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DUPLICATE

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21  
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

NO. W.S. 1473

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1473.

Witness

Surgeon Joseph P. McGinley, M.Ch.,  
Beechfield,  
Letterkenny,  
Co. Donegal.

Identity.

Brigade Medical Officer, No. I Brigade,  
1st Northern Division.

T.D., Member of 2nd Dáil (1920)

Subject.

Activities of Irish Volunteers, Sinn Féin,  
Co. Donegal - 1914-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

File No S. 2790.

Form B.S.M. 2

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STATEMENT BY SURGEON JOSEPH P. MCGINLEY, M.Ch.,  
Beechfield, Letterkenny, Co. Donegal.

I was born near Letterkenny, Co. Donegal, and received my early education there. Subsequently I attended Queen's University, Belfast, where I studied medicine and qualified in 1916.

I joined the Irish Volunteers, West Belfast Brigade, in 1914, while in the University. At that time, my father was Captain of a Company of the National Volunteers in Drumbullogue, Letterkenny. My two cousins were then attending St. Enda's College, Dublin, where they joined the Irish Volunteer movement, and later fought in the General Post Office, Dublin, during the Rebellion of Easter Week 1916. After the surrender, they were interned in Frongoch prison. I was in Dublin during Easter Week, but, not being attached to any unit there, I took no part in the fighting.

Shortly after receiving my medical degree, I applied for and was appointed Medical Officer for Letterkenny district by the Board of Guardians, the then local authority. The Local Government Board refused to sanction my appointment, on the grounds that I was of military age and should join the British army, which I had no intention of doing. I then set up in private practice, by which I eked out a bare existence for two years, by which time my appointment was sanctioned.

From 1917 onwards, I organised Volunteer units and Sinn Féin Clubs all over the County Donegal. I

was Chairman of the Letterkenny Sinn Féin Club and a member of the East Donegal Executive. I joined the Irish Republican Brotherhood organisation in Omagh, being introduced by Seamus Dobbin. I lost touch and interest in that organisation and did not associate with it afterwards.

Before the election in 1918, it was decided by the Sinn Féin Executive that Joe Sweeney would go forward as their candidate for the West Donegal constituency. Joe Sweeney, having fought in the Rebellion of 1916 and afterwards interned in Frongoch prison, was considered the most suitable and popular candidate. At that period, we had as our opponents in the political arena a very strong section of the Unionist Party, supporters of British rule in Ireland, and also a very strong and bitter party in the Ancient Order of Hibernians (A.O.H.) or Nationalist Party as they were sometimes termed. As a result, it was necessary for both the Volunteer organisation and the Sinn Féin clubs to throw their full weight into the campaign, so as to ensure the election of our candidate. At that time, I was kept very busy in the work of organising the constituency, and I addressed meetings all over West Donegal. Our efforts were successful, as Joe Sweeney was elected, having nearly three thousand of a majority.

Later on, I assisted in the South Armagh bye-election by addressing meetings on behalf of Dr. McCartan, the Sinn Féin candidate. Here again, we were up against an Orange mob, and the A.O.H. were equally hostile. On the way home from Crossmaglen, after addressing a meeting there, we were attacked by an Orange mob at Newtownhamilton, and later fired on by members of the

During the year 1919, all our spare time was devoted to organising and training. We also carried out numerous raids for arms in the area, the booty being mostly shotguns. Towards the end of the year, I was arrested and charged with making a seditious speech, to wit, advocating the purchase of Dfíl Éireann Loan Bonds. I was tried before two Resident Magistrates at Bridgend, and sentenced to three months' imprisonment. I was also ordered to enter into a bond to keep the peace or, in default, a further two months' imprisonment. I refused to give this undertaking, and served the entire five months, three in Derry, and the last two months being served in Mountjoy prison where I met a friendly warder named Tim Herlihy. This man was secretly on Michael Collins' staff. He supplied us with daily papers, etc., and ensured that we were well treated.

On the day of my trial and sentence, I told the R.M., in no uncertain language, what I thought of him and British rule in Ireland. During my trial, I was handcuffed in the dock. While I was speaking, it was laughable to see at least a half-dozen R.I.C. constables draw their batons, ready to pounce on a manacled prisoner. At least, I had the satisfaction to learn that the R.I.C. escort that took my Dungloe comrades to Derry jail was ambushed on their return journey at a place called the Rampart, near Dungloe, where a number of them were wounded.

In June 1920, I was returned unopposed as a Sinn Féin representative for East Donegal, and so became a member of the 2nd Dfíl.

