

**ORIGINAL**

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURD STAIRS MILITARY 1913-21

No. W.S. 329

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 329.....

**Witness**

Mr. Patrick O'Connell,  
Corgrigg,  
Foynes,  
Co. Limerick.  
**Identity**

Member of Fianna Eireann and  
Irish Volunteers, Limerick 1915 -

**Subject**

Miscellaneous incidents of  
national interest Limerick-Clare 1915-1921.

**Conditions, if any, stipulated by Witness**

Nil

File No. S.1417.....

Form B.S.M. 2.

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STATEMENT BY PATRICK O'CONNELL,Corrigg, Foynes, County Limerick.

I have a vivid recollection of the Irish Volunteer Parade in Limerick City on Whit Sunday, May 23rd., 1915. I was at that time a member of Fianna Eireann and just 16 years of age. We subscribed for and bought our own Fianna uniforms then. The green hats we got from Lawlors of Fownes Street, Dublin. In company with Michael Sheahan, another Fianna boy, also of Foynes, we donned our uniforms and set out for Limerick on our bikes that Sunday morning, arriving at the Fianna Hall before the start of the Parade. A large number of the Fianna took part in the march with the Volunteers through the City. Of the many exciting incidents during the route, I still clearly remember one when, as we passed over (I think the Sarsfield Bridge) a battalion of British soldiers came marching by, and, apparently, some of them passed insulting remarks about the Flag borne by the Meelick, Clare Company, and heated words took place between Paddy Brennan and the officer in charge of the British, but the incident finished there.

After the Parade we returned to the Fianna Hall to receive instructions regarding the Fianna Convention to be held next day, (Whit Monday) and to which we had been invited as delegates from Foynes Sluagh. Our invitation to the Parade and Fianna Convention, as far as I recollect, was in the form of a printed card bearing the name of James Leddan. James Leddan, Collivet, Sean Houston, Con Colbert were to preside. Most of the Fianna were billeted in the Hall that Sunday night, but we were directed to a house in Davis Street. As we passed by Pery Square a man stepped from the shadow of a doorway and stopped us.

He advised us not to proceed further in that uniform, so he procured us two raincoats and caps which we put on and got safely to our digs. Later that night Joe Dalton arrived with some Dublin Fianna who were armed with revolvers. We cycled home to Foynes on Whit Monday evening. Con Colbert visited Foynes soon after, and the local Fianna discussed future plans and organisation with him in the Workmen's Club, afterwards burned down by the Black-and-Tans. The Fianna here threw in their lot with the Irish Volunteers at the split. As far as I remember it was the Irish Volunteers or Sinn Fein Volunteers we paraded with.

Another historic parade we attended was held in the Square at Newcastle West on St. Patrick's Day 1916, and which was addressed by Sean MacDermott, later shot for his part in the Rebellion, Dublin. Others who addressed the assembled Volunteers were Rev. Father Wall and Father Hayes. In or about that period Ernest Blythe, who was moving around West Limerick organising the Volunteers, happened to meet me there one evening near the <sup>Foynes</sup> Railway Station, and I took him to the home of P. Jackson. He (Blythe) addressed a muster of Volunteers another day at Ardagh in a field near the Railway Station there.

Constance Countess Markievicz, one of the founders of Na Fianna Eireann, visited Newcastle West also at one time and we went there for the occasion. Gearoid McAuliffe was in charge of the parade that evening. The Countess addressed the crowd from the second floor window of Michael Dore's house (chemist) where she stayed.

In the summer of 1915, I spent my two weeks' holidays at my Grandfather's home at <sup>Arranagh</sup> ~~Andonagh~~, Monagea. I wore my Fianna uniform at the time. I spent some pleasant days with Sean Collins, (brother of the late Con Collins of 1916 fame). We

/rambled

rambled up to explore Glenquin Castle, and he took me back the fields to an old Fort wherein he had concealed some arms.

