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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1723.

Witness

JOSEPH MARTIN,  
Kilteelan,  
Athboy,  
County Meath.  
Identity.

Captain, Athboy Company, Irish Volunteers, Co. Meath.  
Engineer, Meath Brigade, I.R.A.

Subject.

Athboy Company, Athboy Battalion,  
Meath Brigade, I.R.A.  
1913 - 1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

3031.  
File No.....

# Bureau of Military History, 1913-1921.

## STATEMENT BY

Joseph Martin,

Address.....

Kilteelan, Athboy,

Co. Meath.

Date *28th* December, 1957.

### ORGANISATIONS WITH WHICH ASSOCIATED.

Irish Volunteers  
Irish Republican Army.

### POSTS OR RANKS HELD.

Captain of Athboy Company  
Battalion Engineer  
Brigade Engineer.

### PERIOD COVERED BY STATEMENT.

1913 - 1921.

### COMMENTS OF INVESTIGATING OFFICER.

The witness, who is 60 years of age, is a farmer and rate collector. He appears to have an excellent memory and was able to recount the events of the period with apparent ease. His evidence was dictated to me in a couple of interviews. He seems to be in the best of health.

*John J. Daly*

Signature of Investigating Officer.  
(J. J. Daly).

Date *28th* December, 1957.

# ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1723

STATEMENT BY JOSEPH MARTIN,

Kilteelan, Athboy, Co. Meath.

I was born in Connaught St., Athboy, in the year 1897. I attended the local national school for some years, and later went to the Christian Brothers' Schools in Kells. I left school at the age of 16 years and was then apprenticed to the building trade.

A company of Volunteers was formed in the town of Athboy in the year 1913. The strength of the company was about twenty men. They used wooden guns in drill exercises and were drilled by an ex-British soldier named James Geraghty. A signal section and Red Cross section were formed at the time. I joined the signal section. After the start of World War 1, a recruiting campaign was started in the area by members of the Irish Parliamentary Party, which caused great dissatisfaction among the Volunteers and they soon ceased to exist as a company.

About the same time as the Volunteer Company was formed, a circle of the I.R.B. was also formed. I was not aware of this at the time, but I heard later that the circle attended on the occasion of the funeral of O'Donovan Rossa to Glasnevin Cemetery in August, 1915. On the Wednesday of Easter Week, six of them - Patrick O'Growney, Patrick Butterfield, Michael Hoey, Bernard McConnell, Seán McGurl and Gilchrist O'Byrne, left Athboy for Dublin to take part in the Rebellion, but they never reached their destination and returned in a day or two.

At the latter end of 1917, the I.R.B. was reorganised in the town by Seán Boylan of Dunboyne. A company of the Irish Volunteers was formed at the same time. Seamus Finn, Athboy, was one of the organisers, and a man named Seán

O'Grady was instrumental in forming a Sinn Féin Club in the same year. O'Grady was a Co. Clare man and was working as an insurance agent in Athboy at the time. The strength of the Volunteer company was only twelve men at the start, and Seamus Finn was elected Captain. There were no other officers. Within a period of a few weeks, both Seamus Finn and I had organised companies in Kildalkey, Ballivor and Delvin. In each area, weekly meetings were held for drill instruction and the collection of subscriptions for the purchase of rifles. Each man was issued with a membership card, upon which his weekly subscription was entered.

During the conscription scare early in 1918, the strength of Athboy Company increased to 40, while the strength of the other three companies reached approximately 20 each. It was during this period that two further companies were formed in Fordstown and ~~Archerstown~~ <sup>Archerstown</sup>. When the strength of Athboy Company reached 40, elections were held for additional company officers. Seamus Finn was still Captain, and, to the best of my knowledge, William Doyle became 1st Lieutenant. I became 2nd Lieutenant, and Patrick Carey became Q/M. An anti-conscription committee, headed by the local parish priest, was formed, and several protest meetings were held. When the scare had subsided, most of our new recruits in Athboy remained faithful and continued to take part in all the activities of the company, which consisted of drilling and route marching twice weekly.

