forty per cent. of the Column were casualties. The enemy, who was attacking from good cover, suffered no casualties. To sum up, it was the worst dressing the Mid Limerick Column received in a few minutes.

Next day, May 2nd, we arrived in the Lakelly area - around 3 p.m. - where Liam Forde, who was in charge of the Column, placed us behind a ditch and whitethorn hedge. I was no sooner in position when he ordered me to take seven men in the direction of some shooting which, we were informed, had been in progress from an early hour that morning. To my surprise, I discovered that a mixed party of Black and Tans and military were engaged in a running fight with members of another Column, located about a mile away. When we got into a favourable position, we opened fire on the enemy and forced them to retreat towards the position occupied by Forde and the rest of the Column. The enemy were in extended formation and just walked up to, and through the hedge, routing Forde and his men, chasing them in a shameful way. When I took stock, I had only two men with me. The other five had been



the gravel which we had excavated. Immediately after laying the mine, we took up position overlooking the railway line. We numbered twenty men and were all armed with rifles. Seán O'Carroll was in charge.

We were not more than ten minutes in position when a patrol of military came along the line from Limerick city direction. They spotted the uneven surface of the track where we had placed the mine and were examining the ground around, when O'Carroll ordered us to open fire. We attacked immediately. The military left the track and ran for cover. We withdrew. The mine was removed later in the day by the military. We should, of course, have blown up the mine instead of leaving it to them to remove it. I might add that the military patrolled the railway line the whole way from Killaloe to Limerick that morning to ensure the safe arrival of the Auxiliaries in Limerick, which they reached later in the day.

Members of Fedamore Company who took part in this attack included D. Hennessy, J. Lynch, J. O'Shaughnessy, J. Ryan, S. Hurley, P.M. Gormahy and myself.

Perhaps the greatest asset the I.R.A. had during the period previous to the Truce was the prosperity of the rural population, due entirely to the brave men, who shot landlords and bailiffs, and the leaders of those men who encouraged them to do so, forty years previous to 1921.

The farmers fed the Flying Columns and subscribed thousands of pounds to the Dáil Éireann loan and Volunteer funds. The shopkeepers in the town were patriotic. One of them, James Moriarty of Croom, took

control of the funds of the Croon Rural District Council to prevent their seizure by the enemy - a very hazardous thing for a man of standing to do at that time. He would have been shot immediately if it had come to the knowledge of the enemy.

The Gaelic League was always strong in Limerick city, yet not more than two or three, of a total of twelve or fifteen city men who fought in or outside the city, were members of the League. They preferred, when the Black and Tans came, to talk Irish rather than fight.

Men who spoke only English and who never had much time for Gaelic games met, attacked and beat the enemy whereas those who claimed a monopoly of Irish patriotism, namely, members of the Gaelic Athletic Association and Gaelic League, were nowhere to be seen when it came to a fight with the enemy.

It has been stated by men who should know better that the I.R.A. were nearly finished when the Truce came on the 11th July, 1921. Nothing could be further from the truth. England could have beaten the I.R.A. in perhaps a week or two if she had waged war as it was usual at the time, that is, by the use of artillery, tanks, gas and aeroplanes, to demolish our towns and villages as happened on the Continent two years before. England, however, couldn't do these things because she had told the world she was rescuing the Irish people from a murder gang. Her Chief Secretary at the time told the House of Commons that "the I.R.A. were being pulled out of the caves in the mountains". The I.R.A. saw mountains only as a man sees the moon, from a very long

distance. There was no solid reason why the I.R.A. could not hold out indefinitely, provided England carried on with her contemptible Black and Tans. Rumours had been circulated in I.R.A. quarters then that certain politicians were anxious to change our plan of campaign and wanted us to meet the British in massed formation instead ~~of~~ with pikes, pitch-forks, scythes and the few guns we had. Other politicians of the time, we were told, were of the opinion that such an act of supreme Irish folly would go down well with American adherents of John Bull.

There may have been no truth in such rumours. I do not believe G.H.Q. would have endorsed such a proposal for the I.R.A. to go out and die like fools to make a holiday for British soldiers, Auxiliaries, Black and Tans and their numerous friends in this country, and keep the people crawling for perhaps another fifty years.

I have met some men who never fought against anybody and who think the English soldier is not a good fighter. I believe myself he is as good a man as ever walked, and that he wouldn't turn his back on any man. I am giving my own experience for what it is worth, and I think that those who say the English soldier is a coward are downright liars.

SIGNED: Sean Clifford

DATE: 4th November, 1955

4th November, 1955.

WITNESS John J. Daly  
(John J. Daly)

