

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURÓ STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

NO. W.S. 147

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 147

Witness

Captain Bernard McAllister

Identity

Member of 5th Battn. (Fingal) Dublin Bde. I.V.

Subject

5th Bn. (Fingal) I.V. 1913-1916.

Conditions, if any, stipulated by Witness

Nil

File No. S.1019

Form B.S.M. 2.

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Statement by Captain Bernard McAllister,
North Street, Swords, Co. Dublin.

I joined the Irish Volunteers in the latter part of 1913 or early 1914. I joined at Donabate. I cannot remember who was present on that particular date. Previous to this I was a member of the Ancient Order of Hibernians and the Volunteers really started from them. On joining I made no declaration or took no oath. We were given Membership Cards. We paid a small weekly subscription - as far as I can remember 3d. per week towards purchase of arms, equipment, uniform.

Our Company Captain was Thomas Joseph Smith. John McAllister was a Lieutenant. I cannot remember who the other officers were. Charles and Bartle Weston, John and Mick McAllister, Henry and Harry Bates and Dan Egan were some of the men I can remember who were also members.

We had parade twice per week. A man named McCollumn, an Ex-Sergeant Major of the British Army, was our Instructor. This man was a reservist and was called up on the outbreak of war. We had no arms at this time and did our drills with wooden rifles. We had a couple of .22 rifles and had target practice at the sandhills by the sea.

The Company took part in the Howth Gun-Running. We paraded that day at the hall and marched to the railway station and took the train to Raheny. The Companies from Rush, Lusk, Skerries, were also on the train. All paraded at Raheny and there joined the Dublin contingent when they came along. We understood it was field exercises we were going on. We marched to Howth. On arrival at Howth Pier we got to understand it was gun-running we were on. Excitement now run

very high but good discipline was maintained. Our Company was drawn up across the Pier (town end) to prevent anyone except Volunteers getting on to the pier. Police and coastguards tried to get on to the pier but were refused. The coastguards then sent up rockets. Either Skerries or Lusk Company relieved us and we proceeded down to get our rifles, but by this time they had all been given out. I jumped on to the boat and succeeded in getting one and ten rounds of ammunition. Mr. Derham of Skerries also got one. We formed up again and marched to Raheny and home. I had the only rifle the Company got. It was the type known as Howth Mauser. Subsequently the Company purchased six or seven Italian (Garibaldi) rifles.

At the time of the split in the Volunteers most of the Company took the Redmondite side. The only ones who remained loyal were John and Mick McAllister, Charles and Bartle Weston and myself. I had joined the Irish Volunteers because I had seen a chance in them of doing something to attain the freedom of our country and breaking the connection with England. In following Redmond I could see no hope of this. The Company rifles at this time were kept by my father at our house. He had decided on the Redmond side. After the meeting at which the split took place, I went home, got a car and loaded all the rifles and equipment into it and brought them to McAllisters of Turvey. After that I had no further contact with the Donabate Volunteers and transferred to Swords.

In Swords, Dick Coleman was the Company Captain. Frank Lawless was also an officer. I cannot remember any other officers. We still continued to pay our subscription - I think it was 6d. per week now. We had parades once a week and nearly every Sunday. Dick Coleman was the Instructor. Officers from Dublin also visited us and gave us instructions and lectures. Ned Daly and Con Colbert were some of these. We were now the 5th Battalion Dublin Brigade. Bulmer Hobson also visited us. Some now had uniforms. Others had breeches, caps and haversacks.

Dr. Hayes was the Battalion O/C. and Tom Ashe was Adjutant. Frank Lawless was the Battalion Quartermaster.

We had field exercises for the Company and Battalion around Saucerstown and the Broad-Meadows. We had Brigade exercises at Finglas and St. Margarets and on one occasion we went to Ticknock with the Brigade. We cycled to the city and marched from the city to Ticknock and back. Each section had a .22 rifle for target practice and .22 ammunition was plenty - sometimes we had to pay for the ammunition we used. We got plenty of practice with the .22 rifle. We were still very short of service rifles and were mostly armed with shotguns for which we had made some buck shot. There was also some hand-grenades which were made locally. Everyone had a bicycle. This was necessary as the Battalion was scattered over a very big area.

By this time we had a good idea that the fight which we were looking forward to would start soon. There was nothing special on Holy Week and we were not warned to go to Confession, although I heard afterwards that some units in the city were. We were warned to mobilise in Swords on Easter Sunday morning and to bring all arms, equipment, and 24 hours' rations. On Sunday morning I got the "Irish Independent" and saw the orders from McNeill cancelling all parades for that date. Accordingly I did not mobilise. I went into the city that day to play in a football match. I did not notice any particular activity around the city.