During a by-election in East Cavan in June or July, 1918, I took part in the election campaign with five or six members of Athboy Company, and helped to do guard duty around the platform of the speakers for the Sinn Féin candidate - Arthur Griffith. The opposition, composed of members of the

Ancient Order of Hibernians, the main supporters of the Irish Parliamentary Party, and members of the Orange Lodge, were very hostile to the supporters of Sinn Féin. It was on the orders of the Company Captain that the speakers for the Sinn Féin candidate were afforded protection by the Athboy Volunteers. The local Volunteers and other Volunteers from North Meath also took part. Arthur Griffith won by a good majority. In May of the previous year, Joe McGuinness had been elected Sinn Féin M.P. in another by-election. A victory celebration was held in Athboy on the occasion. I carried a Sinn Féin flag during the celebrations, and next day I was arrested by the R.I.C. and taken to Navan R.I.C. barracks, where I was detained overnight and released next day. A few days later, I was again arrested with five others who had taken part in the celebrations. We were detained in Athboy R.I.C. barracks for two days, and released without any charge being preferred against us.

During the year 1918, a strike of farm labourers took place throughout the county, and attempts were made to prevent live stock being transported to Dublin by train. In one instance, it was rumoured that the military were called on by the local land owners to guard a particular train load of cattle. Our Company Captain received orders to derail this train. Navan and other companies received similar orders. I presume the orders emanated from Seán Boylan, who was then Head <sup>butcher</sup> ~~of the~~ of Meath I.R.B. County Board. With a few members of Athboy Company, I proceeded to Navan, where I met members of the Navan Company, as well as members of other companies. We proceeded to Athumney, where we lifted a couple of sections of rails. A short time later, a cattle train came along and was derailed.

Around this period, an organiser from G.H.Q. named Eamon Fleming visited the area. He drilled us with wooden guns in the streets of Athboy. While in the area, he was arrested and taken to Dublin, but was taken back to Athboy for trial on a charge of illegal drilling and was sentenced to a short term of imprisonment. We tried to rescue him as he was being taken by the R.I.C. in a side-car to the railway station in ~~the area~~<sup>Athboy</sup>. Someone managed to cut the horse's harness, and a baton charge by the R.I.C. followed. We were assisted by the townspeople, many of whom, as well as the Volunteers, received cut heads. After the incident, several Volunteers and some civilians were arrested. A solicitor was employed to defend all the cases. Seán O'Grady and Patrick O'Growney, who were among those arrested, were in bad health at the time and it was thought that a term of imprisonment would not improve matters for them. However, on the day of the trial, all were released, except Volunteer Patrick Butterfield who got a short term of imprisonment.

At the end of the year, the general election took place. With all other Volunteers in the area, I took an active part in the campaign and was on police duty at one of the polling booths on the day of the election. Eamon Duggan, the Sinn Féin candidate, was elected.

Routine drilling continued during the year 1919, and in the month of June the oath of allegiance was administered to each Volunteer, after which all companies in the vicinity of Athboy were formed into a battalion. The companies comprising the battalion, which was known as the Athboy or 3rd Battalion, Meath Brigade, were Athboy, Delvin, Kildalkey, Archerstown and Fordstown. Mick Fox of Delvin became Battalion O/C; Pat Corrigan of Kildalkey, Vice O/C;

Larry Ginnell, Adjutant; John Tyrrell of Kildalkey, Q/M; and I became Engineer. As well as being Battalion Engineer, I acted for a time as Captain of Athboy Company in place of Seamus Finn, who had been appointed Brigade Adjutant about this time. The brigade officers appear to have been appointed from among the members of the I.R.B. They were - Seán Boylan, O/C; Seamus Finn, Adjutant; Seamus O'Higgins, Q/M; Eamon Cullen, Engineer; and Pat Clinton, I/O.

It is true that a meeting was held near Navan, subsequent to the formation of battalions in Co. Meath, of all the recently appointed battalion officers for the appointment of a Brigade Staff, but, to the best of my knowledge, its purpose was to ratify the appointments already made.

On the night of the 2nd November, 1919, Ballivor R.I.C. barracks was captured by members of the Trim or 2nd Battalion in charge of *Seamus O'Higgins and Patrick Murney*. Entry was gained by a ruse, and all arms and ammunition were captured. Bohermeen R.I.C. barracks, in the Navan or 6th Battalion area, was to have been attacked the same night. Members of the Athboy Battalion were mobilised for the attack, and proceeded to Bohermeen for the mobilisation. Six rifles which should have been sent from Trim for this attack, did not arrive. I was sent to Trim to locate the rifles, but was unsuccessful, so the attack was called off. Several members of Athboy Company, armed with shotguns, stood by awaiting orders.

