

W. S. 1,292

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1297

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,292

Witness

Sergeant Bryan Doherty,
Garda Síochána,
Fethard-on-Sea, Co. Wexford.

Home Address: Rhyne,
Killoe, Co. Longford.
Identity.

Sergeant
Garda Síochána.

Subject.

Killoe Company Irish Volunteers,
Co. Longford, 1 915-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

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BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

NO. W.S. 1292

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STATEMENT BY BRIAN DOHERTY, SERGEANT, GARDA SIOCHANA,
FETHARD-ON-SEA, COUNTY WEXFORD.

HOME ADDRESS:- RHYNE, KILLOE, COUNTY LONGFORD.

During the years 1913, 1914 and part of 1915 I attended school at Esker, Killoe, County Longford, and among my classmates were Francis and Michael Gormley, Michael Heslin, John Clarke and others who, in the subsequent years up to 1921, played a prominent part in the fight for freedom in that area.

The teacher was Mr. Patrick Brady of Fardrumin, Ballinamuck, now deceased who, in addition to giving his pupils a sound education, never lost an opportunity of educating his senior pupils in the doctrine of militant Irish nationalism, and many a time he read the fiery articles on this theme to us from a newspaper called "The Catholic Bulletin" which was in circulation at the time. During these readings a boy was, invariably, placed on guard, so that we would not be surprised by the Inspector's visit. So that when leaving school in 1915, we had a fair knowledge all round.

In 1915, in common with others, I joined the Redmond Volunteers, as they were called. Singularly enough there were only two meetings of the Company to which I belonged, the inaugural meeting and one subsequent meeting a week later. On the latter occasion, the Sergeant of the R.I.C. and a Constable stationed at Ballinalee appeared at the assembly which consisted of about fifty men, and it was explained that the policemen were there to give us instruction in Drill.

We were formed up, numbered off, and shown some simple evolutions such as, 'At Ease', 'At Attention' etc., and when the parade was dismissed, a local man of middle age named Benny Murtagh

of Rhyne, who did not take part in the meeting, addressed us in the presence of the police in the following words, so far as I can remember - "Do you know what you are being drilled for. If you don't I can tell you. It is because England wants you for cannon fodder against the Germans. The traitors that sold your country will sell you as well to England. What did the Germans do to us that we should want to fight them. Now I am only an ignorant man. I never got any education, and I knew very little about the history of my country until I went to America. Then I got it in the Clan na Gael. My advice to you is go home and don't allow yourselves to be betrayed. Please God, you will yet get a chance to drill and fight for your own country, and these peelers can return to their paymasters". There were no further meetings and the Company broke up.

I then joined the Ancient Order of Hibernians with my brother John, so that we could become members of the A.O.H. Brass and Reed Band in Killoe Parish. My schoolmates, Frank Gormley and John Clarke of Esker, joined at the same time. We continued on as A.O.H. members and Bandsmen, until after the Rising of 1916.

The Rising and its grim aftermath of executions and internments brought about considerable feelings and discussions. Arthur Griffith's 'Nationality' began to be widely read, and in a short time matters came to a head in the A.O.H. which, as an organisation, gave its loyalty and support to the old Irish Party or the Redmondite Party, as it was called.

At a reorganisation meeting at Esker Hall early in 1917, a Mr. J. D. Nugent and a man called Brother Bansfield from Dublin, attended.. Clarke, Gormley and myself were censored for wearing the 'tricolour' in our coats and we were given to understand we would

be discharged in disgrace from the organisation if we persisted in wearing the Colours. We left the organisation together with the following Band members :- Sean Duffy, Cavan, Ballinalee, Patrick Cooney, Doorock, Drumlish, Peter Mimmagh, Doorock, Drumlish, Frank Conroy, Aughaboy, my brother, Sean Doherty, Jimmy Lennon the Drummer etc. Consequently, the Brass and Reed Band disintegrated.^{ED}

The first important event regarding the new Sinn Fein movement in the county was the contest between Joe McGuinness and Paddy McKenna of the Irish Party. McGuinness, a Commandant in the 1916 Rising and a Longford man, was in gaol at the time of the contest.