On Easter Monday I went to Fairyhouse Races. While there I heard the Rising had started and I saw the D.M.P. leave the course. On arriving home I got in touch with other men of our section and found that it had mobilised that morning. We decided to get off immediately and make contact with the Battalion or the Company. We took our rifles and ammunition and 24 hours' rations. We went to McAllisters of Turvey and there learned that the Company had gone to Finglas. We started off for Finglas - six of us. En route we found the Battalion at Knocksedan. This was

early on Tuesday morning. The Battalion was returning from Finglas. There were only about 60 or 62 men present out of about 200. Frank Lawless told me to hand over my rifle to another man and to go and collect a rifle off a fellow called McNeill, a short distance away (who had not turned out). I got the rifle and 10 rounds of ammunition. It was a Lee Metford. We stayed at Knocksedan on Tuesday night. I was on guard all that night.

On Wednesday morning we had a good breakfast of bacon and eggs. We left there about 9 or 10 a.m. and moved on to Swords via the Green. We had been told we were going to attack the Barracks there. We cycled up to the Barracks, jumped off and rushed in. The Sergeant and another Constable were present. We told them we had come for the rifles. They offered no resistance. We took possession of the rifles and ammunition, about six rifles and 50 rounds of .303 for each. They were police carbines. I do not know if we got any other weapons or ammunition. This was my first time to see Dick Mulcahy. He went in to the Post Office and dismantled the telegraph and telephones. We also took possession of one of Kennedy's motor bread vans, full of bread, which came down the street from the city direction.

We next moved on to Donabate for the same purpose. On arrival at the railway station we dismantled the 'phones and telegraph in Signal Cabin and Station Master's Office. Our section proceeded towards the Barracks. The Barracks looked formidable - it had iron shutters and did not seem as easy a take as Swords. Five or six of us crept up to the door and called on them to surrender. The answer was a volley of shots. We returned its fire and after a few rounds fired through the top windows, the police shouted that they would surrender. They were told to throw their rifles through the windows which they did, and came down to the door with their hands up. I noticed a policeman named Thorpe was wounded in the hand. We collected five rifles and ammunition there and a couple of revolvers. In this case and

in Swords they were warned not to take any further action against us or they would be shot.

We then started in the direction of Lusk. We were halted on Turvey Hill. A rumour got going here that British troops had landed at Skerries and that they were in Lusk. We were a couple of hours halted here. We then proceeded back to Knocksedan. After a good supply of food had been partaken off the Battalion started for ^{GARRISTOWN} ~~Saucerstown~~ ^{B Meo} and went into camp at a place called Baldwinstown. That night about 10 p.m. approximately a small party in charge of Dr. Hayes, of which I was a member, proceeded to the Barracks in Garristown on cycles. We cycled up to the Barracks and knocked at the door and called on them to surrender and hand over their rifles. They opened up and the Sergeant said the rifles had been taken to Balbriggan that day. We searched the Barracks but found nothing. We next went to the Post Office and dismantled the telegraph instruments and then proceeded back to camp at Baldwinstown. We had a good meal then of meat, bread and tea, and slept in straw in the stables. At 4 a.m. I was awakened and put on guard. I came off guard next morning at 10 a.m. On arrival into camp I found the Battalion on parade. I was told to fall in with my section. Ashe and the other Battalion Officers came on parade. He said something about men grumbling about the Rising not being general in the country and that only the Dublin crowd was out. Dick Mulcahy also gave us a lecture about our duties to our country. Dr. Hayes also spoke. Ashe said: "Anybody who is not satisfied to carry on could go home there and then and that they would not be thought the less about". There was a number of questions asked by the men of the officers and eventually six or seven men stepped out and said they would not carry on any further. They were told to leave their rifles and equipment behind which they did, and left camp. Before going they were warned about not talking or giving any information.

We remained at Baldwinstown until approximately 8 p.m. on Thursday when the Battalion moved to a new camp at Borranstown.

We killed a sheep that evening and had good food, including soup. We again lay on straw in stables. I was part of that night on guard also.

On Friday morning the Battalion paraded in its different sections and was told our immediate object was Ashbourne Barracks (R. I. C.), about two miles from the camp, and also to destroy the railway line at Batterstown. I was in No. 1 section and we ^{were} first to move out of camp. John McAllister, Jim Rooney and myself were detailed as scouts to the advance party.