On the instructions of the Brigade O/C, all arms in our area were collected in the autumn of 1919. In the raids for the arms, we did not meet with any opposition and collected 14 shotguns, three miniature rifles, two elephant rifles, a few revolvers and several rounds of assorted ammunition. At the end of the year, an order was received from G.H.Q. to try and locate a Detective O'Brien of Dublin Castle who was supposed to be on holidays in our area. He was a native of the place. We raided his

house one night, but did not find him. We also received instructions to locate a man named Boland who was a turnkey in Mountjoy Jail. He was also a native of our area and was wanted by the Dublin I.R.A. We did not find him either.

By the Spring of 1920, Stirrupstown, Delvin, Bohermeen and Causestown R.I.C. barracks had been evacuated. On the orders of the Brigade O/C, they were all burned down. Members of Athboy Company took part in the destruction of each. In June or July of this year, a Sinn Féin District Court was established in the area. ~~\_\_\_\_\_~~ The names of Justices appointed, <sup>were James Giblin and Patrick O'Grady.</sup> Seán McGurl was appointed Battalion O/C of Police. The people of the area were very law-abiding and there were very few sittings of the court prior to the Truce.

Preparatory to the capture of Trim R.I.C. barracks, I attended a meeting in O'Hagan's ~~\_\_\_\_\_~~ in Trim, presided over by Seán Boylan, when plans were discussed for the capture of the building. All roads in the Athboy area were blocked on the occasion. The petrol and paraffin oil used in the destruction were taken from Athboy by Seamus Finn in a van to Trim on the morning of the attack. The arms captured were taken away in the same van.

At this time, I was attending a course of lectures in Parnell Square and Lower Gardiner St., Dublin. The lectures were on the use of explosives and were given by Dick McKee and Rory O'Connor; Ginger O'Connell and ~~\_\_\_\_\_~~ <sup>George</sup> Plunkett also gave lectures on organisation and the formulation of plans for attacks on enemy forces. When I returned to my own area, I went around each company and gave lectures to selected men in each area on engineering, bridge and road cutting, the derailment of trains and the making of



buckshot cartridges.

A short time later, I was told by a friendly R.I.C. man that I was one of several active I.R.A. men in the area who were to be arrested within the next few days. He asked me to warn the others. Two Volunteers - Patrick Carey and Hugh Kelly - ignored my warning and were arrested. We went 'on the run'. From then on all the active I.R.A. men were being raided for, while the others stayed away from home at night. I went to Dublin for a while. There I met most of the Trim Volunteers who had been 'on the run' also since the capture of the R.I.C. barracks. We held a meeting one day and decided to return to our own areas. When we returned, we reorganised the Athboy and Trim areas once more.

In the autumn of 1920, an order was received from Brigade H.Q. for the demolition of bridges and the blocking and trenching of roads in the area. During the period, we demolished six river bridges and trenched the roads extensively. We commandeered civilians to help us at this work. The Tans subsequently commandeered the same civilians to repair the trenched roads. They later carried planks to bridge the trenches, and around the same time seized prominent civilians whom they carried as hostages during their raids.

On the 31st October, with two or three other Volunteers, I went to Trim to collect three rifles, some hand grenades and a quantity of ammunition for distribution to different company areas. On the return journey, we took shelter for a while in an old disused house on the roadside. While inside, a lorry load of Tans pulled up outside and proceeded down a boreen to raid a house further down. They did not raid the

house in which we had taken shelter. When they had left the vicinity, we proceeded on our way. Next day, one of the usual raids took place on my house, or, I should say, my father's house. I was living with him. When they (Tans) enquired as to my whereabouts, my father replied that I had gone to Scotland. One of them replied: "He was not in Scotland last night; we know that he was in an old house in Kildalkey at 10 p.m.". Apparently the enemy had been informed of our visit to Trim and were trying to locate us when they pulled up outside the empty house. A night or two later, one of our neighbours saw a couple of Tans outside our house again. Next morning, my father found <sup>a</sup> notice ~~attached~~, signed B.H.Q., meaning Black Hand Gang, pinned to the door.