General Election activity - monster meetings of the parties in the summer of 1917, took place throughout the County. I remember to be at one of the first Sinn Fein public meetings held early in 1917 at Newtownforbes following a football match. The speakers arrived in a horse-drawn brake, and as Clonguish was a hotbed of A.O.H., they got a hot reception, even Paddy Belton was shouted down. There were girls who accompanied the speakers from Dublin dressed in Cumann na mBan uniform and they were endeavouring to sell the Colours made in the shape of a bow to be worn on the coat lapel, but they weren't making much headway when, suddenly, I was surprised to see a man, whom I had known well since childhood, speaking from the platform. He was James Conway, a first-cousin of my father, from Lisameen, Ballinalee. He was recognised by most of the crowd and he got a fair hearing for a start. But before he had finished talking there was silence, and the flag-sellers were sold out in a short time. I remember some of his remarks which made a decided impression on me at the time, and it was obvious that the crowd were even more impressed.

He commenced by reminding his listeners that as a result of the Battle of Ballinamuck in 1798, County Longford could hold its head

high until they shamed themselves by electing Sir John Greville, a landlord, to represent the County in the House of Commons, over John Martin, the honest '48 man. He asked them were they still in South Longford going to disgrace themselves further by preferring Paddy McKenna to Joe McGuinness, a patriot lying in gaol. There were prolonged cheers when he finished his remarks and subsequently the campaign was in vigorous swing. Catch cries and songs were the order of the day, and the following is a sample of the songs which suddenly appeared :

"Vote for McGuinness who is a true Irishman
Because he loved Eireann and fought in her cause,
And prove to the party and prove to the world
That Ireland is sick of her English made laws".

This was sung to the air of "O'Donnell Abu", having some four verses. Another ran thus :

"Up Longford now and strike a blow for the land unconquered
still;
Your fathers fought their ruthless foe on many a plain and hill.
Their blood runs red in your Irish veins;
You are sons of Granuaile;
So show your pride in the men who died
And vote for the man in gaol".

Another song which I give in full really heralded in the resurgence. It was profoundly popular and the sentiments which it expressed made a wonderful appeal to all. It was also sung to the martial air of "O'Donnell Abu", and I personally had to sing it often three or four times at dances on the same night:

(1)

"Awake men of Eireann the long night is ending,
The first golden gleam of the morning has come.
Voices long sundered in concord are blending
High hopes are ~~swinging~~^{swinging} in hearts that were numb.

Chorus.

On for the nation's right. On to the noble fight;
Leap from your sleep at the call of the dawn.
Win back your own again. Tear down the thraldom chain.
On to the war cry of Sinn Fein Amain.

(2)

Here is the land that is liberty's altar
 Here and here only the battle must be
 Think on the prize and your hearts will not falter
 Think on the future when Ireland is free.

(Chorus)

(3)

Men from the plains of Mayo to Loč Garman
 Men from Loch Lene to the hills of Tyrone
 Seeds of the Gael, of the Dane and the Norman
 Join hands for Ireland and Ireland alone.

(Chorus).

It may not be out of place to set forth these old songs of the resurgent period. Most of them have since been forgotten, but they had their uses, and they did their part in building up the true spirit of militant nationality in the youth of that period; a spirit which lay dormant in the breast of the Irish Race since it had been partially paralysed in '67 and subsequently discouraged by Parnell and a host of Irish pacifist leaders. Therefore, the flame started in 1916 spread easily enough as a result, in a great measure, of the depths which were sounded by these sentimental old ballads.

The Republican Movement took definite shape in my parish in 1917 when, in common with others, I was sworn in, in April of that year at Esker Hall, and subsequently bi-weekly meetings and drill practices at night, together with route marches and manoeuvres through fields continued until 1918, when an organiser was sent down from G.H.Q.. He was Staff Captain Patrick Garrett and his headquarters, while in our area, was at my own home at Rhyne, until things got too hot in late 1920.

The merits of this man as an organiser and instructor are too well known for me to mention them here. It is only fair that I should add my opinion to those already expressed, because I saw, probably, a lot more of the Captain than many of the lads during that time. It was, in my opinion, mainly due to his work that Longford played such a part in the War of Independence. The officers of my Company were Mr. F. Reynolds made Brigadier afterwards, Frank Gormley Captain, Ned Kehoe and James Sheeran Lieutenants. There were other appointments subsequently when the A.S.U. was formed.

