

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 691

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

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Witness

Matthew Davis,
Kilteevan,
Co. Roscommon.

Identity.

Quartermaster South Roscommon Brigade,
1917 - .

Subject.

- (a) National activities, South Roscommon,
1916-1921;
- (b) Procurement of arms for Irish Volunteers,
South Roscommon, 1917 - .

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

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STATEMENT BY MATTHEW DAVIS, M. C. C.,

Kilteevan, Co. Roscommon.

My uncle, James Hayden, was a member of the Fenians and had to fly from the country with some others as a result of his activities. Another uncle, Patrick Hayden, tried to follow on in the lines laid down by his brother and was a keen supporter of Parnell. I knew my Uncle Pat well. He was an out and out separatist. The R. I. C. gave him a rough time of it and on several occasions I saw the police prevent him from speaking at meetings. I always felt that it was my duty to vindicate his memory.

1916 Rebellion and Organisation of the Volunteers.

In 1916 I was unattached to any group. I felt that this was the second edition of '98. 1916 was over and there was an outcry to execute the fanatics. I felt that we would have to do something about it and I founded the Irish Volunteers in County Roscommon. I had been in touch with certain individuals in Dublin about this. Jack Brennan, Corrail, Athleague, was theoretically appointed Brigade O/C. by Headquarters of the I. R. B. Henry J. Finlay, Main Street, Roscommon, was appointed Adjutant. I was not then in the organisation. Joe Finlay asked me to attend a meeting of the South Roscommon Brigade which was based on I. R. B. lines. At this meeting I was appointed O/C. of the 3rd Battalion, South Roscommon Brigade. This was in the year 1917 and no such unit then existed. It was then

that I actually became a member. Up to that I was acting unofficially.

When we had the nucleus of an organisation going, another meeting of the Brigade was held and at this meeting I was appointed Quartermaster of the South Roscommon Brigade. Jack Brennan was O/C.; Joe Finlay, Adjutant, and I, Quartermaster. We had no funds and very few men, but plenty of sympathy from the ordinary people. We built up the organisation as best we could, with very little assistance from G.H.Q.

At the early period two Companies of the 3rd Battalion, the Kilgefin Company and the Curraghroe Company, were attached to the Longford Brigade and acted as a bridgehead for the Brigade across the Shannon area around Lanesboro'. When we got organised to some extent we called a general meeting to formulate a scheme for the incorporation of all the Battalions and Companies into one Brigade, or, in other words, to tighten up our organisation. Paddy "Boddens" Doorly of Roscommon Town was appointed Vice Commandant of the 3rd Battalion. When I had been appointed Brigade Quartermaster, Pat Madden, ~~to whom I have referred~~ ^{and} previously, was appointed O/C. of the 3rd Battalion. The Companies comprising the 3rd Battalion then were, Kilgefin, Cloontuskert, Kiltteevan, Kilbride, Athleague and Roscommon.

Frank Simons was Company Adjutant, Kilgefin, and later he was appointed Battalion Adjutant. I remained Quartermaster of the Brigade until the Truce. Brennan, who was the original O/C. of the Brigade and who had been interned in Frongoch, was superseded by Dan O'Rourke who

continued in that appointment until the Truce. This change took place at a Brigade Council meeting which was held in Smith's Hotel in Roscommon. Michael Staines, who was Quartermaster General at the time, represented General Headquarters at this meeting. This meeting was held towards the end of 1918. Brennan was superseded because of the inactivity of the Brigade. I still continued as Brigade Quartermaster of the Brigade under Dan O'Rourke. We had a series of Brigade Adjutants. For reasons of convenience the Adjutant appointed was always from the Castlerea area where the Brigade O/C. lived. Each man who was appointed Brigade Adjutant was shot by the British within a few days of his appointment. Our Brigade Intelligence Officer, Paddy Egan, was afterwards discovered to have been an agent for the British. He slipped out of the country early in 1920. There was quite a number of men shot by the British Forces in the Castlerea area. In fact, every man who was a sound I.R.A. man, was shot through the instigation of this man.

They made several attempts to get Dan O'Rourke but he always succeeded in getting away from them and his house and the school where he taught were being constantly raided for him. The headquarters of the South Roscommon Brigade for two and a half years was at Naughton's house at Ballinagheglis. Brigade Council meetings were held there every fortnight which all the Battalion Commanders attended. This was a very sound place. Ernie O'Malley came down from G.H.Q. as Director of Training. The headquarters, while in Roscommon, was in Kiltewan, and he worked consistently in this house where I am living now.

