

ORIGINAL

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

No. W.S. 478

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 478.....

Witness

Superintendent Patrick Meehan,
Garda Síochána,
Granard, Co. Longford.

Identity

Constable R.I.C. 1910-1921;
Member of Garda Síochána 1922 - .

Subject

- (a) Cooperation of R.I.C. Trim, Co. Meath,
with I.R.A. 1918-1920.
- (b) Destruction of Trim R.I.C. Barracks by I.R.A.
September 1920.

Conditions, if any, stipulated by Witness

Nil

File No. S.1649.....

Form B.S.M. 2.

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Statement by Superintendent Patrick Meehan,

Garda Síochána, Gránard, County Longford.

I joined the R.I.C. in November 1910 and did my training at the Depot in the Phoenix Park, Dublin. The period of the course for recruits for that Force was six months. We were trained as a semi-military Force and did drill up to Battalion standard. We were also taught skirmishing and the use of cover. We were also taught musketry - using the police Lee Enfield rifle or carbine, and on two occasions we were brought to the Rifle Ranges at the Curragh Camp to fire courses in that weapon. We also did a course of training on the revolver. This was a short course. We got a very thorough grinding in police duties and detective work, but we got no training in Intelligence or Political work. A few of our men were picked for a special course in Intelligence duties.

Our instructors were all Sergeants of the R.I.C. who were experienced in training. Some of these instructors had done courses in England. Throughout the period of training, by means of lectures and otherwise it was continually being impounded into us that we were now undertaking a great responsibility and that what counted above all was absolute loyalty to England. We received a large amount of physical training also, so that at the end of the period everyone felt in the pink of condition. Of course a recruit had to be perfectly fit in every way before being accepted in the first instance.

My first station after leaving the Depot was at Ashbourne, County Meath. I next was transferred to Ballivor, then to Kilmainhamwood and then to Ballinacorney near Kinnegad and from there to Trim where I finished up. I did all my service after leaving the Depot in the County Meath. During this time things were very peaceful in the country as a whole.

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When the Irish Volunteers were started I was stationed in Ballinabrackey and there we assisted in drilling and training the Volunteers. Most of the R.I.C., that is the rank and file, were in favour of Home Rule. Generally I think that it could be taken that the majority of the officer class were opposed to Home Rule. Nothing of importance took place until the Rebellion. Previous to the Rebellion we had no special instructions regarding watching or reporting the Volunteers and of course afterwards there were no public parades or meetings of that organisation.

I was in Ballinabrackey when the Rebellion broke out. Everything was very quiet there. We really did not know what was happening. A telegraphed message was sent to Ballinabrackey that I was to report to Slane on the Friday of Easter Week - presumably I was to be one of the party of police for Ashbourne. Fortunately for me that message was not delivered for a week afterwards. There were no arrests in the Ballinabrackey area. All was quiet there. After the Rebellion there was a cooling off in the relations between the police and the men who had been in the Volunteers. You could sense this feeling that the Volunteers were suspicious of us, although no incidents occurred to verify this.

I was transferred to Trim early in 1918. When I was there the Conscription crisis developed and nearly all the police at that station contributed openly to the anti-conscription fund. About 90% of the police were opposed to conscription and would not have helped to enforce it. This applied, of course, to the rank and file. The officers, of course, would have mainly stood by the British Government. I often think it was a great pity that the British Government did not attempt to enforce this Act. It would have united the country and the Police Force from shore to /shore.

shore. With the failure of the police to enforce the Act, Government would have broken down completely.

Sergeant McElligott (Pro-Patria) was stationed in Trim at this time and he took a big part in organising the Force against Conscription. We held a meeting in the day room of the barracks. We locked out Constable Wilson who was a Presbyterian. He threatened to report us, but on reaching his own house he died suddenly and never got the chance to report on us.

Some time before the attack on Ballivor and Lismullen barracks I got in touch with the I.R.A. in the Trim area through Michael Hynes and occasionally with Michael Jiles. We worked in co-operation more or less and I assisted them as best I could. I kept them informed of impending raids and so forth. When the I.R.A. were carrying out this general raid for arms throughout the country I kept them informed of the areas that the police would be working in daily, so that they were always able to get that area cleaned up before the police arrived in it. This also prevented the two sides from clashing. The police at this time had instructions to collect on all the arms in possession of the public.

I carried despatches from Trim for the I.R.A. to Dublin and delivered them to Tim Healy at Knockmaroon on the Dublin-Lucan road. I do not know what they contained. Tim Healy, who was afterwards Governor-General of Ireland, had a printing press at his residence. On one occasion I copied two highly secret circulars from Headquarters which I discovered in the D.I.'s office. One circular was to the effect that Bands (musical) were to be roughly treated where contacted at meetings, processions or such occasions. It did not give any reasons why this should be done and I can only assume that it
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was to irritate them. The other circular was even a more drastic one. This was that the harvest crop was to be burned by the police and elaborate precautions were to be taken so that the blame for this would be placed on the I.R.A.