Before I became attached to the Flying Column I took part in raids for arms, raids for bicycles, road blocking etc. with other members of the Company and up to 1920 our house did not come under the notice of the British authorities - a fact which spoke volumes for the loyalty and discretion of the people; because on account of Captain Garrett being staying with us and other activities which involved our place, it was a wonder we hadn't previously received attention.

The first big raid at our house was carried out by Black and Tans on the eve of Christmas 1920, but they didn't find any of us there. They did, however, steal various articles of silver and cutlery from the house which we have never seen since.

On the 5th November, 1920, the day following the first attack on the Tans at Ballinalee, the fighting men of the area assembled at Reilly's of Goran which is within less than a mile from Ballinalee, and a constant vigil was maintained for over a week at this place. The intention was to attack the Tans should they return to burn the village which they had been prevented from

doing on the night of the 4th November at considerable cost to themselves and only a small portion of the A.S.U. being involved. The following assembled at Reilly's on 5th November to the best of my recollection under the leadership of Sean MacEoin and the Brigade Staff - Seamus Conway, M.F. Reynolds, Sean Duffy and other officers.

GAIFFE

James Sheeran, ~~Casserly~~, Thomas Casserly, do, Pat Quinn and John Dinning, do, James Trapp, Tom Quinn, John and Mick Connell, Peter McGuire, Joe and James Lee, Hugh McLoughlin all of ^SWoran, Frank Gormley and Michael of Esker, Ned Kehoe, Cartron, Thomas Hurson, Doonacross; Paddy Reynolds, Corlea, Michael J. Reynolds, Cartron, James McGuinness, Aughaboy and Bill Murphy of Esker. All from Killoe Company with as many more from Clonbroney Company.

This position was abandoned after a large force of military and Black and Tans arrived from Longford which was too formidable to attack.

On 5th December, 1920, I became a permanent member of the A.S.U. I took part in the attack in Ballinalee in December on Pat Farrell's house which had been previously occupied by the R.I.C. and Tans. After that I was posted to the protective position around Canon Markey's house at Clonbroney. I took part in a sniping attack on Tans in Ballinalee on 5th January, 1921, and on a Sunday morning in February 1921 at 6 a.m. I went through an unforgettable experience. As I have previously explained, we didn't come under any close attention at my house by the Tans, and none of us were being sought by them. It was, therefore, customary for me to sleep at home occasionally without arms. I came home this particular Saturday night having in my possession

the latest copy of An t-Oglach in the breast pocket of my coat. My two eldest brothers and one older sister, two younger brothers and a young sister aged 8 years with my mother, comprised the entire family. The two eldest brothers, although in the Movement, were not so active as myself as they were operating a mobile threshing set for hire around the area and they always came home on Saturday nights.

We were rudely awakened the following morning when a cycling patrol of Auxies from Ballinalee, about ten strong, broke in the front door and invaded the house. All the family occupied upstairs bedrooms in one of which I slept with my brother Patrick. The minute I awoke I rushed to my coat and disposed of An t-Oglach by putting it under some odds and ends in a corner of the room and returning quickly to bed. By this time the raiders were in every room searching and getting all hands out of bed and as ill luck would have it they discovered An t-Oglach and began to question us with drawn guns. Mother told them that the child, my younger sister, found it on the road coming from school a few days before that, and the child confirmed her statement and no amount of persuasion or promises of sweets or chocolate would change her although they spent surely an hour trying to. She behaved a wonderful child throughout. There were three bicycles at our house one of which was a girl's, my eldest sister's. The Auxies directed myself and my two elder brothers to mount them and proceed as prisoners to Ballinalee with them. I made out I couldn't cycle and that I never learned how to cycle. They tried me on my sister's bicycle and I fell off on to the roadway and complained of hurting my arm. The Auxie in charge was a man named Coburn and he handed me his trenchcoat directing me to report with it at the barracks before 10 a.m.

