

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1,531

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1531.

Witness

Michael Smyth,
Cooleen,
Melitta Road,
Kildare.

Identity.

Capt. Athgarvan Coy., I. Vols., 1915-16.
Adj. North Kildare Battn., 1917-20.
Vice Comdt. No. 2 do. 1920.
O/C do. Dec. 1920 - 3rd July, 1921.

Subject.

Activities Athgarvan Coy., I. Vols., 1915 - ;
North Kildare Battn. 1917, and A.S.U. 1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

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STATEMENT BY Mr. MICHAEL SMYTH,
"Cooleen", Melitta Road,
Kildare.

Irish Volunteers 1914 to 1916.

A Company of Volunteers was formed in Athgarvan in June, 1914, of which I was appointed Secretary. Drilling, route marches and rifle practice were carried out under the instruction of William Jones, who was a Corporal in the Connaught Rangers, and a first class drill instructor. He and other instructors were called up when the war broke out in August 1914, as they were on the reserve.

In 1915 a split took place in the Company and the majority decided to go over to the Irish Volunteers. Denis Cox, the well known Radio singer, was a member of the Company and, as he was working in Dublin, he got in touch with the Irish Volunteer Headquarters, and Mr. Michael O'Leary, organiser, came down, with Lieutenant Ted O'Kelly, as organiser for Kildare. Mr. O'Leary was organiser for Leinster.

At a meeting held at the Gaelic Hall, Athgarvan, on 15th September, 1915, attended by Mr. M. O'Leary and Lieutenant Ted O'Kelly, a Company of Irish Volunteers was formed. The following attended and were enrolled as members - Simon Nolan, Denis Cox, Thomas Wilmot, William Jones, Thomas O'Brien, James Melia, Henry Mullally, John Sweeney, Christopher Mullally, John Baker, Matthew Cardiff, John Smyth, Thomas Brophy, William Brophy, Patrick Keegan, Thomas Mullally and Eamonn Ó Modhrain. They were all from Athgarvan, except Eamonn Ó Modhrain, who was from Ballysax, The Curragh. I was appointed Company Captain.

An intensive training course was gone through under Ted O'Kelly, who attended parade every week. Drilling was carried out in the Gaelic Hall twice weekly. During the winter of 1915 and spring of 1916

night manoeuvres were carried out under the direction of Lieutenant Ted O'Kelly and William Jones, drill instructor, who had been demobilised from the British Army after being wounded in France. Rifle and revolver practice was also carried out, and a special class in signalling was established.

Special training was also carried out on the Curragh in trenches which had been made by the British Army.

In October, 1915 - William Jones, Instructor, was arrested under the Defence of the Realm Act and sentenced to a month's imprisonment, and also dismissed from employment on the Curragh Camp, and deprived of his Army pension.

Mr. Seamus O'Connor, Solicitor, a member of the Irish Volunteer Executive, attended a number of parades of the Company and also gave lectures on military subjects in the hall.

In October, 1915, I attended a meeting at the house of Mr. Michael O'Kelly, Editor of the 'Leinster Leader', at Naas, for the purpose of forming an organising committee for North Kildare. Those present were Michael O'Kelly, Naas, Domhnall Ó Buachalla, Maynooth, Patrick Dunne, Kill, Thomas Harris, Prosperous, Art O'Connor, Celbridge, Eamonn Ó Modhrain, Ballysax, and Michael Smuth (myself), Athgarvan. Arrangements were made for tightening up organisation in North Kildare, and I was asked to help to extend the organisation to South Kildare. Lieutenant Ted O'Kelly attended the meeting and stated that Companies existed at Maynooth, Athgarvan, Naas and Kill.

I also attended a conference of North Kildare delegates held at Volunteer Headquarters, 2 Dawson Street, Dublin, in October, 1915, when the position of the Volunteer Movement in Kildare was reviewed.

I was deputed by G.H.Q. to purchase arms and ammunition from soldiers of the British Army, and I succeeded in getting a good supply of Lee Enfield rifles, but I found it difficult to get ammunition from the soldiers. We had some members working on the Curragh Camp and ammunition was got through those working on the rifle ranges. I was supplied with a special code by G.H.Q. to apply for funds to get rifles and ammunition.