One evening in the year 1914, the local Volunteers had assembled on the pier head for their usual parade and drill. Before the parade dismissed a messenger was seen approaching on a bicycle and he handed our instructor (the late Michael Cahill) a note. After perusing the note Cahill addressed the following words to us - "I'm afraid I'll have to keep you "out a bit later to-night, boys", and we were marched back the road, about a mile or so, in the direction of Mount Trenchard, the home of the Honourable Mary Spring Rice. Here we remained on duty until early morning. During the night there was much Volunteer activity, and a large number of Volunteers had arrived in the village from Askeaton and Aughanish and other points along the shore. These had taken up positions allotted to them. The Post Office was under the control of the Volunteers. Telephone communication was cut off and the village isolated from outside. Rumour had now pierced the air of secrecy and whispers of an expected arrival of rifles gladdened our hearts. It was said the guns were to be landed in Foynes Island. The local Volunteer boatmen - the Walshes, Finucanes, Michael Buckley, Joe Carroll and Edward Barron were ready to man their boats when required. Morning came, but not the rifles. Disappointed we marched home. *Next day the British destroyer "Bismarck" came up to Foynes, but left after a few hours.* Some time previous to the events related above, Conor O'Brien, his sister, and George Cahill and Tom Fitzsimons, as members of his crew, sailed from Foynes in his yacht "Kelpie". Of the subsequent landing of the rifles by O'Brien at Kilcoole, County Wicklow, all are now familiar.

The election of Count Joseph Plunkett (father of Joseph Mary Plunkett, shot 1916) as first Sinn Fein T.D. in

/North

North Roscommon is recalled in Foynes, being celebrated on the night of the 6th February 1917, with lighting of a bonfire and singing of songs. The following members of the local Sinn Fein club were summoned to appear at the next Court for, as alleged, "lighting and making use of a fire in the neighbourhood of Foynes, without permission of the Competent Naval or Military Authority". The following were "Bound to the Peace" for 12 months and ordered to be of good behaviour: Daniel Sheehan and his two sons, Daniel and Michael Sheehan. They were carpenters. Also William Jackson, Patrick Jackson, Patrick O'Connell, Thomas Danaher, John Walsh, Cecil McCarthy, William Cahill, Michael Cahill. Patrick Jackson was sent to Limerick jail for one month. From this year on to 1919 and 1920 raids and arrests of members of Sinn Fein and Volunteers were becoming more frequent. Michael O'Sullivan of Ardineer and Joseph O'Carroll of Barracks were arrested, but released again after a week. Both are since gone to their reward (R.I.P.)

Among the Cumann na mBan of the period and who helped right up to the 1922 year were Miss Madden, Miss Mollie Jackson, Nan Jackson, Ellie Walsh (dressmaker), K. Sheahan, Dora Knox, Bridget Scully, May Shanahan, Mrs. P. Jackson, Annie Dundon, Aughanish, Miss Conway, Aughanish, Mrs. B. O'Sullivan, Ardineer, Mrs. Michael Guerin of Aughanish, Nora Kirwan, Miss Mary Spring Rice. An incident occurred one day in the village as the British military were leaving in a lorry after a number of raids. Some members of the Cumann na mBan and others had assembled and as the lorry with military passed them, Nora Kirwan waved the Tricolour flag. The lorry stopped and an officer, revolver in hand, seized the flag. In the tussle, both fell to the ground and, although he threatened to shoot, Nora held on to the flag. By this time stones and other missiles were being hurled at the

soldiers, and the officer jumped on the lorry and ordered it to move off.

From 1920 to 1921 Foynes was considered one of the most strongly garrisoned villages of its size in the county. Big forces of military, R.I.C., Black and Tans, occupied the most strategic points in the village and a gunboat with naval crew lay anchored off the pier. At the time the R.I.C. barracks at Shanagolden and Loughill were vacated and their staff distributed to Foynes and Newcastle West and Askeaton, Shanagolden and Loughill barracks were both destroyed by Volunteers immediately they became vacant.

We had received orders from Battalion headquarters to collect all arms in our area, as secret information had been received that the police were to collect same. We collected all arms in the area that night, finishing at 5 a.m. The police searched next day for same, but failed to locate where they were. These guns were for a time concealed in Jack Liston's house at Ballynash, being put between the ceiling and roof where they were not found although the place was raided once.