A Police Raid.

In the end of 1917 there was an R. I. C. Barracks at Beechwood and one day while I was working on my land my sister came to me in a hurry and told me that the house was full of police who were searching it for seditious documents. Sergeant Lambert was in charge of this police party and it also included a Constable O'Rahilly. I told my sister to go back and tell them there were no documents. I also told her where there was a webley revolver and a box of ammunition in the house adding that she was to procure these and throw them out of the window. She did this and I, having followed her to near the house, snapped them up and sped with them through the fields.

The police took a shotgun which was in the kitchen. A week later Sergeant Lambert presented me with a summons for this gun. I was now faced with a problem as to whether I should recognise the Court by attending or not. I did not attend the Court and I was fined thirty-two shillings and sixpence, and the gun confiscated. A week later Sergeant Lambert and Constable O'Rahilly arrived again and informed me that he had come to collect payment of the fine. He said he did not want any trouble and advised me to pay the fine. I called him a "skunk" and charged him with stealing my gun and told him I was giving him six days to return it to me. He returned within six days in force but I was not at home to them. Later I got in touch with him again but this time I had a revolver which I held pointed at his head. Later he came back again in force looking for me but I was not in.

A Brigade Training Camp.

Towards the end of 1919 or 1920, Ernie O'Malley started a Brigade Training Camp for Brigade and Battalion officers on the Ballinagheglish area. For each lecture or instruction given by him he issued us with typed notes or memos. He stayed here on his first visit for eight days and nights and slept at Henry Brennan's of Cloontogher, Kiltreevan. He always, of course, slept during the day and worked at night.

Ernie left us to go to the North Galway Brigade travelling on cycle through Ballymoe. At Ballymoe he was recognised by the R.I.C. who tried to intercept him. Ernie opened fire on them and they fired also, hitting him on the wrist. He escaped by jumping into the river and then made his way back here. Joe Finlay and I arranged to get him across Lough Ree to the Longford side of the Shannon to the Newtown-Cashel area where a car was to meet him to take him to Dublin for treatment. The bridges across the Shannon at Athlone and Lanesboro' could not be used as they were being well watched by the British Forces. He got back to Dublin alright.

Enemy Raids.

We were raided here practically every night and on one occasion three times the one night. The raids took place at 11 p.m., 3 a.m. and 7.30 a.m. We always had scouts out and consequently were never at home when they arrived. It had been customary for men "on the run" to move into an area that had just been raided as it was not likely that the enemy would return for some days at least. They, however, got wise to this and it became their policy to return within a few hours and raid the same houses again.

We, of course, got wise to this too and gave up returning to or sleeping in places that had been recently raided.

Intelligence and Counter-Intelligence Work.

During 1920 and the period prior to the Truce in 1921, I was in touch with certain members of the R. I. C. One was Constable Duffy in Roscommon and the other was Sergeant Galligan of Kiltoom. Galligan is now a Superintendent in the Garda. Sergeant Galligan had made arrangements to hand over the Police Barracks in Kiltoom but the local I. R. A. mishandled the job somehow, and did not turn up as arranged. Before anything further could be done about it the Barracks was closed down and the garrison transferred to other centres. Sergeant Galligan was transferred to Boyle. He had eventually to escape out of the Barracks in Boyle and go "on the run" for his part in the Kiltoom affair. He was in touch with Mick Collins in Dublin. Duffy remained in Roscommon and stuck it out to the last. This man was very useful to us as he was able to give us warning beforehand of when raids and round-ups were going to take place and other useful information.

We knew at this time that we were being informed on. Duffy gave us the low-down on two of the criminals. These men were executed by us that night. One was an ex-R. I. C. man and the other was a Postmaster. Two men who were well placed to be dangerous. Duffy was in touch with me and dealt directly with me. He always met me at the rear of John Brennan's shop in Roscommon. Duffy also gave us some ammunition and hand-grenades and revolver and shotgun ammunition which he took out of Barracks.

In the Knockcroghery area, which was the 4th Battalion, we could not get to know who was giving the information to the British about the area. The Black & Tans got hold of an ex-British Army man and blackened his face and took him around in the lorries with them. Actually he was not the guilty man at all. They did this to focus our suspicion on him. When they had done sufficient of this they threw him off the lorry and we shot him leaving the real culprit who was unknown to us still at large.