I copied both circulars in my own handwriting and took the copies to Tim Healy. He assured me that he would destroy my copies when he had made use of them. Tim Healy had a large number of copies of these circulars printed and distributed throughout the city. One out-of-work artist or actor named Jack Morrow was found with one of these copies under his pillow and got six months' imprisonment for it. The circulars were subsequently withdrawn from all the Police Headquarters in the country and never acted on. Davy Murnane was the D.I. in Trim at this time and he was very upset at this carry-on by Police Headquarters.

When the Tans came to Ireland we objected to any of them being posted to Trim. Sergeant McElligott objected in writing to the Inspector General of the Police. He stated that these men had customs and diseases which were foreign to us and that he refused to be associated with them. Sir Joseph Byrne, the Inspector General, came to Trim and had an interview with us and heard our objections. He stated that he was not anxious to sub-divide the Tans into small parties and that he wanted to keep them in large groups. If we would give an undertaking to him that we would defend the barracks he would not have any of the Tans posted to Trim. We gave him this undertaking and no Tans came to Trim until after the Barracks was captured by the I.R.A.

I kept Mick Hynes informed of all this and other things that happened. Some time later - quite a good while - Mick Hynes came to my house. I was then married and living out of the Barracks. He told me that he had information that the

Tans were coming to the town and that the barracks would have to be taken before they came. We, the police, had no information about the Tans coming. I accepted Hynes's statement and he and I there and then entered into a discussion on plans for capturing the barracks. I told him the best time for the attempt would be on a Sunday morning during first Mass in the local Chapel. Half of the garrison would be at this Mass while most of the remainder would be still in bed. Things were always slack in the barracks on a Sunday morning. I drew a plan of the barracks for Hynes, making out all the rooms including the Ammunition Store. I also gave him an impression of the keys of the front and back doors which I took in soap at a later date. The strength of the police force in the barracks at the time was a District Inspector, a Head-Constable, three Sergeants and fifteen policemen.

About a week later Hynes told me that the Barracks was to be taken on the following Sunday morning. Although the I.R.A. had made keys to fit the locks I told Hynes that they would be of no use to them as the real keys would be in the locks in the inside and that they would have to wait until some one came out of the back door and to pounce on him. That was what actually happened. A policeman opened the backdoor to fetch water and was immediately seized by the party of I.R.A. who were awaiting alongside who then entered the barracks. It was always necessary to come through the backdoor to get water supplies.

On the previous Wednesday I resigned from the R.I.C. and I was paid off by wire on the following day, so I was a civilian when the barracks was taken. I actually left Trim with my wife on the Sunday morning and travelled to Kildare, moving out of Trim by the only road which the I.R.A. had left open for their own get-away. I came back

to Trim that night and saw the smouldering ruins where the barracks had been. I was there when the Tans from Gormanstown Camp came in and burned the town, but I escaped them. The Tans were in an enraged state that night. I could not say if they were drunk but they were certainly in a mad state. A day or so later I went up to the ruins of the barracks. There was a number of R.I.C. searching the debris. I was ordered out of the place by them.

I now returned to my native place in the County Clare. I was probably a suspect there also as the I.R.A. there were not aware of my activities. I was practically "on the run" all the time avoiding the Tans. About three weeks after the capture of the barracks I returned to Trim. I was staying in my own house. A party of Tans and R.I.C. under the County Inspector Egan arrived one night and took me out. They brought me for about a mile along the Navan road. When coming through the town we met a patrol of R.I.C. This patrol recognised me, as they were all regular R.I.C. men with whom I had served. Sergeant O'Brien, who was in charge of the patrol, spoke to some members of Egan's party and afterwards he informed me that it was he who saved my life as he had told them that if they molested me he would make the whole affair public. I was taken into a field about a mile from the town. Some revolver shots were fired over my head and I was questioned about my part in the capture of the barracks. They said that they knew I had given it away and that they knew all about me. I denied everything vigorously. This took place on the night of 'Bloody Sunday', so you can realise they were in a nice mood. They gave me twelve hours to get out of the country. They now left, leaving me in the field. I made my way back towards Trim. On my back I met my wife and the two curates with lighted candles coming to look for me - and expecting to find my dead body.

I left Trim the next morning and cycled to my wife's place at Ballymore-Eustace, County Kildare, and after about a fortnight there I went to London where I stayed until after the Truce. I came back to Ireland in December 1921 and I joined the Garda on the 1st April 1922, and was given the rank of Inspector to start off with.

Signed: *Pádraig MacDonn*

Date: *21. 2. 1951*

Witness: *Michael B. O'Connell*

