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COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 737.....

Witness

Sean Meade,  
Fanningstown,  
Patrickswell,  
Co. Limerick.

Identity.

Section Leader, Ballylanders Company  
Irish Volunteers, 1913 - ;

Captain same Company 1918 - ;  
Brigade I.O., 1921.

Subject.

- (a) National activities, Co. Limerick,  
1913-1921;
- (b) Attack on Ballylanders Barracks 27/4/1920;
- (c) Dromkeen Ambush, February 1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S.2050.....

Form B.S.M. 2

# ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 737

Statement by Sean Meade,

Fanningstown, Patrickswell,

Co. Limerick.

I was born in 1896 and came of farming stock. I joined the Volunteers at their inception in 1913 when Eoin MacNeill, Tom Kettle and a third man whose name I cannot remember, came to Ballylanders, Co. Limerick in that year and organised the Ballylanders Company. Tadg Crowley was appointed Company Captain. I was selected a Section Commander as was also Jack Crowley and Tom Murphy, both now deceased. The appointment then known as "Section Commander" probably corresponded to what later came to be titled "Lieutenant". I was at the same time appointed to act as Company Adjutant. Ned Tobin was appointed Company Quartermaster. I retained my appointment as Adjutant until elected Captain after some arrests to which I shall refer in due course. Tom Murphy was killed by Crown Forces on New Year's day, 1921, during a raid on Mrs. Tobin's of Glenbrohane, Knocklong. Our Company took up the business of training with much enthusiasm and utilised every means at our disposal towards perfecting ourselves in the arts of war by availing of the services of veteran ex-British soldiers and shortly after the first World War commenced in 1914, by British soldiers home on leave from the front. They gave us quite a useful training by arranging sham battles and skirmishes with neighbouring companies such as Galbally, etc. We were then the National Volunteers under John Redmond but our members gradually dwindled from over 100 strong to 27, mostly political supporters of the Irish Parliamentary Party.

When the Volunteer Split came we went over to

Pearse without hesitation, except a few who remained loyal to the Irish Parliamentary Party throughout. The Company was again reorganised and brought up to its former strength of about 100. Tom Murphy was appointed Captain and I was reappointed Adjutant and 1st Lieutenant. Ned Tobin again was appointed Quartermaster. At that time the local Post Office was in Crowley's premises, one of the family being sub-Postmaster. A Post Office Inspector informed the family that they could not retain the office if they were hostile to the Government. He gave them the alternative of resigning from the Volunteers or of giving up the Post Office. Acting on the advice of Commander M. Colivet, Limerick City Volunteer Commander, they outwardly took a less active part in the Volunteers but in reality were very active.

We continued training and gradually realised something very serious was about to happen.

During Easter Week 1916 we were mobilised on Easter Sunday and instructed to hold ourselves in readiness for a long route march which we understood was to Limerick for rifles. As nothing transpired we assembled on the following Wednesday morning at W. Manahan's house to attack Ballylanders R.I.C. Barracks. During the night we got confession and communion and were moving into position about 4 a.m. to commence the attack when the countermanding order came that everything was off. It was Mrs. Jim Hannigan (sister-in-law of Donncadha O'Hannigan) who brought the message. It was I who held her up just outside the village as I had no idea of who she was or her business travelling in a pony and trap so early in the morning. We always had a good laugh over the episode whenever we met in subsequent years.

It is hardly necessary to say how we felt when we had to disperse to our homes and later hand in our arms to the local R.I.C. The order to hand up the arms came from Commandant Colivet, Limerick. We broke the shot guns but held on to the few rifles (we only had two) and all ammunition and some of the shotguns.

During the stalemate that followed and the apparent break up and helplessness of our cause when any further efforts seemed futile I went for a number of terms to the Agricultural Schools at Mount Bellew, Galway, and Ballyhaise, Cavan, to receive training in farming having the ultimate intention of taking up farming in Canada. Meanwhile I had an arrangement with Tom Murphy to write to me if anything worthwhile was likely to happen. I returned home towards the end of 1917 and took up the threads as things were beginning to look bright again.