In January, 1916, one soldier, who supplied a number of rifles and couldn't get .303 ammunition, informed me that he was in camp on the Heath of Maryboro and that when they broke up there was a box of ammunition over and that they buried it. Lieutenant Ted O'Kelly and I came to an agreement with him and he came with us to the Heath of Maryboro (in uniform). Messrs. E. Fleming, M. Sheridan and others from the Maryboro Company attended and, although they dug for the greater part of the day, they couldn't find the box of ammunition, but the soldier was quite positive that it was buried there in 1914.

From the time I was Secretary of the National Volunteers I received circulars from the Headquarters of that organisation and in November, 1915, I was informed that they had Martini Enfield rifles and ammunition for sale, at £3. each. G.H.Q. arranged with me to buy 100 rifles and 10,000 rounds of ammunition, and I was given £300 odd to purchase same.

This was made as the chief charge against me when I was tried at Wormwood Scrubbs Prison in 1916. The charge was that I received £300 in German gold to buy rifles and ammunition.

In December, 1915, we had manoeuvres with Naas Company under Lieutenant Ted O'Kelly.

In January, 1916, one of our Company - Thomas Wilmot - was badly wounded at revolver practice, and had to be conveyed to the Drogheda

Memorial Hospital, Curragh. He was attended by Dr. L.F. Rowan, Kildare, who was arrested after Easter Week. As a result of this accident the R.I.C. became very active in Athgarvan district.

In accordance with instructions from G.H.Q. we had a parade on St. Patrick's Day, 1916, and afterwards had rifle practice. Lieutenant Ted O'Kelly attended and addressed the men on parade.

Before Easter Week I was in touch with supporters in Kilcullen, Kilgowan, Rathangan, Newbridge, Kildare and other places, but their numbers were so small that it was not possible to form a Company.

In March, 1916, we sent a number of rifles to G.H.Q.

On my visit to Rathangan I was in touch with Christy Kenny, Tom Behan and others and was informed that the majority of the National Volunteer Company there were in favour of the Irish Volunteers and would turn out if there was a Rising. This Company had a good supply of arms and ammunition and were well trained.

The following Rathangan men were arrested after Easter Week - Thomas Behan, Christy Kenny, Patrick Kenny, Joseph Kenny and Thomas Mooney.

We were also in touch with the National Volunteers in Newbridge and I was informed on Easter Monday evening, 1916, that we could have a supply of rifles and ammunition from them if we required them for the Rising. John J. Fitzgerald and John Wallace, Newbridge, were arrested after Easter Week and John Wallace died shortly after being released from prison.

Doctor L. F. Rowan and Edward Cosgrove, Kildare, were also arrested.

Shortly before Easter a Company was formed at Kilgowan in South Kildare with William McGrath in charge.

On Wednesday, 19th April, I was visited by Captain Thomas Byrne and Lieutenant Ted O'Kelly, and the position of the Volunteers was discussed. I was asked to mobilise all the Volunteers I could depend on to turn out if the Rising took place, on Friday night, 21st April, and also to obtain information from the other districts.

On Thursday 20th April, I visited Naas, Kilcullen, Kilgowan, Brownstown and Newbridge to find out the number who could be depended on to turn out.

I had the Athgarvan Company mobilised on Friday night, 21st April. Captain Byrne and Lieutenant Ted O'Kelly inspected the Company. I was informed by them that the Rising was fixed for Sunday, 23rd April, at 6 p.m., and that I would get definite instructions of time of mobilisation on Sunday morning, 23rd April. I advised members to go to Confession and Communion at Easter.

On Easter Sunday morning I got the mobilisation order to attend with my Company at Bodenstown Churchyard at 3 p.m. on Easter Sunday.

I mobilised the Athgarvan Company for 11 a.m. to make final arrangements. The following is a list of members of the Athgarvan Company who mobilised on Easter Sunday, 1916 :- Michael Smyth (myself) Company O/C., W. Jones, H. Mullally, P. Keegan, C. Mullally, S. Nolan, T. Brophy, T. O'Brien, R. Mullally, J. Baker, M. Cardiff, T. Wilmot, J. Smyth and D. Cox.

