

W.S. 1,327

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
NO. W.S. 1,327

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.
STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,327.....

Witness

Patrick O'Donnell (Kit),
Sheskinarone,
Dungloe,
Co. Donegal.

Identity.

Lieut. Dungloe Company Irish Volunteers,
Co. Donegal, 1918 - ;

Q.M. 1st Brigade, 1st Northern Division.
Subject.

Dungloe Company Irish Volunteers,
Co. Donegal, 1918-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S.2643.....

Form B.S.M. 2

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STATEMENT BY PATRICK O'DONNELL (KIT),

Sheskinarone, Dungloe, Co. Donegal.

I joined the Irish Volunteers in 1918. The first company organised near my home was the Burtonport Company, which was started by Joseph Sweeney (later Major General).

The next company started was Dungloe. I became 1st Lt. of the Dungloe Company. Sinn Féin was started about the same time. We had very few members in Sinn Féin or the Volunteers at the start. The A.O.H. had the grip in the early days, but we made headway slowly and when the 1918 election came along we had a better organisation than the A.O.H. The members of the A.O.H. did not oppose us too strongly but, at the same time, they would not join us. The ones that did join us turned out right good men.

In 1919 our captain was appointed to the battalion and I became captain for a while. In 1920 I was appointed Battalion Quartermaster. At that time the battalion had one service rifle and two Ross rifles. The companies had a few shotguns each. My principal job as Q/M was going round the companies and seeing that the shotguns were kept in good order and in a safe place. I was also responsible for seeing that the companies collected a levy which had been imposed on each householder. The levy was collected by the companies and handed over to the battalion. The funds collected were used for the purchase of arms, grenades and explosives. Payments were also made for lodgings for men on the run

visiting our area, and in at least two cases for the care and treatment of wounded men. Many of our supporters were poor and could not be expected to provide food out of their own resources.

Early in 1921 I was appointed Brigade Q/M. My duties were the same as when I was Battalion Q/M, except that instead of looking after a battalion I was responsible for three battalions, made up of 22 companies between them. I never rode a bicycle and all my journeys over the whole brigade area were made on foot.

The activities I have knowledge of commenced in 1919. It was late in that year.

Two men named Anthony McGinley and Charlie McBride were arrested for distributing Sinn Féin literature in the town of Dungloe. They were sent to Derry jail under an escort of R.I.C. We knew that the R.I.C. would have to return to Dungloe, so Joseph Sweeney (Major Gen.), our Brigade O/C, prepared an ambush. On returning to Dungloe by train, the R.I.C. could leave the train at either of two stations, Kincasslagh Road or Dungloe Road. Two local men were instructed to keep the train under observation and Joseph Sweeney brought us into ambush positions at the old school about two miles from Dungloe on the Burtonport side. We were in three sections: No. 1 section - Patrick Breslin, Bernie Sweeney, James McCole (Capt.), Geo. Meehan; No. 2 section - Joseph Sweeney (Major Gen.), Patrick O'Donnell (Kit) - witness, Frank O'Donnell; No. 3 section - Patrick McCole, John Molloy. No. 1 section was behind the schoolhouse wall,

armed with revolvers. No. 2 section was 20 yards nearer Dungloe. There was little cover, as the road ran across open country. No. 3 section was 20 yards on the Dungloe side of No. 2 section. This section was armed with 2 Mills bombs.

The plan was to let the R.I.C. party (which, it was anticipated, would consist of a sergeant and two or three constables) come right into the ambush position before opening fire. John O'Gorman, who had been sent to scout the train, came and reported that the R.I.C. were on the train and were going on to Dungloe Road station. We waited, and as the R.I.C. came into the position we opened fire. The R.I.C. ran from No. 1 section into No. 2 section. We were firing all the time as they ran. One R.I.C. man was wounded and later lost his leg. The others ran through the ambush and got away. The bombs were not thrown. After the attack we dispersed to our homes. We captured no arms.

In January, 1921, the Tans had a post in Glenties and we received warning that they were coming to burn Dungloe. Joseph Sweeney ordered the mobilisation of the two companies nearest - 'A' (Dungloe) and 'B' (Burtonport). The Tans did not appear.

Around the same time word came through from Derry that a mystery train was coming to Burtonport from Derry. The train was supposed to collect fish at Burtonport, but as there was no fish at the time it was well believed that the train would carry troops. Peadar O'Donnell had a small column in the area at the time and plans were made to attack the train. I got orders to get all

the arms and ammunition available.

Joseph Sweeney and Peadar O'Donnell were in charge. They selected a site at Meenbanad about a mile from the station of that name. It was a single line running through a deep cutting. The line was blocked with stones. It may not have been an ideal spot, but the arrangements had to be rushed and it was the best available at the time. The ambushing party was broken into sections and they were placed in position on both sides of the line but so arranged that no one section was directly opposite another. I was with No. 2 section alongside Peadar Breslin; who is now District Court Clerk in Longford. Scouts were posted along the line to warn us of the approach of the train.

When the train came into the ambush, No. 1 section opened fire. It continued on until opposite my section, where it stopped, and we then opened up on the carriages, firing down the embankment at point blank range. I was using a rifle; most of the others had rifles. Some of our men threw Mills bombs. Parts of the carriages began to fly in splinters. There was a machine-gun mounted on the engine but they got no chance to use it. The soldiers in the carriages made no attempt to fight. We kept up fire on the train for about 20 minutes and then withdrew. I would say that the whole of our party did not exceed 22 men.

In 1922 I heard the sequel to the train ambush. At that time I was a captain in the National Army and was stationed in Buncrana. One night I was in a pub when a young, smart looking man came in. He had but one arm. I thought he had a military cut about him.

I asked someone in the bar who the stranger was and how he had lost his arm. One of the men in the bar said that the man had stayed with him for some time and he had told him that he had lost his arm in the train which was ambushed at Meenbanad. He had said also that there were about 50 British soldiers shot in the train. We had heard that there were 50 wounded.

About a week after the Meenbanad ambush the British military brought another train to remove the first one. Plans were made to attack the second train. The site selected was at Crollly, just opposite the station. No. 1 column, under Peadar O'Donnell, organised the attack and called for assistance from the local officers. We got short word to get to the ambush. There were only four of us readily available and we had no transport. We went out on the road in Dungloe town - myself, Anthony McGinley, Charlie Cole and Willie Sharkey - and held up a traveller. We commandeered his car but none of us could drive. We got a driver at the local garage and drove from Dungloe to Crollly, carrying our rifles openly.

At the place Peadar O'Donnell had selected for the ambush the railway line skirted the bottom of a hill. Peadar and his column took up position on the top of the hill. When the train arrived they opened fire. We were approaching the ambush position when the firing started and we came under fire from the train. We took cover and replied to the fire. The train was moving all the time and I don't know what damage was done. None of our men was hit.

These were the only two operations I had personal contact with. My duties as Brigade Q/M kept me on the move all over the brigade area.

Signed: Patrick O'Donnell ^{Kit}
(Patrick O'Donnell) Kit.
Date: 18 Dec 1955

18 Dec. 1955.

Witness: James J. O'Connor (James J. O'Connor)
(Investigator)

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