

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURD STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 570

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 570.....

Witness

Patrick Kiernan,
Monaduff,
Drumlish,
Co. Longford.

Identity.

Member of Irish Volunteers,
Ballinamuck, Co. Longford,
1917 - .

Subject.

- (a) National activities, Co. Longford, 1917-1921.
- (b) Military engagements, " 1920.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

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Statement by Patrick Kiernan

Monaduff, Drumlish, County Longford.

I joined the Irish Volunteers in June 1917 at Ballinamuck, County Longford. Michael Collins took me into the Volunteers. He was in the area organising at this time. This was the start of the Volunteers in Ballinamuck and a Company was started there then. As far as I can remember I did not then take an oath but made a declaration of loyalty, the form of which I have forgotten. James J. Brady of Gaigue was appointed Company Commander, Francis Reilly, 1st Lieutenant, and, as far as I can remember, Michael McNerney of Gaigue was the 2nd Lieutenant. John Joe O'Neill was the Company Adjutant. I cannot remember now who was the Company Quartermaster.

Some time after I joined we had a parade of the Company, and I would say that there were about sixty to seventy strong on parade. John Joe O'Neill acted at least for a time as Instructor. He had had some experience in the old National Volunteers, in fact, quite a number of us had. On joining we were issued with membership cards and paid a small subscription weekly. We paraded for instruction a couple of evenings per week, and sometimes on Sundays as well. Usually we did a short route march on that day. The R.I.C. were still in Ballinamuck at this time and they usually were present at our parades, but they did not interfere with us.

About September of that year Harry Boland came down from Dublin and organised a Company of Volunteers in

Drumlish. I then transferred to this Drumlish Company. The Company Commander here was Francis Whitney of Drumlish. I was appointed 1st Lieutenant and the 2nd Lieutenant was E. Keogh of Cartroon, Drumlish. The strength of the Drumlish Company at the end of 1917 and the beginning of 1918 was over one hundred. We had a parade and march to Rooskey and there were 104 on parade that day. The remainder had hurleys or wooden guns which were made locally. There was no small arms or .22 rifles that I knew of.

During the South Longford election a lot of our time was taken up in canvassing for votes and getting people out to vote. The next big thing of note that occurred was the conscription crisis. Our strength now increased, but not so much, as we did not take anyone into our ranks unless we considered them genuine. Our strength went up to about 150 or so. When the crisis was over we retained our strength and even improved on it later on when things got dangerous.

During the General Election in November 1918 we had a very busy time. I was appointed sub-director for an area of North Longford. This entailed an enormous amount of work, and it meant that I was away from home most of the time. There were no incidents whatsoever with the authorities during the election and all went off quietly. The only hostility we met with was from our own people, and this was not very much either. On polling day we escorted the ballot boxes into Longford and kept a guard on the boxes that night in the Court house. The R.I.C. also had a guard on the boxes, but neither party were actually allowed into the room where the boxes were stored.

By this time we had collected any arms that were in the area. This was actually done during the Conscription crisis. We allowed some of the people to retain their arms, on the understanding of course, that they would be available to us when we required them. The arms collected were mostly shot guns and some revolvers. We had very little to do when the general raid for arms was carried out by the Volunteers later.

In 1918, and on into 1919, Whitney and I attended an officer's course which was held at Longford. This entailed travelling to Longford on two evenings each week. The instructor on this course was Peter Harvey. He had had experience in the British Army. What we picked up at this course we imparted to the men of our Company in turn. We often took our men on route marches with Whitney in charge. The R.I.C. always followed us on those occasions. Whitney was arrested and tried as a result of this, and was sentenced to six months imprisonment in Belfast Jail where he did a Hunger-strike. During his absence I took charge of the Company. I was still in charge of the Company during the South Armagh election, although Whitney had been released. He had not yet fully recovered from his period in Jail and from his hunger-strike. During that time I was ordered to take a party of men into Longford to protect McGuinness's house and shop which a mob, composed of followers of the Redmond Party and 'hangers on' and separation allowance women of the British Army, had threatened to destroy. They did actually assemble, but we succeeded in beating them out of the Main Street and dispersing them. Quite a lot of missiles, such as bottles and such, were thrown at us during this melee.