Owing to the report which appeared in the "Sunday Independent" calling on the Volunteers to demobilise, I left the Company in charge of Simon Nolan, and went to see Lieutenant Ted O'Kelly at the

Dominican College, Newbridge. He decided that we should visit the Companies in the district and keep them mobilised. We visited Prosperous and Naas. On Sunday night Captain Thomas Byrne visited Athgarvan, and arranged with me to have the Company mobilised on Monday morning and to await instructions.

I had the Company mobilised on Easter Monday morning but did not receive any dispatch. We were informed of the Rising on Monday evening.

Thomas Harris informed me afterwards that a dispatch was given to a Newbridge Volunteer for the Athgarvan Company, but it was not delivered. This man admitted afterwards that he received the dispatch and didn't deliver it.

On 25th April I visited Eamonn Ó Modhrain, Ballysax, and went as far as Naas with Thomas Brophy; but Michael O'Kelly, Naas, had instructions to wait for a dispatch from Dublin.

Athgarvan Company was mobilised during the week but no dispatch was received.

I was arrested on 2nd May and brought to the Hare Park Prison, Glass House, Curragh Camp. I was brought to Richmond Barracks on 8th May, and was deported to Wandsworth Jail on 2nd June, and interned in Frongoch Camp on 26th June. My number was 1124 - Hut 24 North Camp. An Internment Order was served on me on the charge of being a prominent member of Sinn Féin, Irish Volunteers etc.

In July I was sent before the Sankey Commission at Wormwood Scrubbs. I took part in the hunger strike which started on 3rd November. I was detained in the South Camp, Frongoch, until 23rd December, 1916, when the general release of untried prisoners took place.

The following were arrested from Naas Company - Michael O'Kelly, Alfred Sweeney, Nicholas P. Byrne, N.T., Richard Furlong, Patrick Mooney and Christy Byrne.

Patrick Weafer, John Greaves and Joseph Ledwitch, Maynooth, were transferred with me to Richmond Barracks, and were courtmartialled and sentenced to two years' imprisonment.

The following Kildare prisoners were in Frongoch Camp - Domhnall Ó Buachalla, Patrick Colgan, Thomas Harris, Thomas Mangan, Matthew Maguire, John Maguire, Patrick Kirwan, T. Tyrell, Frank Burke, E. Moran, M. Smyth.

In February, 1917, I received a letter from Michael Collins, Cork, to get in touch with P. Colgan, Maynooth, with a view to re-organising Volunteers in Kildare.

On 17th March, 1917, the Athgarvan Company, Irish Volunteers, was reorganised, and shortly afterwards I attended a meeting in Newbridge at which a Company of Irish Volunteers was established. I also attended a meeting in Naas about the same time at which a Company was formed.

At a meeting of delegates from the North Kildare Companies of the Irish Volunteers held at Prosperous on Ascension Thursday, 1917, it was decided to form a Battalion Council for North Kildare and the following officers were appointed :-

Battalion Commandant	-- Patrick Colgan, Maynooth,
Battalion Vice Commandant	-- Thomas Harris, Prosperous,
Battalion Quartermaster	-- Art O'Connor, Celbridge,
Battalion Adjutant	-- Michael Smyth (myself), Athgarvan.

The following Companies were represented - Maynooth, Celbridge, Kilcock, Prosperous, Athgarvan, Newbridge, Kill, Naas and Carbury.

An intensive organising campaign was carried out and a number of new Companies formed. I was employed on the training of the Companies in the Battalion area during 1917. I was also engaged at procuring arms and ammunition from British soldiers on the Curragh Camp.

Eamonn Ó Modhrain and I went to the South Longford election in May 1917 when armed Volunteers were called for, and we were on duty in Longford town until polling day.

The Companies of the North Kildare Battalion were mobilised for the Thomas Ashe funeral and formed cycling corps to Dublin for the funeral.

I mobilised the Athgarvan and Newbridge Companies for 1st November, 1917, when President De Valera's meeting was proclaimed in Newbridge.

I also had the Volunteers mobilised on the occasion of the public meeting addressed by the late Arthur Griffith, Joseph McGrath and other speakers in Naas in 1917. The meeting was proclaimed but was held outside the town.

In 1918 an intensive training campaign was carried out in the Battalion area at which I was engaged in training the Volunteers in preparation for Conscription, and also trying to procure arms for the various Companies. I procured a further supply of arms and ammunition from British soldiers from the Curragh Camp and Newbridge Barracks. I was also engaged raising funds for the Volunteers.