When about 100^{yds} east of the Rath Cross we saw three police on bicycles with rifles slung on their shoulders on the other side of the Cross Roads and on the bye-road I think, which goes to Ratoath. John McAllister shouted at them to surrender. They dismounted and one man tried to get his rifle off his shoulder. We fired a couple of shots over their heads and two of them put up their hands. The third man got round the bend in the road and made off in opposite direction to the Barracks. We took the rifles and ammunition off the two police and handed them over to the section which had closed up now. Rooney and I were told to follow up the policeman that got away. Less than half a mile from the Cross on the west side towards Ratoath we found his bicycle and rifle on the side of the road. We saw a gap in the hedge which he had made and traced him to a farmer's house about 300^{yds} away. We asked the farmer's wife if she had seen a policeman. She denied any knowledge of him. We searched the house and found him under a bed in a top bedroom. He had discarded his tunic and cap and was dressed in shoes, pants and shirt only. We took him back to the Cross of the Rath.

Before arriving at the Cross we heard rifle fire and thought the rest were attacking the Barracks which was only 200^{yds} from the Cross. We handed over our prisoner and were told to take up positions covering the Barracks. While doing so a policeman was seen crossing the fields towards Ratoath evidently after getting out of the Barracks. Ashe or Hayes shouted: "Get that fellow".

We followed him across country. He was about 500^x away at the time. He was unarmed. We followed him for a few fields and fired a few shots at him but he succeeded in getting away. We reported back to the Cross and told Dr. Hayes who was there that he had escaped. We asked Dr. Hayes if we would rejoin our section. He said "No, wait here".

About ten minutes elapsed - I happened to look down the road towards Kilmoon and I saw a car approaching about half a mile away immediately followed by several other cars. I reported to Dr. Hayes that there were cars coming towards us. He put his field glasses on to them and in a moment said: "Those are police. We will have to stop them". He detailed a man to report to Ashe that police reinforcements were coming quickly. He said: "We will try and hold the Cross but tell him to send help immediately". I asked what would we do. He said: "Stop them, shoot to kill, aim at the drivers". The car pulled up immediately - about 150 yards away from us at the Cross. All the other cars pulled up behind them in line covering each other off. The police jumped off the cars and raced to cover on both sides of the road. Dr. Hayes ordered reped fire. A very heavy fire was returned on us from the police positions.

After a short lapse of time, in about 10 or 15 minutes, I was delighted to see the Section Commander beside me with the remainder of the section- in all about 20 men. His orders were to hold the Cross Roads at all costs. Things quieted down somewhat now and firing only occurred as the police presented a target. The next order from Weston, our section leader, was that when the police broke we were to use volley fire. The police eventually did break and started to run towards us and dive for fresh cover. We fired at them and actually our fellows were making bets as to who would shoot the most. I noticed several fall and in one case I saw four out of a party of five get hit and fall.

At this stage we could hear Dick Mulcahy who was apparently

in command of a party who was advancing on the police from the Slane direction in the fields on both sides of the road shouting: "Drive them out of it". The police were acting like rabbits being driven from a ditch before a shooting party. We had a clear view and decimated them with our fire. Some took cover under the cars but were visible to us there. About this time D. I. Gray was shot and the police then threw down their arms and came towards us with their hands up. Some of them were badly shaken, but on the whole their morale was good. We rounded them up and collected their arms and ammunition.

The police in the Barracks surrendered also on seeing their comrades on the road doing so. Bartle Weston and I counted the rifles. When all were collected, they totalled 96, including the ones out of the Barracks. We put all the rifles and ammunition into the bread van which had come up. I was then detailed with Bartle Weston to go into the village and destroy the instruments in the Telegraph Office, which we did. There were only a few people around. They were nervous, but we assured them that no harm would come to them and not to worry. We then reported back to the camp at Borranstown to which the Battalion had moved while we were in the village. I estimated that there were ten policemen killed and between 30 and 40 wounded.

Two civilians arrived on the scene in a small two-seater car during the fight. Apparently the police through those were Ashe and Dr. Hayes as their car was similar to the one used by them, and they shot both of them. No one in our unit knew who they were. We had one man killed, Mack Crenegan, and Tom Rafferty died that night from wounds. Four or five other men of ours had slight wounds from which they all recovered.

On arrival in camp we had some food and I went to sleep in a manger in a horse stall. On Saturday morning at about 2 a.m. I was awakened by Captain Jim Lawless and put on guard, relieving Peadar Kelly. My patrol extended as far as the cross of the Rath. Some of the dead police were still there up to 8 a.m. when I was

withdrawn. On getting into camp I found everybody ready to move and as a result I got no breakfast. We moved into Garristown where we spent most of the day and that evening we moved south in the direction of the city and went into billets at New Barn near Kilsallaghan.