I was selected with Jack Crowley and Christopher Upton to represent the Company at Thomas Ashe's funeral in 1918. After the funeral we met Mick Collins and Diarmuid O'Hegarty at Hughes Hotel, Lower Gardiners Street. They gave us two rifles. Both Collins and O'Hegarty were on the run at the time.

From then on we adopted harrassing tactics towards the police. There was a baton charge at Galbally during the trial of T. Crowley, J.J. Crawford and Tom Murphy, who had been arrested previously for a breach of the peace at Thurles during a football match. There were a few more of us in the row, but we kept out of Ballylanders village while the detective was there from Thurles and so escaped detection.

About that time I was appointed Company Captain and some time after a very ugly split occurred in the

Company which ultimately involved almost the entire Brigade. As a result of the split, I resigned my commission and reverted to the ranks. This was the dispute known as "the Manahan-O'Hannigan dispute", of which I must leave others to testify in detail.

Arising out of an Enquiry held at Maloney's, Knocklong, in May, 1918, into the dispute, new elections were ordered to be held on the units. As regards our Company, we, the existing officers, took no part in the election except that I announced to the Company that I was not going forward for election. We were members of the I.R.B. of long standing and, so far as I can remember, it was a case of the I.R.B. versus everybody else, especially as regards our Company.

At this election, William Sampson, Spittle, was elected Captain and Pat Maguire, Ballylanders, 1st Lieutenant.

We now prepared hard for an attack on Ballylanders Barracks. I was present at most of the meetings at Ned Tobin's, Glenbrohane, where preparations were being made. Those meetings were also attended by Ned and John J. O'Brien and Jim Scanlan, all of Galbally, and Commandant J. McCarthy, Kilfinane; also T. Malone, then organising the National Loan in the district, and now teaching in Nenagh.

We mobilised at Ballylanders Bridge and there got our instructions. My job was, first, to get the unit which was to occupy O'Grady's house in front of the Barracks to their positions as they were all new to the district, and to get away the O'Grady family to safety. Also to get away Mrs. O'Hare (sister of Christopher Upton) who gave birth to a baby a few hours previously.

She got very frightened and hysterical when we took over the house but eventually, after much persuasion, we got her to come on the stretcher to relatives at the upper end of the village. At the back of her house (next to O'Grady's) we had to lift her over a seven-foot high barbed wire fence. Ultimately we got her to safety without injury.

I had only twenty minutes to effect clearance of both houses and be back again in position at O'Grady's.

We were almost immediately in action, Commandant McCarthy, Kilfinane, in charge, and after about twenty-five minutes fighting I received a bullet through the right lung, which gave me the coup de grace and almost complete black out for many months. It ended for ever my ambitions as a budding Napoleon. I distinctly remember telling Donncadh O'Hannigan, who was at the window beside me, to watch out as I could hear the bullets crashing into the timber partitions at our back and into the ticks of feathers we used as barricades. We were aware that one of the policemen in the barrack, a Protestant, named Stafford, was a dead shot, as he gave us a few examples of his skill by shooting jackdaws off the telegraph wires with a rifle in front of the barrack some weeks previous to the attack. He may have "got" me as most of the time the surrounding countryside was lit up as bright as day by Verey lights, and I had trouble with the rifle becoming jammed during bouts of rapid fire, and I must admit I knew little about how to manage it. During the excitement I must have exposed myself unknowingly. Otherwise, I cannot account for the calamity.

When the attack ended, I was taken to Con Ryan's

near Kilmallock and shortly afterwards to Mrs. Bourke's, Laurencetown, Kilfinane, where Dr. Fitzgerald, Ardpatrick, gave me first relief from intense pain. After about a week at Mrs. Bourke's I was taken to the County Infirmary in a Red Cross ambulance by Dr. Fitzgerald and Nurse O'Sullivan. The Red Cross ambulance came from the old Workhouse, Kilmallock. Miss O'Sullivan was a nurse there. She had a sister who was a Red Cross nurse with the British in France and who was home at the time, and had her uniform. This sister of Nurse O'Sullivan was brought by Ned Tobin and others to nurse me whilst at Mrs. Bourke's. I understand she is now Matron of a Children's Nursing Home in Dublin. The Misses O'Sullivan were natives of the Limerick Junction locality.