I organised the constituency for the General Election in 1918 and presided at the Convention held at Prosperous at which Domhnall Ó Buachalla was selected as candidate for North Kildare.

I arranged for the guarding of Sinn Féin meetings during the election campaign and guarding polling booths in the Battalion area on polling day. I also arranged for the guarding of the ballot boxes in Naas until the counting of the votes after Christmas 1918.

In 1919 I had to arrange for protection with Volunteers in each area during the big Farm Strike of 1919 in North Kildare in which the Volunteers were kept busy doing police duty for about four months.

Companies of Volunteers were kept active in each district and I visited the Companies for inspection and training. I arranged for Volunteers to do duty at Sports, County Feis etc. in 1919.

In 1920 General P. MacMahon came as organiser to Kildare, and North Kildare Battalion was divided into two Battalions - Kildare No. 1. and Kildare No. 2. Thomas Harris was appointed Commandant and I was appointed Vice-Commandant of No. 2. Battalion by General P. MacMahon. A training camp was established at Laytown, Naas, where intensive training was gone through by Company Officers from the Battalion area which was carried out under the supervision of General P. MacMahon.

The following Companies were organised in Kildare No. 2. Battalion Athgarvan, Droichead Nua, Eadestown, Twomilehouse, Allen, Allenwood, Robertstown, Prosperous, Naas, Kill, and Ballymore Eustace; in North Kildare and Brittas, Hollywood, Blessington and Vallymount in West Wicklow.

In January, 1920, I worked for the collection of the Dáil Eireann Loan with the late Richard Cotter. I was elected a member of the Droichead Nua Town Commissioners, Kildare County Council and Naas No. 1. District Council and Board of Guardians in 1920, and all those bodies pledged allegiance to the Government of the Irish Republic.

I was in charge of an armed raid for the destruction of Sallins R.I.C. Barracks in April, 1920 with 26 Volunteers, and the Barracks was burned down. All roads leading to Sallins were blocked and telegraph wires cut.

I was mobilised with arms with Commandant P. Colgan, North Kildare Battalion, in May, 1920, to assist the Carlow Brigade in attacking Castledermott R.I.C. barracks.

I was engaged in May and June, 1920, procuring arms and ammunition from British Military at Newbridge Barracks and the Curragh Camp. A number of rifles, revolvers and ammunition were obtained.

In August, 1920, with General P. MacMahon and Thomas Harris, I organised new Companies in Ballymore Eustace, Allen, Allenwood, Robertstown and Twomilehouse.

In August, 1920, Dowdingstown House, Twomilehouse, Naas, was taken over as Battalion Headquarters, and fortnightly meetings of the Battalion Council were held from this date to the Truce.

I was 'on the run' from August 1920.

All the disused R.I.C. Barracks in the Battalion area were burned in June 1920.

In September, 1920, raids were carried out for arms in the Battalion area and a large number of guns were procured.

I was in charge of the raids which were carried out in Athgarvan, Newbridge and Curragh districts on 10th and 11th September, 1920, when a large amount of arms and ammunition were procured.

Arrangements were made by the Battalion Council for the setting up of Republican Courts in the Battalion area, and I acted as Republican Justice for Newbridge area. Arrangements were also made for Volunteers to guard the Republican Courts.

All Companies were mobilised for Church parades on the occasion of the funeral of Terence MacSwiney in October 1920.

An ambush was arranged for Newbridge Station on 1st November 1920, but it did not come off owing to British troops not turning up for the train as expected. Thomas Harris, Seán Kavanagh and I were in charge, and we had Volunteers from each Company area.

Thomas Harris, Battalion O/C., was arrested on 21st November, 1920, and I carried on until my appointment as Battalion Commandant in December 1920. Arthur Doran, Ballymore Eustace, was appointed Vice-Commandant, Seán Kavanagh Adjutant and James Harris, Quartermaster.

I organised a Company in Rathangan in December 1920, as there was some trouble there with Offaly.

I was in charge of armed raids on mails carried out during November and December, 1920, and January, 1921. Those raids were carried out according to instructions from G.H.Q. Armed raids were made and trains held up at Sallins, Kildare and Newbridge stations, and an amount of British official correspondence was captured, and same was conveyed to G.H.Q. by Mr. Seán Kavanagh, Intelligence Officer.

