

W.S. 1384

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21
NO. W.S. 1384

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

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,384.....

Witness

Michael Nevin,
11 High Street,
Sligo.

Identity.

I.O. 1st Battalion Sligo Brigade;
I.O. Sligo Brigade, July 1921.

Subject.

National activities, Sligo,
1916-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S.2706.....

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ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

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No. W.S.

1384

No. S. 1, 384

STATEMENT BY MICHAEL NEVIN

11 High Street, Sligo.

I was born at Rosses Point, Sligo, in 1892, and was educated at Seaview National School and Sligo Technical School.

A detachment of British military was stationed at Rosses Point in my boyhood days. Their demeanour in these days caused a certain amount of antagonism towards them generally and caused me to have a hatred of British rule in Ireland.

In 1915 I joined the Sinn Fein organisation in Sligo town. The organisation was then known as the Sinn Fein Alliance. I was introduced into the organisation by Jack Clancy (deceased) and D.A. Mulcahy, who was the leading light in the organisation here in Sligo at that time. Mr. Mulcahy was a teacher in Sligo Technical School from 1912.

In 1916 I was appointed secretary of the Sinn Fein organisation in Sligo. Later in this capacity I was kept very busy as the organisation very often had to intervene to settle strikes (labour, etc.) We took over large tracts of tillage land and divided them amongst small landowners so as to give them an opportunity of producing sufficient food to give them a fair livelihood. Arbitration Courts were also set up and a large number of cases satisfactorily dealt with, thereby encouraging litigants to ignore the Courts held under British Law.

From 1917 onward a number of prominent members of the National Movement were interned in Sligo Jail at various times. Sean MacEoin, Alec McCabe, Billy Pilkington (now Fr. Pilkington) were some of the important prisoners who served terms of imprisonment there during that time. It was necessary for the organisation to make contact with all political prisoners and look after their welfare as far as possible.

I joined the Volunteers in 1917. They were then only

organised on a local basis. I worked in Hamilton's in Sligo. This place was the headquarters of the I.R.B. While I was aware of this and knew something about that organisation, I had a dread of secret organisations and, consequently, never saw my way to become a member.

Prior to and during the elections in 1918, I had a very busy time. The Register had to be prepared, Sinn Fein Clubs organised in North Sligo, personating agents to be selected and appointed. Every available hour and every Sunday was devoted to this work. There was a large number of Imperialists in the area at that time and it meant hard work to ensure a satisfactory poll in favour of the Sinn fein candidate - Jack Clancy - who was duly elected.

In 1919, the Volunteers were organised on a company and battalion basis. I was attached to the 1st Battalion, Sligo Brigade. The 1st Battalion was organised in four companies, i.e., Sligo Town, Calry, Carraroe and Coolara. The strength of Sligo Company then was 70 all ranks. I acted as Intelligence Officer for Sligo Company in the initial stages and was later appointed Battalion I.O.

As far as I can remember, there was no special Volunteer activity in the area in 1919 beyond routine training and organisation.

I was a member of Sligo Corporation in 1919. Early in that year we displayed a Sinn Fein flag from the Town Hall. An order for its removal was issued by the British authorities, which was disobeyed. I was commandeered by the British forces and taken up to the tower in the Hall and ordered to take down the flag. I refused to obey the order. The British forces then removed the flag and I was ordered out. As I was going

down the steps from the Tower, which were very steep and numbered about 24, a heavy coat was thrown down on my head; had I not a good grip of the ladder I would have been knocked to the bottom, probably with serious results.

In 1920, Thomas Fitzpatrick was outgoing Mayor of the Corporation and would not go forward for a further term in that office. I was advised to go forward as a candidate for the office. This was a blunder, to my mind. The man that should have been put forward was James Devine, an attendant in the Mental Hospital, who was then in Derry Jail serving a sentence for using language derogatory to British rule in Ireland while acting as a member of the Corporation. The absence of Devine left us one vote short in our party. The result was, I was beaten by one vote. Had Devine been put forward I could have given my vote in his favour and thereby secured his election as Mayor. As it turned out, John Jinks was elected by one vote.

In June 1920, Frank Carty was a prisoner in Sligo Jail. A plan was formulated to effect his escape. I contacted a warder in the prison, named Stephen O'Connor. O'Connor was a warder in Mountjoy before his transfer to Sligo and was a member of the Volunteer organisation in Dublin. He had the impression that he was under suspicion in Dublin before his transfer to Sligo. He had a key of the cell where Carty was located. He agreed to carry the key and, to cover him up, he was to be overpowered when the time was opportune. At the same time, arrangements were made for an outside party of Volunteers to bring wooden and rope ladders to assist Carty to scale the wall. Everything went according to plan and Carty escaped.

I never succeeded in making any contacts with members of the R.I.C. or British forces in Sligo. My principal source of information was through Fr. J.J. Hanley of the College staff, also Chaplain to the Volunteers. He was a personal friend of District Inspector Russell, who came to Sligo on transfer from Ballymote. Russell was, in my opinion, inclined to be friendly.

For a long time I did not come under suspicion by the British forces as being a member of the Volunteer organisation. In March 1921, my home was raided and a cheque book was found there, one block of which showed an entry of payment by me of affiliation fees to the Sinn Fein Club. I was arrested shortly after and interned in Sligo Jail. No charge was preferred against me.

I was released from Sligo Jail in May 1921. The order for my release which, to me, was quite unexpected, was arranged by the people I worked with at the time, named Connolly. I understand they were friendly with Dr. O'Donnell, then Bishop of Raphoe, Donegal, who had some influence with the British authorities.

After my release I called on Mr. R.G. Bradshaw, then Brigade Intelligence Officer, to report for further duty and receive any instructions he might have for me. While at his house, I noticed a big force of British forces passing. I later found that they were on their way to my home at Rosses Point, where they thoroughly searched the whole place. I was obliged to go 'on the run' after that.

While I was in jail I met three officers of the Sligo Brigade, fellow prisoners. The three men were Battalion O/Cs. i.e., Thomas Duignan, O/C. 5th Battalion; Frank O'Beirne, O/C. 7th Battalion, and Charles Gildea, O/C. 6th Battalion.

It was considered very important to secure the release or escape of the three officers mentioned. Plans for their escape were discussed and it was finally decided to have a key cut that would open a gate leading into the outer yard. Once outside this gate the way would be open to the outer wall where assistance from the Volunteers outside, i.e., ladders and ropes, would be in readiness.

An impression of the key was taken and sent out with the warder mentioned earlier, Stephen O'Connor. He brought back a key, but it would not open the lock. I am of the opinion that O'Connor did not care to be involved in a second escape of prisoners. The attempt to escape had then to be postponed until some reliable person could be got to have a key made outside.

When I found that I was about to be released, I offered to get a key made and have it taken in. At that time we had two temporary warders named Hynes and Henry. Both were friendly and willing to assist. Hynes got a good impression of the original key which I took out with me on release. After having the key made, I called back to the prison with it concealed in my sock. I asked for permission to visit a prisoner, but first had to go before the Prison Governor for an interview. I succeeded in bluffing him and eventually passed over the key to Charles Gildea. After some delay, the prisoners mentioned succeeded in escaping and made their way in safety to their respective battalion areas. The escape took place in the last days of June 1921.

I resumed my duties as Battalion I.O., also as a member of Sligo Corporation until the Truce on July 11th, 1921.

Signed: Michael Nevin

(Michael Nevin)

Date: 28-3-1956

28.3.1956

Witness: James Conway, Colonel

INVESTIGATOR (James J. Conway) Colonel