Shooting of two R.I.C. Men.

While Sergeant Galligan was still in Kiltoomo he sent two Constables on duty to Roscommon. At the level-crossing over the railway two I.R.A. men attacked them, shooting one man, Constable Potter, dead, and took their two rifles. This was an unofficial act on the part of the I.R.A. and was disastrous as Constable Potter was in touch with Mick Collins and supplying information to him.

The Procurement of Arms.

As Quartermaster of the Brigade it was my job to procure arms for the Brigade. We levied a rate per pound on the valuation of all lands and properties as is done in the ordinary poor rate collected by the County Council. I think the rate struck was a shilling or one and sixpence in the pound. Everyone paid up this levy willingly and it amounted to a good sum. I travelled to Dublin nearly weekly trying to purchase arms which we were willing to pay for, but I succeeded in getting very little. All told, we got nine rifles

and a good few revolvers. I always dealt with Michael Staines who was Quartermaster General. Interviews with Staines always took place at Cullenswood House or Saint Enda's and a point would be given for me to collect any stuff that I succeeded in getting. I always took the arms to Roscommon by train. A checker on the railway named Paddy Daly, used to take charge of the bags or cases containing the stuff. Daly would throw off the stuff at the level-crossing at Corry near Knockcroghery. There would always be a few fellows waiting there to pick it up. I would, of course, have to travel on to the station at Knockcroghery before I could alight.

When the Brigade started first we had not a rifle in the whole Brigade area. There were a good number of shotguns available but the ammunition for such guns was usually damp and dangerous. We got a good few rifles at the ambush at Scramogue and also a hotchkiss machine-gun and a nice amount of .303 ammunition. There was quite a quantity of small arms throughout the Brigade but it was very hard to get ammunition for them as a lot of them were small bore weapons and not of much use.

We made gun-powder of a kind. This was very dirty and smoky, but very powerful. We made buckshot which was loaded into the shotgun cartridges. The supply of percussion caps caused us great worry. We did succeed in getting a small supply of these from fog signals which belonged to the railway. We got detonators and took the mercury out of them and fitted caps into them. We removed the mercury with a steel awl which I afterwards learned was contrary to the right way to do it and should have caused an explosion. A wooden tool should have been used.

This operation of making the stuff was done in the 3rd Battalion area in Cloonmine, Ballymurray. We were

able to get some gelignite and detonators from the railway quarries at Lecarrow. Eventually, however, the British Authorities controlled this supply to the railway so much so that nothing further could be got from that source. Various attempts were made to manufacture cheddar or war flour, another type of high explosive, but this was not successful. However, prior to the Truce we got supplies of this explosive, but we knew nothing about using them and no use was made of them. We had plenty of men who had a good working knowledge of detonators and gelignite.

Enemy Lay a Trap Mine.

The Cloontuskert Company were ordered to keep the Longford-Lanesboro'-Roscommon road cut and denied to enemy traffic at all times. This Company cut a trench across the road at Beechwood. This was a straight through trench. The Auxies collected the local residents and made them fill it in and then went back afterwards and set a trap mine in it. This was a hand-grenade with the pin withdrawn and a flat stone placed on top to keep the lever in position. When the stone was removed it would allow the lever to fly up and the striker to fire the cap and explode the grenade. A local man, an ex-British Army man, spotted that the Auxies were up to something and came and warned me about it. We warned the Cloontuskert Company not to re-open this trench. There were only about four men available in the Company at this time due to arrests and internments and so forth and some local dissention. Despite the warnings and I suppose from lack of help they decided to re-open the old trench with the result that the grenade exploded wounding all four men seriously. One man, John Scally, died from his wounds about twelve days afterwards. The others survived. We had to remove them to an island in Lough Ree

as being the only safe place. We got in touch with Dr. Halloran in Lanesboro' and he promised to come out and attend to them, but he never turned up.

The men waited for about six days without medical attention and eventually we succeeded in getting Dr. Charles Kelly from Roscommon to attend to them. He was too late to do anything to save Scally's life. We got a coffin and had Scally's remains conveyed across country and buried in Kiltreevan graveyard at night. After the Truce the remains were transferred to Cloontuskert and he was given a wonderful public funeral. A monument to his memory is now erected at the spot on the roadside at Beechwood.

SIGNED

Matthew Davis
MATTHEW DAVIS.

DATE

18th June 1952
18th June 1952

WITNESS

Matthew Barry
(Matthew Barry) Comd't

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