By now a Battalion organisation existed in the area. This comprised the whole north county. The South County

was organised into another Battalion and Sean Connolly was Adjutant. During the general raid for arms by the Volunteers we had very little raiding to do as we had collected nearly all arms in the area during the anti-conscription period, and quite a lot of people handed in what arms they had to us voluntarily. The Police raided my house about this period. I had two shot guns in the house. I was working in the bog and I saw the police coming to the house. I ran to get there before them and hid the guns. They opened fire on me, and fired about twenty to thirty shots, but I got to the house first and hid the guns under an old coat at the top of the stairs along the skirting board. They did not discover them there. They found some Sinn Féin literature and a note ordering me to attend a Volunteer meeting. They took these papers away with them. They did not arrest me then, however. In the meantime Whitney had been arrested again, and did another period, which again included a hunger-strike in Mountjoy Prison. In August of that year I was arrested in Drumlish by the R.I.C. and brought to the barracks there. I was tried in Ship Street Barracks, Dublin. I cannot now remember in detail what the charges preferred against me were, but one was for being a member of an illegal organisation. I was sentenced to six months imprisonment, which was reduced to two, and which I spent in Mountjoy Prison. I was released before Whitney, and just the day before the Hunger-strike began. We were given more or less political treatment in Mountjoy and allowed free association at tea-time. We were allowed to smoke and receive parcels etc.

During the absence of Whitney and myself in jail the Company got disorganised. Some of the men had joined other units. We had to start and reorganise it again. It was late in October when I was released from

Mountjoy, and on returning I found I had been appointed Quartermaster of the North Longford Battalion. On reorganising the local Company Seamus Casserly was appointed Company Captain, James Courtney 1st Lieutenant, and another Jas. Courtney (Black) as 2nd Lieutenant.

At this time a Brigade staff existed in the county. Tom Reddington was the Brigade O/C. Mick Heslin, I think, was the Brigade Adjutant, and Ned Cooney was the Brigade Quartermaster. By this time the Irish Volunteers had become the I.R.A. when the Dáil had assembled and taken over responsibility for them as the Army of the Republic. Each member was now required to take an oath to the Republic. A few of our men declined to do this and faded out then. From now on we devoted a lot of our time planning to capture some R.I.C. barracks. We collected some gelignite - I don't know the source - and started to make bombs. These bombs were rough affairs, made from cart wheel boxes which were filled with gelignite. Caps for the ends of the boxes were made by Seán MacEoin in his forge at Ballinalee.

It was now decided to attack and capture the R.I.C. barracks at Drumlish. The strength of the Garrison at that post was about 18 R.I.C., who were augmented by about 10 soldiers a few days before the attack was made on it. The attack actually took place on the night of the 5th January, 1920, and was carried out by units from the 1st Battalion area. The attack was a failure as the fuzes in the bombs failed to act. One of the large bombs was dug in under the foundation at the gable end of the buildings, with the object of blowing down the gable wall. This failed to explode. Another one was thrown through the fanlight over the door, and also failed to explode. I believe myself that what happened in this case was that the fuze got cut by the bomb casing when it fell on the

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hard concrete or flag floor inside. We had a good few rifles and plenty of shot guns for this attack. I received a slight accidental wound. One of our men having fired from a shot gun could not extract the spent cartridge. He closed the gun, and in doing so, the gun, which was a double barrelled one, fired the cartridge in the other chamber. This discharge burst the boot on my right foot and scorched my big toe. I was not injured otherwise, and after cutting away the boot with a pocket knife I was able to carry on. I believe also that there was another of our men also wounded, but I do not know the details. I do not know if the garrison suffered any casualties. The police continued to occupy the place for some months after this and then evacuated it.

Organising and training went on ahead after this incident and as time went on became more intense.

On the 9th June Ballinamuck R.I.C. barracks was attacked. In this case also we failed to capture the barracks but succeeded in burning it and rendering it uninhabitable. On that night I was detailed to take a party of about four men to Drumlish and cover off the R.I.C. Barracks there and prevent the garrison from going to the assistance of their pals in Ballinamuck. For this purpose I had only a few Mills hand grenades. We had no rifles. I had a revolver and some ammunition. I had also to look after the barricading of the roads leading from Longford to Ballinamuck. The police in Drumlish made no effort to leave their barracks, although we were able to see the 'Verrey' lights which the Ballinamuck garrison were sending up for assistance very vividly. We had no engagement with the police that night and we withdrew about 2 or 2.30 in the morning.