The reason I had to remain so long in the Infirmary was that a portion of the shirt I was wearing when wounded got into the lung with the bullet. The doctors did not know what was wrong until the portion of shirt began to come away, thread by thread, when inflammation set up in the lung. My right shoulder was also fractured by the same bullet which took a downward course after striking the shoulder and passing through the upper portion of the lung which is collapsed. During my period in hospital I developed septic pneumonia.

They had no X-rays in Limerick in those far-off days.

I am sure my Creator only knows how I pulled through.

The attack on the Barracks took place on 27th April, 1920, at 10.35 p.m.

After nearly five months in hospital I was

offered a position of steward on the agricultural students' farm at Mount Melleray. It was Dr. Larry Hayes, Ballylanders, who made the offer on behalf of Mount Melleray, but Brigade Commandant S. Wall may have had something to do with it, as I remember he mentioned about that time that they had made arrangements that I take up a job at Lord Dunraven's, Adare, Co. Limerick.

Seán Wall, Nicholas O'Dwyer and others called often to my ward in the hospital, but I was too critically ill to know anything of what was on.

I regained strength very rapidly at Mount Melleray, chiefly through the kindness of a nun who was in charge of the maids in the College laundry and who put everything in the line of food and comforts at my disposal. Her name may be Casey, from the Kilmallock district. One of the priests, a brother of J.T. Nolan, former T.D., of Foynes, was guest master in the monastery. I do not think that the monks knew my real identity. At any rate, they never referred to anything concerning it.

After spending some months at Melleray, I left, due principally to a very unpleasant and unexpected incident which occurred as follows: I was after returning from a fair at Dungarvan and was having a cup of tea at Walsh's Hotel, Cappoquin. Two men, whom I heard afterwards were from Kilmacthomas, came into the hotel and had tea also. When they were finished, they moved towards the door and promptly shot a policeman who lived across the street and who was speaking to his wife on the footpath at the time. They ran to their car which was parked further up the street and I ran after them, but they drove away.

The approximate date of this shooting was the



autumn of 1920. I do not remember the name of the policeman; he was killed. The fact of my being there was purely a coincidence, or matter of ill-luck, so to speak. Had I known the men's intentions, I would have beaten a hasty exit from the hotel to Melleray, circumstanced as I was then.

I made my way across the moors to Melleray in a state of panic and utter exhaustion and told one of the priests of the incident. He made light of it and said nothing could happen when I had nothing to do with the shooting.

Two lorries of military made a thorough search of the monastery next day, but I stayed out in the woods. I was informed by one of the professors that rumour was rife in the town that I could tell a lot about the shooting and he advised me to leave at once. The professor in question was a layman, a Mr. Wylie of Waterford, Professor of English, and, I was informed, a close friend of the Redmond family. There was a number of lay professors, a few of whom stayed in hotels in Cappoquin. I was very friendly with all of them, as we shared the same sitting and dining rooms.

I was very unhappy and uneasy for fear of getting my benefactors under the notice of the Tans. I was there under the name of John Ryan. I insisted on my resignation being accepted and came home, and a week later joined the Column of East Limerick Brigade, which was then billeted at Tully, Glenroe, Co. Limerick.

The story is soon told. Apart from taking part in the bloody encounter with the Tans at Dromkeen in February, 1921, my work with the Column consisted mostly

of harassing tactics against the enemy and doing Brigade Intelligence duties.

With regard to Dromkeen ambush, I was located with Dan Allis, Jim Greene, David Guerin, all of East Limerick, and two Mid-Limerick men whose names I don't remember, but whose worth I shall never forget. The four first mentioned were armed with rifles, the two Mid-Limerick men with a shotgun and a grenade. Their instructions were to fire on the driver and drop the grenade into the lorry. This they did without a hitch. All the Tans were killed by the grenade, except one who got a broken arm and threw himself out of and under the lorry. He made a fight there for four or five minutes before he was eventually killed. The lorry struck the wall right in front of our unit.