In August 1920, in company with Jim Dawson, I attended a Brigade Staff meeting, called by the Brigade O/C, Samuel O'Flaherty. There he informed us that a constable named Johnston, who was then stationed in the County Monaghan, was friendly and reliable, had got in touch with him while he (Johnston) was home on leave in Killygordon, and informed him that the R.I.C. garrison in Drumquin, Co. Tyrone, were a hard-drinking lot, and he thought it would be an easy task to capture the barracks there, as a big number of the garrison could be picked up in licensed premises in the town by different parties of Volunteers while the main party would hold up the R.I.C. in the barracks.

While discussing plans for the attack on Drumquin R.I.C. barracks, I suggested a daylight raid as being the most feasible. My reasons were: less chance of confusion amongst our own men, also a better opportunity of rushing the barracks. After some discussion, this plan was agreed upon, and the 29th August 1920, fair day in Drumquin, was the date fixed for the attack. The reason for selecting that day was: a number of men congregating in town on a fair day would pass unnoticed.

We succeeded in collecting five motor cars to convey our attacking party to Drumquin. We painted Monaghan number plates, and placed them over the correct registration plates on the cars, so as to prevent identification at a later date. We had five men in each car - twenty-five Volunteers, all told. A number of our men were armed with revolvers - it would be impossible to conceal any other type of weapon - while another party was equipped with wire-cutters.

It was very important to sever the telephone connection with Omagh which was the headquarters of the Enniskillen Fusiliers and only six miles distant.

Our party arrived in Drumquinn without incident. The party detailed to cut the wires got to work immediately. The party detailed for the licensed premises moved off and succeeded in disarming any of the R.I.C. found there. I moved in with the main body to rush the barracks. As we were closing in on the barracks, a constable, named Munnelly, came to the door. Jim McMonagle drew his revolver, and called on him to put up his hands. McMonagle claims that Munnelly reached for his gun; in any case, McMonagle fired and shot Munnelly dead. Our party then rushed into the barrack day-room. As I stooped over the dying constable, to examine him and find out if I could render medical aid, two shots rang out, and an R.I.C. sergeant came rolling downstairs. McMonagle told me later that, as he came into the hallway, he saw the sergeant take aim at me with a rifle, from the top of the stairs; he, McMonagle, then fired at the sergeant. The sergeant, named Bradley, was later very highly commended by his superiors for his loyalty, devotion to duty and courage in defence of his post.

We had hoped for a bloodless victory, and the shooting at this early stage upset our plans to a certain extent. The bombs stored in the barrack for its defence were kept upstairs, and, as the shooting downstairs alerted some constables above, it was found impossible to rush the upper portion of the barracks and capture the bombs. We collected all the available arms and ammunition downstairs, and retreated to our cars

which we had parked on the wrong side of the barracks, and had to pass it by to get on the road for home. One constable threw some bombs out of the window, and we found it necessary to open fire on the windows to keep him from throwing any more bombs until the cars could be got away. When the shooting commenced, all the people at the fair scurried out of the town as fast as they possibly could. I don't believe a fair was scattered so quickly before or since.

It was now necessary to get on the road for home in the shortest possible time as we were obliged to pass the two occupied R.I.C. barracks on the way, and there was the possibility that the garrison would be alerted before we arrived. I ordered the armed men to have their revolvers at the ready, but not to fire unless compelled by circumstances to do so. The first R.I.C. post we came to was Castlederg where two R.I.C. men were on the bridge. They made no attempt to halt us, so we proceeded on our way. The next R.I.C. post was at Castlefin where two R.I.C. men were on patrol. As in Castlederg, no attempt was made to stop us, and we arrived back in the vicinity of Letterkenny without further incident, having taken the faked identification plates off the cars beforehand.

In the end of 1919, a district inspector of the R.I.C., named Walsh, was posted to Letterkenny. He called on me shortly after his arrival, but I let him see I had no use for him. He said, "I am the new District Inspector here, and I want to tell you that you can rely upon me". I was inclined to be sceptical at the time, but I found at a later stage that he was sincere, and he proved it on several occasions afterwards.

After the Glenquinn barrack attack where we went unmasked, the R.I.C. had a perfect description of Jim Dawson, Jim McMonagle and myself. The County Inspector, R.I.C., told D.I. Walsh that they wanted us arrested and taken to Drumquinn for identification. D.I. Walsh persuaded them that there was no useful purpose being served by arresting us, as he himself had met us in different parts of the town of Letterkenny at the time the raid on Glenquinn barracks was in progress. His statement satisfied the Tyrone R.I.C. officers, and we were not arrested. Had we been arrested and brought in for identification, it would have been too bad for us, as it would have been quite easy to identify three of us, at least.