After this the local barracks at Drumlish was evacuated by the police, and it was burned by us as soon

as they left it. We also burned the school which was on the opposite side of the road as we were afraid they might return and occupy this as a barracks. From its position it would have been pretty well impregnable.

Some time around this period the county was organised into Battalions, and the local area became the 5th battalion. I was appointed O/C of the Battalion, John Joe O'Neill was Vice O/C, James Mulligan (Annif) Adjutant, and Francis Whitney of Drumlish Quartermaster. The Companies forming the Battalion were "A" Killoe area, - Company Capt. M.F. Reynolds, "B" Drumlish area - Capt. James Casserly, "C" Ballinamuck area - Capt. Seán Sullivan, "D" Dromard or Leggan - Capt. Charles Reynolds and "E" Moyne area - Matt. Grey Company Capt. There was no rifles of a service nature in the battalion when I took charge. We had a big number of shot guns and some small arms of various types. One of the revolvers was a .45 service type. We had some ammunition also of various types for those small arms.

After the attack on Ballinamuck, and about August 1920, a patrol of about five R.I.C. men used to escort the horse-drawn mail-car from Longford to Ballinamuck. It was planned to attack this escort at the townland of Gaigue. Seán Sullivan, who was the Capt. of the local Company, was in charge of the attack. For this affair he had about six men armed with shot guns and with the cartridges filled with buck-shot. The escort turned up to time, and fire was opened on them from behind the road fence. Sullivan had strict orders that he was to call on the police to surrender, and not to fire unless they refused to do so. They refused to surrender, and fire was opened on them. One R.I.C. man was killed and two severely wounded, and a third slightly wounded. The police then surrendered and what armament they had was

captured. They carried a particular type of rifle - a cavalry carbine which took us some time to master before we could use them efficiently. I do not remember if they were armed with revolvers and I do not think they were.

The next incident I was engaged in was the attack and capture of Arva R.I.C. barracks. This took place in September 1920 and was carried out by parties from the 1st and 5th Battns. The 5th Battalion, which was our battalion, was mostly engaged on the blocking of roads and such obstruction and demolition work. Terence McQuaid, Patrick McKenna and I, however, did take part in the actual attack. Captain Mulligan was outside the town of Arva in charge of road blocking operations. This attack was a success and the barracks was captured - the police surrendering with all their arms. I was in charge of a party which was detailed to watch the road leading to Killeshandra, and also to take charge of the surrender. We actually had no firing to do. When the police surrendered we searched them as they came out with their hands up and put them under guard facing the wall. They were then placed in a vacant house near the barracks. Everything was collected out of the barracks and placed in a car and got away as quickly as possible. As far as I can remember, there were eighteen rifles and seventeen revolvers, or vice versa, together with what ammunition and grenades they had been issued with, captured in this attack.

After Arva we collected a lot of funds for the Volunteers for the purpose of purchasing arms and ammunition. We collected this money by running functions in each company area. All the money went to the brigade headquarters. I often handed in amounts up to £40 to the brigade funds at meetings of the brigade. At practically every meeting I attended I was able to hand in some money for the funds.

I was now treasurer of the County Centre of the I.R.B. I had joined the I.R.B. at an early date when it was organised in

this county. I cannot remember the date now. I think it was Sean Connolly who took me into the I.R.B. Sean McKeon was the Head Centre for the county; Sean Connolly was secretary and I was treasurer. We generally met about once every month. I did a lot of travelling throughout the county and swore in a number of men into the organisation. I had authority to do work of this nature. All applications to have new members admitted to the organisation came up before the County Centre meetings for consideration and a decision would be given there. The local Centre would then be notified to have the men ready for swearing in on a certain date and I would travel to that centre and take them in.

How spies and such like were to be dealt with would also be considered at meetings of the County Centre. It was always members of the I.R.B. who were detailed for work of this nature. One man from this area was executed for spying. I believe that this man was not guilty. His courtmartial, of course, was carried out by the I.R.B., the members of which were from other areas. This occurred some short time before the Truce in 1921; otherwise the business of the I.R.B. meetings were purely of a routine nature.