After they had left with my brothers I contacted the Captain Frank Gormley at Molloghans, Esker - about a half mile from his own house where he had slept for safety the previous night. When I explained the position he advised me to go in with the coat adding, wisely enough, that if they had known anything about me they wouldn't have given me such a chance and said that it might go hard with my brothers if I didn't turn up with the coat. He advised me to play the game if they questioned me and get out of their clutches as well as I could.

I, therefore, returned home and after breakfast I set forth with the coat on my shoulder and in about half an hour or less I arrived at the barbed wire barricade around Reynold's shop which the Auxies had occupied as a barracks and just simultaneously who should arrive in a Crossley tender among the Auxies only the Captain, Frank Gormley himself, a prisoner who, only an hour before had given me his advice. It seems that when I left he paid a short visit to his home which was surrounded while he was there. Like myself he hadn't been much in the limelight previously and the Auxies were keen on getting his brother Michael whose activities were well known to them and in addition he had deserted from the British Army in 1918, after a few months training the purpose for which he joined so that he could fight them with their own methods as he certainly did. They thought they had him in the person of his brother Frank, but were soon disillusioned when they had us all inspected by the R.I.C. soon after our arrival. Up to this time they hadn't searched Frank who told us, when he got a chance that he had some "45" bullets in his pocket. We soon disposed of those under their gaze almost.

We were detained overnight and placed in the cellar on bags of straw for beds.

These Auxies were a soft crowd because both myself and Gormley pulled fast ones on them next morning when we were separately interrogated by the officer in charge, a breezy little man called Major Filleny and two other officers, one called Cadet Riley a pretty shark looking joker. They questioned Gormley about his brother Michael at great length, and Frank gave them to understand that Michael was a common nuisance to his family who would be glad if he were interned, and at their request he promised to have Michael at home for them in a few days, so with this understanding they let him out. I was proceeding to be questioned at this time and he gave me a sly wink. His facial expression conveyed that he was safe.

I faced my inquisitors, thank God, without tremor and I had a tough job convincing them that I couldn't ride a bicycle, but eventually they seemed to believe me. They then started off on the usual tack, what I knew of the I.R.A. and its members. All this time I kept expressing my indignation for being detained because I obliged one of their men by bringing in his coat, and I suddenly had an inspiration. I said that it was my intention to join the **R.I.C.** as soon as the present trouble was over. They then asked me if I had made any inquiries about joining and I said I had been speaking to Mr. Caldwell - who was a retired Sergeant of the R.I.C. a protestant residing at *Glanagh* and a friend of our family. I said Mr. Caldwell had given me instructions regarding candidature for the R.I.C. Major Filleny then told me in a fatherly way that it would very much enhance my chances of becoming a member of the Forces if I would co-operate quietly with his Forces and help to restore law and order.

He even gave me instructions about passing on information unobtrusively. I readily promised to co-operate and I was immediately released from custody. My two brothers were held. They must have realised their error soon after my release because in a few hours afterwards they surrounded our house and asked mother if I had returned. She said I had and that I had gone to our other farm at Glanagh to look after cattle. They searched the other farm for hours that evening.

At this time I had, of course, joined the unit at Cartron, Drumlish, and Frank Gormley and myself were having a bit of a laugh at the gullibility of the Auxies.

During the coming months several ambush positions were prepared around Aughadowney, Doonacross and at several places around the Hill of Corn, but nothing much materialised except skirmishing around, and as a result of the irreparable loss to the unit of Seán MacEoin and Seán Connolly coming so closely together, the unit was badly stricken and in no position to force the pace against the Tans with full vigour. The O/C. General MacEoin's position as a prisoner was a very serious one and there was a general feeling among members that a forced pace would not help him.

The Tans, sensing that something like this may have affected the morale of the army, began to take liberties and started to move around in small cycling groups between their posts ^{AT} ~~and~~ Longford and Ballinalee, calling into houses along the route and chatting with the occupants.

On or about the middle of May, 1921, it was reported that a patrol of two men in plain clothes had proceeded to Longford from Ballinalee at 11 a.m. The Company Captain Gormley contacted three

of us and we took up position at Kelleter at 4 p.m. that evening to intercept the patrol. Our position was inside the gateway of an avenue leading up to a big farmhouse from the main Ballinalee Longford road about mid-way between the two points and almost at the top of a hill or rise in the road. We were armed with shotguns having slug loaded cartridges which we hastily acquired as the rifles etc. were at the unit headquarters at Cartron and we hadn't time to get there.