Some time after a consignment of 60 wooden boxes arrived at Foynes railway station, consigned to the commander of a gunboat which was permanently stationed at Foynes. These boxes were for the storing of .16-lb. gun shells on board. I travelled to Askeaton to the home of Captain Fitzgerald who lived about two miles on Limerick side of Askeaton; there I got some revolvers which I brought to Foynes and that night we forced an entrance to the Railway Goods Store, removed the boxes which we piled on the pier and burned. Search lights were immediately turned on the scene from the gunboat, and naval and police patrols turned out, but we got home safely. Those taking part in the raid were the late Pat

Pat Cusack, Pat Walsh, H. Danaher, J. Jackson, Jim Finucane, Paddy O'Connell, Michael Sheehan, Tom Scully, Jim Shanahan. Curfew was enforced soon after and anyone caught out of doors after 10 p.m. had the patrols to contend with. Military and police made periodical visits to the homes of suspected Volunteers and they checked all the occupants of each household to agree with names on a list which, according to a curfew order, had to be affixed on the inside of doors of all homes. Shovels, picks, crowbars and other implements were required for the trenching of roads and knocking bridges in the area. A supply of these tools was removed one night from the Railway Ganger's tool box just before curfew and handed over to J.T. O'Connor and other members of the flying column, who removed them by way of the School Hill. All roads adjoining Foynes were trenched and blocked with felled trees some days later.

One evening in May 1920, Paddy Walsh came into the B.P. Oil Company's office, where I was employed. He asked me to accompany him to the Fishery Store on the pier. There I met the late Mickey Houlihan, .... Reidy, and a Collins man from Aylervue on the Clare shore. I was informed by them that the home of Cissie Behan of Coolmeen, a member of the Cumann na mBan, had been searched the previous day, and that they had found correspondence from me relating to the sale of tickets in aid of the Coolmeen Volunteer Company. My house was searched about a week after by local R.I.C. - Sgt. Kelly.

The burning of the Foynes Workmen's Club by Black and Tans, also the burning of the co-operative Store, and other nights of terror following the Borrignone and Loughiel ambushes, will not soon be forgotten in Foynes.

After the Loughill ambush the police arrived in Foynes with their dying comrade, Fahy. The police ran amok, firing shots through the village.

They burst in the doors of Charlie O'Malley's house in search of Donnadh O'Brien, Irish Teacher and now T.D. Luckily for him he had gone to Limerick that day and did not intend returning for a day or so. Word was sent to him next day not to come back.

Some time after the Borigone train ambush, Thomas Walsh, Robertstown, who resided with his mother near the scene of the attack but was at that time employed in Tipperary town, had the house where he lodged visited one night by Black-and-Tans who foully murdered poor Tom, shooting him through the back. He was a member of the Foynes Football Team, and Volunteers. Tom, as he was known to us, was a fine, dashing type of young Irish manhood, over 6 feet tall, and as true as ever breathed. I still cherish an Easter card he sent me. His remains were brought by rail to Foynes and laid overnight in his native Church, Robertstown. Next day, his coffin, covered with the Tricolour, was borne by comrades to Dunmoylan Churchyard near Shanagolden. A beautiful glass wreath from the Foynes Football Club was laid on his grave. May he rest in peace.

At the above funeral lorries of Tans from Adare arrived at the Chapel at Robertstown, and searched and questioned many people, but did no harm otherwise. After the departure of the lorries and Tans, the coffin was covered with the Tricolour and the funeral proceeded without incident.

I remember being on duty with Michael Sheahan and <sup>Pat</sup> Walsh and other Fianna boys on the night before Casement was captured. We were expecting he would pass through here on the way to Limerick to Hanratty's Hotel. As far as I recollect the car which was to bring him ran into the sea and



a Limerick Volunteer was drowned. Pat Jackson was with us that night and in charge, I think.