All the arms we had were collected from us by the Brigade H.Q. to arm the active service column, so that we were left with no armament in the battalion except for a few shotguns and a few revolvers which were of very little use to us.

A British soldier called "Geordie" had deserted from the Lancers in the top barracks in Longford and got in touch with the I.R.A. to whom he gave useful information. He later helped to raid the guardroom at the top barracks from which a number of rifles was secured. Subsequently he was given a sum of money equivalent to about £4 for each rifle that was secured. This money was to assist him to get out of the country. He went to Dublin and there he spent the money unwisely, I believe, and

when it was all gone he returned to Longford and was located in the 4th battalion area. This man was a desperately heavy smoker and it was impossible to keep him in cigarettes. Getting desperate, he declared in the hearing of some members of the I.R.A. that he was going to rejoin the Lancers and that he would tell all he knew and who he knew and of course he knew a lot. He was arrested and sent under escort and blindfolded to me to be detained as a spy. I had the blindfold removed and had him detained in a house. There were a couple of other people living in this house at the time.

I was appointed President of the court that tried him on the charges of spying and informing. The trial was a lengthy one lasting nearly all night. "Geordie" made a lengthy statement in which he gave the details of his whole life up to date. I was satisfied that he was not guilty and that he had no intention of rejoining his unit or of informing on us. An execution party was standing by, having been detailed from the 1st Battalion. I had "Geordie" removed to another location in one of my company areas where I knew he would be safe and I submitted a report to the Brigade O/C. The Brigade took a very poor view of my actions and said that I was disobeying all orders.

I held "Geordie" in custody for about three months whilst the matter was being dealt with by G.H.Q. Subsequently I got a dispatch from the Brigade informing me that if I provided "Geordie" with sufficient money he could be allowed to travel back to any part of England to which he wished to go. I had no money to give him. However, I informed "Geordie" to this effect. Actually he cried and said he did not want to go to England by any means. All this time he was with people named Donoghue in D/Company area. I released him from arrest and he continued to live with the Donoghues for some time afterwards and to work for them. I helped him with money as best I could. He subsequently married a girl from that locality. He joined the Regular Army when it was

started. I met him in the army afterwards. He had by now learned what I had done to save his life and he was sure thankful to me. I am still very pleased that I saved his life as I am satisfied that he was absolutely free from any guilt as far as the I.R.A. was concerned. I do not know what eventually became of him.

During 1921 we got a loan of arms and ammunition a few times from the 1st Battalion and the column for the purpose of carrying out ambushes in the battalion area. We never had any luck, however, as the enemy never turned up when we were waiting for them. This was extraordinary, as in some cases the enemy had been doing habitual runs on the routes selected previously. Some of the column also came to 'assist' us in these operations. The arms and ammunition had, of course, to be returned to the column immediately after the operation was over. The running of dispatches was by now a continuous operation.

About a month or so prior to the Truce I was suspended. I was charged with the misappropriation of funds - approx. £400 - and with disobedience. The latter arose out of the "Geordie" case and my failure to attend a Brigade Council meeting. I did not attend the meeting because I was not notified to do so in time. I was able to produce receipts for all the money, so that was that. Actually, this was the money I had handed to the Brigade, as mentioned previously. When the Truce came no further action was taken and, although at the time I was determined that the whole matter would have to be investigated by G.H.Q., I let it drop. Seamus Brady of Gaigue, Ballinamuck, was appointed acting O/C. of the battalion when I was suspended. Actually I never returned to the battalion again. During the time I was suspended and up to the Truce no actions of any nature took place in the battalion area.

The Brigade O/C. - Tom Reddington - and I were on bad terms

from the time of the attack on Drumlish R.I.C. Barracks. The night that the barracks was attacked he came disguised to it. I, who lived quite close to it, had not taken any such precautions. I only recognised Reddington that night by his voice and I had to laugh at him, the way he was made up. This seemed to annoy him and for ever afterwards he had a set on me. At Brigade meetings, when I would put forward a proposition for an ambush in our area, he would veto it in favour of something in the 1st Battalion area, which was Sean McKeon's. This applied to other propositions of mine as well. In this way he was always down on me and we never got on well together.

Signed: Patrick Kiernan

Date: 14 Sep' 1951

Witness: Matthew Darcy Condit

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