We weren't long in position when we observed the two suspects cycling towards us from Longford and dismounting from their machines to walk towards us up the 150 yards hill. Gormley and myself stood in the gateway and we previously had placed the other two men James McGuinness and Patrick Hagan at the other side of the road behind a thick hedge. These two men were much older than ourselves and consequently were not as swift on foot.

When the Tans approached within about fifteen yards we both stepped out on the roadway. I personally presented my weapon and ordered them to put their hands up. They did this with alacrity and we then marched them with their bikes up the avenue to a point where we were out of view from the road. Then Hagan and McGuinness joined us. The two men denied they were members of the Black and Tans but when searched they had dispatches from Longford addressed to the O/C. at Ballinalee. Anyway both Gormley and myself had seen them when we were prisoners at Ballinalee - wearing the uniform of Tans. They eventually admitted they were Tans and we escorted them back to the main road minus their bicycles and dispatches. We had made up our minds that we would not let them return to Ballinalee. When we were approaching the main road the Captain instructed Hagan and ^{to} McGuinness keep them covered at a point within ten yards of the road until we examined the position on the roadway, as there were

quite a number of vehicles and people returning from a fair which had been held that day at Longford. The subsequent events were precipitated by the Tans themselves. One of them, the tallest, a big, powerful young man, bolted up the avenue and had gone out of shot range before the Captain and I spotted him. I fired two shots from the double barrel which I had and missed as he was over 100 yards away. The Captain then said, "Take after him Brian and grab one of the guns and I'll attend to this chap."

I grabbed a single barrel gun from one of the two men who were rather shaken and spellbound by the sudden turn of events and I gave chase to the Tan through the fields and on to a bye-road leading to the Parochial House where it was obvious he was making for, to seek shelter. I could not gain on him but fortunately there was a local calf jobber coming from the fair and proceeding in the same direction as the Tan who had passed him out. The jobber had a good fast pony and I jumped on to his car and urged him at gun point to overtake the man in front. The galloping pony overtook the Tan at Harrissons crossroads, Emnybegs, within a quarter of a mile of the Parochial House and one slug loaded cartridge ended his career there for ever. His name was Booth and he was a native of Liverpool having had active service in the first world war. The other was named Stewart, an orangeman from Tyrone.

In a few minutes the Captain arrived on the scene and after assuring himself in a practical way that the enemy was out for the count, we rejoined our comrades and conveyed bicycles and dispatches to the unit headquarters.

After this we kept close to the unit expecting that reprisals and military action would bring the full unit into play again. But singularly enough nothing unusual happened which was attributed to

the action of the Parish Priest who merely had the bodies attended to and covered, and a message conveyed to Longford to the British Authorities. This wise action of a great Parish Priest most assuredly prevented a bad aftermath. This was the last fatal brush. The unit did carry out a sort of attack on the stronghold at Ballinalee on the eve of the Truce which I thought was more of a defiant action than a serious attempt to take the fortress.

After the Truce I was posted to the Republican Police, and between that and December, 1921, I was constantly employed on police work, serving Summonses, attending Parish Courts and seizing property with the rate collectors to distraint for outstanding rates which certain people refused to pay to the Republican Government.

I have endeavoured to set down my experiences with as much detail and accuracy as I possibly can command, after a period of over thirty years; and the body to whom I am submitting these details is at liberty to make whatever use of my Statement it thinks fit. Some difficulties may be experienced in the matter of my handwriting which was never my strong point, I am sorry to say. But if any correction or amendment is considered necessary, I will gladly attend to the matter. Or if any of the matters I have mentioned requires further explanation, I will attend to it likewise.

In the opening paragraphs of my Statement there are certain matters which could be deemed irrelevant; but my idea in referring to them was to give an impression of the background in my native locality immediately prior to 1916, and the subsequent events which culminated with the Truce of 1921.

Signed: Bryan Doherty Sgt.

Date: 22/11/55

(Bryan Doherty) Sgt.
22/11/55.

Witness: James Conway (James J. Conway)
INVESTIGATOR.