In addition to above, I would like to record the following particulars, viz: Michael Sheahan, our Coy. I.O. sent word to Battalion headquarters, Ballyhahill, on the day previous to the round-up there, resulting in the shooting of Sean Finn, word was sent through the late John Nolan, ex-T.D. that the round up was to take place, the information being got through a Tan in Foynes Barrack. On instructions from H.Q. our I.O. arranged for a photo to be taken of Foynes R.I.C. Barracks; this was taken by William Ebzery from inside his window of his house which is directly opposite the barracks. I remember being sent by Capt. P. Cusack one evening at 7 p.m. about 1919 or early in 1920 with dispatch to Fr. McCarthy, Ballyhahill. There were two other Volunteers there when I arrived, one of whom, I think, was O'Regan of Rathkeale; the second, I do not remember his name. Fr. McCarthy left on his motor bike and we had to await his return in the early hours of the morning; I got to Foynes about 6 a.m. Mollie Cregan - now Mrs. T. Gore, Foynes - was then housekeeper at Fr. McCarthy's. The same Fr. McCarthy was for some time chaplain in the National Army at Limerick. He is dead, R.I.P. A tricolour flag which we had erected on one of the 30-ft. high storage tanks in the B.P. oil yard - about 9 p.m. one night I heard and watched it being removed by Tans and British Bluejackets who erected in its place a Naval Red Ensign. I informed Capt. Hennessey, M. Sheahan, P. Walsh and we cautiously stole to the place. Walsh and Sheahan removed their boots, climbed to the top, removed the Naval Ensign and replaced another tricolour. Then we kept watch, but our flag was not removed again. We spent another night with the late Capt. T. Madigan (later shot), D. McDonnell of Shanagolden and other battalion officers,

rounding up persons in the Borrigone area, concerned with stealing of sheep and firing shots in a house. They were dealt with by Sinn Fein courts.

For two weeks during Sept. 1921, in company with Vol. T. Fráwley, I attended a Battalion Signal Training Camp at Shanid, Shanagolden (having left our <sup>work</sup> week for that fortnight).

On orders from Bn. Comdt. Capt. Hennessy and I with a few other members of the E. Coy. took over R.I.C. Barrack in Foynes and manned it for two weeks till handed to Battn. staff. We were warned by H.Q. to beware of booby traps or bombs when entering barrack, as cases of such like occurred when Tans left bombs tied to doors or behind window shutters in barracks. We took over day after evacuation of R.I.C. and Tans - Truce period.

At the period when Republican Police duty was being carried on by members of Sinn Fein Clubs William Sheehan, Victualler, of Foynes, and a man named Monahan (not of Foynes, but employed here) were carrying on such duty one Sunday evening; they were assaulted by some Black and Tans who had only just arrived in the village. Sheehan's forehead was split by a blow from a rifle butt. Soon after, orders were issued by Volunteer H.Q. to discontinue said duties in garrison towns and villages.

During Truce negotiations we happened to be conducting a Coy. Training Camp in Dundon's Cottage, Aughanish, Borrigone Area. As result of word from Battn. H.Q. we had suddenly to break camp and move away. Capt. Hennessy, myself, Jack Dore and Jack Lynch of Glin stayed in Hartney's and Charlie O'Malley's of Stokesfield that night. Some day or two later, when we were in the vicinity of McKenna's and John Nolan's Southcappa, the above order was revoked.

At a critical period of the War of Independence a number of R.I.C. men resigned from the Force at Listowel, Co. Kerry. One of these, named Dave Donovan, was brought to Mt. Trenchard, Foynes, and given employment there by Miss Mary Spring Rice and Miss Knox. Donovan happened to come into Foynes village one day on horseback on some business and, unluckily, was recognised by some former members from Listowel who happened to be in the village in Crossley tenders. One shook hands with him and chatted for a while, and he returned to Mt. Trenchard O.K., but resolved to leave Mt. Trenchard soon. Jim Hallet, carpenter, who worked at Mt. Trenchard, offered to row Donovan across the Shannon to Cahercon, Co. Clare, but Miss Knox thought it chancy, so she drove Donovan instead in a pony and trap to Ardagh railway station where he took train. He was not long left Mt. Trenchard when Tans raided the place for him; so he was lucky.

Signed:

Patrick O'Connell  
Ex Adjt "E" Co

Date:

15th November, 1949

Witness:

Michael Sheahan  
Ex R.O.