I had special classes arranged for Company officers in training, engineering and signalling at Battalion headquarters at Dowdingstown House. William Jones, Athgarvan, was appointed Lieutenant of Training, Patrick Magee, Eadestown Company, Lieutenant of Engineering, and James Clancy, Newbridge Company, in charge of Signalling. Those classes were held weekly and were attended by Company Officers.

Seán Kavanagh was arrested in January, 1921 and Matthew Cardiff was appointed Battalion Adjutant.

In February, 1921, the Vice-Commandant, Arthur Doran, was arrested and Richard Harris was appointed to replace him.

The Battalion Council arranged for a number of engagements in the Battalion area on Easter Sunday, 1921. One of the engagements was an ambush at the Hill of Allen to be carried out by the Prosperous, Allen, Robertstown and Allenwood Companies. A lorry of R.I.C. and Black and Tans was expected to pass from Kildare on that evening. All the available members of the Prosperous, Allen, Robertstown and Allenwood Companies were mobilised for same in view of the proximity of the Curragh Camp. The enemy lorry did not turn up until late in the evening and a number of the men had been demobilised, and, therefore, our original plans did not work out. Our men opened fire on the lorry and the fire was returned, but the lorry got away. There were about twelve of the enemy in the lorry. There were no casualties on our side, and it was not known if there were any casualties of the enemy.

The Military and Black and Tans were very active in our area after the ambush and a number of our men were arrested.

An intensive campaign of road trenching, tree blocking etc. was carried out in the Battalion area, especially in the district adjoining the Curragh Camp where all roads leading to and from the Camp were blocked, wires cut etc. Raids were continued on the mails, especially at Newbridge and Sallins Stations.

Raids and destruction of Belfast and British goods were also carried out.

In February, 1921, the Quartermaster, James Harris, was arrested and Patrick Kelly, Newbridge Company, was appointed Quartermaster.

The Battalion Active Service Unit was started in April, 1921, and Martin O'Neill, Ballymore Eustace Company, was appointed O/C.

Republican Police were organised in each Company area in April, 1921.

An attempt was made to blow up Limerick Canal Bridge on the main Dublin Curragh Camp road in April, 1921, but explosives did not act.

A new Company was organised at Hollywood, County Wicklow, in connection with the Active Service Unit.

In May, 1921, the Battalion Adjutant, Matthew Cardiff, and Vice-Commandant, Richard Harris, were arrested, and Patrick Tuite, Prosperous Company, was appointed Adjutant, and Thomas Lawlor, Naas Company, Vice-Commandant.

In May, 1921, a dispute arose between our Active Service Unit and another in West Wicklow, which was under the Dublin Brigade, and I met Gerald Boland. The dispute was settled satisfactorily and the boundary of our districts was arranged.

On 1st July, 1921, I reorganised a Company in Kilcullen with Patrick Brennan and arrangements were made for attack on Kilcullen Barracks on 12th July.

On 6th July a raid was carried out on the British Military Stores at Moorefield, Newbridge. Two lorry loads of goods were taken away for the A.S.U. Camp at Ballymore Eustace, and the stores were burned down.

During this period I was O/C. of the area and, during April, May and June, I kept the various Companies active with blocking and trenching of roads, cutting telegraph wires etc., especially in the districts surrounding the Curragh Camp as per instructions from G.H.Q. who requested that those operations be carried out in order to keep

the enemy engaged in that district. Raids on mails and Post Offices, and also raids for the destruction of Belfast and British goods were carried out.

At Battalion Council meeting on 3rd July, it was decided to form a second Active Service Unit and on my way to meeting of same I was arrested with William Jones - Lieutenant of Engineering. We were armed but we got no time to defend ourselves as we were surprised by a party of Black and Tans at Twomilehouse. We were badly beaten at our arrest and were kept in Newbridge Barracks from 7th July until 13th July when we were transferred to Harepark Camp.

I was transferred to Mountjoy on 8th October for Courtmartial, and was there until the General Amnesty on 14th January, 1922.

SIGNED: Michael Smyth

DATE: 12-11-56

WITNESS: Deán Brennan Lieut. Col.