Early in the month of December, on the orders of Seamus Finn, Brigade Adjutant, preparations were made by the Athboy Company for an attack on Athboy R.I.C. barracks. Shortly after 18 members of Athboy Company had taken up positions, armed with shotguns, around the barracks, the order was cancelled by the Brigade Adjutant. No reason was given for the cancellation. Roads had been blocked and telephone wires cut for the occasion. During the month, I established a workshop in a bog at Drewstown for the making of road mines, hand grenades and bank mines. The workshop was a wooden hut. We raided several establishments for tools and engineering equipment for use in the workshop. These consisted of vices, hack-saws, taps and dies, drills, threading tools and other small tools. In the workshop, I supervised the making of the hand grenades from 2" iron piping, the making of road mines, which had cement casings, and the bank mines, which were about 2' 6" long of cement casings. In the making of the latter, we inserted a small

flower pot filled with shrapnel. For an explosive we used gelignite and warflour.

The battalion strength at the end of the year was approximately 60 men, of whom 23 were members of Athboy Company.

While in Delvin on Christmas Eve, 1920, I got word that a spy for whom the I.R.A. were looking was in the town. An hour or so later, I was accosted by three men, one of whom drew a gun and gripped me by the collar. In the scuffle which followed, I drew my revolver and fired twice, wounding the man each time. After this I broke away. A day or two later, I was informed that the man I had wounded was the spy. Dan Monaghan was my informant.

After a prolonged preparation by the Battalion Staff, arrangements were made once again to attack Athboy barracks in the month of January, 1921. Some thirty men, representing each company in the battalion, were mobilised for the attack. All carried shotguns and buckshot ammunition. At the last moment the attack was called off by the Battalion O/C, Pat Corrigan, on the grounds that the arms at our disposal were inefficient. A third attempt was also called off. On this occasion I had placed a land mine on the Delvin road at Mangan's Cross, and had a tree felled nearby. With others, I took up an ambush position near the spot to prevent reinforcements reaching the town. In the early morning I got word that the proposed attack had been cancelled once again. Other roads were also blocked on this occasion.

A few weeks later, an ambush was prepared for a spot near Rathcormack Chapel in the Kildalkey Company area. The ambush party of fourteen men were members of the Delvin

and Athboy Companies and were in charge of Seamus Finn. Their objective was a lorry load of Tans which passed that way occasionally. The ambush party were armed with three rifles, seven shotguns and a couple of hand grenades. They were placed in extended formation on one side of the road. When the expected lorry did not show up after a wait of six hours, Seamus Finn called off the attack for the time being.

Some days later, in charge of twelve men from the Athboy and Fordstown Companies, I took up an ambush position near Girley Chapel to attack a cycle patrol of twelve R.I.C. and Tans. I placed the twelve men, who were all armed with shotguns, behind a ditch on high ground overlooking the road. There was an open field behind them. Armed with a rifle, I took up my position at a bend on the opposite side of the road. The order for attack was a whistle and a rifle shot from me. After being in position for some considerable time, the men on the opposite side called me over. We discussed the positions they had been allocated and a number of them pointed out the disadvantage of the open field behind them. After waiting for a further half hour, there was no sign of the cycle patrol so I decided to withdraw and gave the order accordingly.

In the month of April, on the occasion of the formation of the 1st Eastern Division, Meath Brigade and adjoining battalions in Westmeath and Cavan were reorganised into four brigades. Athboy, Fordstown and Kildalkey Companies then became the 2nd Battalion of No. 4 Brigade. The officers of this battalion were: - John Corrigan, O/C; Luke Bradley, Vice O/C; Patrick McGurl, Adjutant; Matt Ledwith, Q/M; James Halligan, Engineer; and Peter Gilbran, I/O. This battalion was one of three comprising

the 4th Brigade. The Brigade Officers appointed were: - Michael Hiney, O/C; Patrick Corrigan, Vice O/C; Joe Monaghan, Adjutant; John Tyrrell, Q/M. I became Engineer, and Edward Thornton became I/O.

From then to the Truce the main activities of the brigade consisted of road trenching and occasional raids on the mails. Before I close, I would like to pay tribute to the very kind and generous people who sheltered and fed us while 'on the run'. In particular, I would like to mention the Misses Flynn of Grennanstown, Athboy, the Ginnells of Rosneath, and the Casserly family of Drewstown.

After the Truce, I attended a training camp at Ballymacoll, Dunboyne, and later attended another camp at Ballivor which was later transferred to Delvin Workhouse.

Signed:

Joseph Martin

Date:

28.12.1957

Witness:

John J. Saly  
(Investigator).

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAGE MILITARY 1913-21
NO. W.S. 1,723