The boys were in great form this day after our victory at Ashbourne. Their morale was very high and looking forward to the next fight. We now had good rifles, the police ones having been issued to us and plenty of ammunition. Here I noticed that daily orders were issued for the first time. These were in manuscript and signed by Dr. Hayes as Adjutant. The sections for guard and the time, etc. were laid down on these. We arrived in New Barn in daylight and another sheep was killed here. Bread was now very scarce. In this respect we were helped out by Mrs. Fagan who was the mother of the caretaker. We were billeted in the sheds, again on straw. Strong guards were mounted. This always consisted of an outpost line with scouts on cycles out in front. At 3 a.m. on Sunday morning there was an alarm and we all turned out and manned positions for about two hours. I don't know what gave rise to the alarm.

About 11 a.m. on Sunday two police Sergeants in uniform were caught by our picquets and brought into camp. Afterwards I learned that those men were under a Flag of Truce demanding our surrender. We were paraded and told that the police had come for us to surrender, that Pearse and the rest had surrendered in the city. We were disinclined to believe this and the men got very disheartened. Ashe now told us that Mulcahy was going into the city to see Pearse and we were holding one of the Sergeants as a hostage until his return. We were waiting there until about 3 p.m. or later when Mulcahy returned. While Mulcahy was away there was a lot of talk amongst the fellows about not surrendering even if the city had done so. On Mulcahy returning he said to us: "It is all up boys". On hearing this some of the men broke down and cried bitterly and some of them wanted to fight on. There was a meeting of the officers and we were then told it had been decided

to surrender. Some of the men now threw their rifles away while others said they would not surrender. Most of them were for disbanding and getting away. Mulcahy now said a few words to us about being soldiers and finished by saying: "Are you going to desert your officers now?". I was one of those in favour of disbanding, but on hearing this I said to myself: "If they were good enough to fight ^{with them} I will see the thing out with them". About a dozen men did leave. I should mention here that after Ashbourne all the wounded men were sent home.

We waited there in a desperate mood, no food was got ready and hardly any talk. The police Sergeant (hostage) was present during this. I saw Ashe hand his revolver to the police Sergeant as a token of surrender. A cavalry escort arrived about 6 p.m. and we were fell-in in two files with our bicycles. Cavalry were placed on our flanks and in this way we were marched to Swords. In Swords we were put into lorries and brought to Richmond Barracks, Dublin. Officers and all were put into one barrack room - no beds - no food. We had to lie on the floor.

On Monday morning Ashe, Dr. Hayes, Frank and Jim Lawless were taken away and the next time I saw them was in the Gym. Also there were Ned Daly, Con Colbert and other senior officers. Our particulars were taken there and we were brought back to the barrack room. The only food we got was some Bully beef and biscuits and red tea. On Tuesday, the 2nd May, we were paraded with other prisoners, about 300 strong, and marched from there to the North Wall. While going through the city to the Docks we got a very bad reception from the civil population. They booed us, called us ugly names and were generally hostile. This crowd represented the rabble of the city and not the ordinary citizen. At the North Wall we were marched on to a cattle boat and put down in the cattle pens. We got no food on board. We sailed to England and thence by rail to Knutsford Jail. In England the people were alright and not hostile. In Knutsford we were put in single cells. This was a military prison and the prisoners were detailed as warders over us. We got one hour's exercise in

the day. Food was very bad. I never felt hungry until then. This continued for about a month, after which things improved.

After a visit by Larry Gennell, M.P., we were allowed to intermingle and talk and were out for most of the day. Food improved and we were allowed parcels and letters. From Knutsford we were moved to Frongoch about the middle of June. We were the first party of about 20 to arrive there. Further batches began to arrive there until the camp (North) filled up and there was about 1,500 all told. At first rations were bad, but when the camp filled up conditions improved. We did our own cooking. We had our own canteen, etc. We had our own Camp Commandant. We also had a good library in the camp.

We got a good training here in the running of a camp, and also in general military training, drills, etc. We were organised in sections and companies. The I.R.B. was organised and recruited for extensively here, and I joined there. I was there until the general amnesty at Christmas when we were released and given a passage to Ireland.

I noticed a big change in the country on our return. The crowd who booed us going away now landed us and treated us as heroes and we got a grand reception on our arrival at Dublin.

I should have mentioned earlier that while we were billeted at Ballyinstown on Easter Thursday morning a Father Kevelehan came into the camp. Ashe told us that he was the son of a Fenian and that he wanted to bless us. We all knelt down and he gave us conditional absolution and his blessing. A good number of the men went to confession in the Chapel at Garristown that morning.

Signed B. M. O'Althorpe

Date 1-10-48

Witness Matthew Barry

M. Barry.

COMMANDANT.

Date 1-10-48

BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION EST. BY 1913-21
BURO STAIRE METATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 147