On a later occasion, during the course of a raid on my home by R.I.C. and military forces, Walsh came to me and asked had I any arms, ammunition or seditious literature in the house. I told him there were some revolver ammunition and literature in a drawer in my room. Walsh took over the searching of that particular room, and, having secured the documents and ammunition, he instructed the British forces to search the house thoroughly. He returned the documents and ammunition to me at a later date.

In 1921 when R.I.C. were fired on in Letterkenny and one sergeant and a constable shot, the British forces were about to carry out reprisals by burning some houses in the town owned by people with nationalist sympathies. Walsh took control of the situation, and prevented the reprisals being carried out. He was appointed Assistant Commissioner of the Garda Síochána on the formation of that force.



At the end of August 1920, the late Neil Blayney told me that he had information that Fanad Head coastguard station was about to be evacuated. We had been discussing the possibilities of attacking this post at an earlier date. If the rumour about its evacuation was true, it was necessary to carry out the attack immediately. I suggested that the best means of obtaining information was: Neil Blayney, being an insurance agent, to go up there, get in touch with some of the garrison, under the pretext of selling insurance, and he would have a good opportunity of getting useful information. He adopted my suggestion and, having made a call at the coastguard station, he returned immediately to inform me that the coastguard station would be evacuated inside a week.

As a result of this information, it was necessary to make hurried plans to attack the place. Accordingly, the date for the attack was fixed for the night of September 4th, 1920. It was decided that the attacking party would be drawn from the Letterkenny company. The Volunteers from Fanad company were to act as scouts and guides. Our party set out by motor car from Letterkenny and, on reaching a pre-arranged rendez vous, we were guided across country by Volunteers from Fanad company. On reaching the coastguard station, which was a solidly constructed cement building, we took up positions behind a wall surrounding the building and about fifty yards out. The light from the lighthouse on the Head was disconcerting to us. The lighthouse keeper, a man called Heehan, who was friendly, on being accosted, handed over his revolver and extinguished the light. I gave the order to my party to open fire, and, after a burst of rifle fire, I called on the garrison to surrender. After a short delay we got a reply that they would surrender if we would spare

their lives. I told them that I had no intention of taking life, and ordered them to come, with their hands up. This order was complied with immediately. We then moved into the building and collected nine service revolvers. On enquiring where the revolver ammunition was stored, I found that our rifle fire, in the first stages, had cut off the garrison from the ammunition store. On going to that store, we got one thousand rounds of revolver ammunition, some gelignite and a Verey light pistol, with some star shells to fit. We delayed some time with the garrison, and they shared some of their supply of corned beef with us.

We were informed a few days later than a British admiralty sloop was anchored in Mulroy Bay, convenient to the coastguard station. The sloop was there for the purpose of salvaging gold from the ship, "Laurentic", which was sunk in the bay by a German submarine during World War I, and had two and a half million pounds worth of gold aboard. For some unknown reason, the sloop had left the bay that night. Had the marines been in the bay and come to the assistance of the coastguards, we would have been in a bad position. Of course, it is possible that the Volunteers from Fanad would have warned us, in advance, of the presence of the sloop, had the sloop remained in the bay.

In July or August 1920, instructions were issued by the Volunteer organisation to railway drivers and firemen to refuse to drive trains with armed British forces aboard. Most of them complied with the instruction. One evening in September, 1920, information was conveyed to me that a party of armed British military had boarded a train at Derry, bound for Letterkenny. I was informed that the original crew had refused to take the train

but a substitute crew was found in a short time. I collected a few Volunteers from Letterkenny company, and while we were discussing what action we would take, we got information that the crew was about to pull out from Letterkenny with the engine on its return journey to Strabane, leaving the coaches behind. I immediately instructed James McMonagle to get a shotgun and some cartridges, loaded with buckshot, and go to a certain spot where I would pick him up in my car. My idea was to head out in the direction of Strabane, get ahead of the railway engine, and ambush the crew. I picked up McMonagle and set out. On reaching a point near Glenmaquinn railway station, we heard the engine whistle. We immediately jumped out of the car, and raced across a field to the railway line. Just as we reached an embankment, the engine was passing and we fired at the driver - with what result, I cannot say. This action ensured that our order was complied with in future.

In June 1921, Volunteers from Letterkenny company fired on a patrol of four R.I.C. men in the town of Letterkenny, where one constable - Carter - was killed and an R.I.C. sergeant wounded. In the earlier part of this narrative, I have referred to this action where District Inspector Walsh took command and prevented reprisals being carried out in the town after the shooting. The attack was really an effort to draw off British troops who were operating in great strength around Burtonport to recound up the flying column that was billeted in that area. The shooting

in Letterkenny had the desired effect.

There was no further activity of a military nature in this area until the Truce on the 11th July, 1921.

SIGNED: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21
NO. W.S. 1,473

WITNESS \_\_\_\_\_