We had opened fire on the second lorry before the first reached the barricade round the bend at the bottom of the village. They put on great speed and struck the barricade with a terrific impact. District Inspector Sanson, who was in civilian clothes, was thrown from the lorry and over the wall. He buried himself in a heap of horse manure, heaped in the field. In the excitement he was not noticed and so escaped.

Also, two other Tans were thrown out of the lorry on to the road and were knocked unconscious. They recovered consciousness just as we were lined up ready to march away. They were tried by drumhead courtmartial and summarily executed.

When all was over, the site of the ambush presented a very gruesome spectacle.

Apart from the foregoing grim description, the

episode had its humorous side as well. Long before the lorries were signalled, we were holding up everybody going into and leaving the village, and interning them in Hussey de Burgh's house near the scene of the ambush. We held up one old woman who had a bag of flour in a donkey and car coming from the village. After first telling us what she thought of us, she agreed to leave the car when we assured her that we were taking it and the ass and bag of flour to safety. When we left her at the door, she was still protesting and bewailing the probable loss of her property, whilst all the others were praying as hard as they knew how.

I can quite visualise how the poor woman felt when she was at liberty to salvage what was left of her car and bag of flour.

When reinforcements of the Tans arrived from Pallas Barracks, they burned eleven houses in the district.

Commandants Hannigan, McCarthy, Hayes and Allis were in charge of the ambush party.

I was appointed Brigade I.O. in the beginning of 1921. The work in connection with this department consisted of collection of information of enemy movements, their associates and friends and keeping under observation those likely to assist the enemy by giving information of movements of the Flying Column.

I got in touch with a Tan in Bruff through Jim Connors (local I.O.). We got some useful information from the Tan and also purchased some small arms from him. All our efforts to obtain a Lewis gun through him failed, though I was authorised by Commandant Hayes to offer him £50 for one. He was too frightened of the

consequences of being found out to avail of the offer. I never came in actual contact with him. We offered to take him on in the Column if he secured the Lewis gun.

We also got some photographs of much interest from him. One was of Seán Wall which was taken immediately after his execution at Annacarty by the Tans.

SIGNED:

Sean Meade

(Sean Meade)

DATE:

16-10-52

16/10/52.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S.

WITNESS:

J. MacCarthy Lt. Col.

J.M. MacCarthy, Lt. Col.

Appendix "A"  
(See Investigating Hammington  
Officers' Comments) 9-10-52

I certify this letter to be as addressed  
to, and received by me Winnamaithe Lt. Col.  
(J. M. MAC CARTHY)

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY-1913-21  
BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21  
No. W.S.

Dear Jack

you will surely say I am going to  
inundate you with correspondence but I am sure when  
you are condensing the statement you will water it down  
to proper dimensions and remove all redundancy and  
affectation. Apart from getting badly wounded I  
claim to have played but a minor part in the movement.  
I trust you will not get the impression that I am  
trying to blow my own trumpet unduly.

I am anxious to say a little more about  
Dromkeen and another matter

(1) In order to be accurate it could hardly be called  
a village containing as far as I can remember  
only one public house.

I wish to add that a considerable number took  
part in the ambush. I now remember the house on  
the opposite side of the road to where we were, was  
also occupied and the lorry of tons with which we were  
concerned was subjected to a withering fire from there.  
While it lasted the cross fire was highly dangerous  
and a sheer waste of valuable ammunition worth its

its weight in gold at the time. All the tans were  
dead in a matter of a few minutes.

With regard to the two Mid Limerick men,  
Dick O'Connell could probably tell you something about  
them as he brought them on to us shortly before  
the Limericks were signalled.

(2) With regard to the first part of my statement  
I also wish to add that as a child I received  
the earliest part of my political education through  
listening to the terrible stories of an old man a  
next door neighbour and a very small farmer at that  
time who used to visit my father's house almost every  
night. He told tales of the Famine days and of  
Ejections and Landlordism generally all of which he  
seemed to have lived through and which made a  
profound impression on me. He ended up a very  
extensive farmer but none of his family took much  
interest in the movement. He was much an older man  
than my father but a fine type and remained a  
strong supporter of the Irish Party throughout.

I am very pleased you are on the job and  
if I think of any more that may be of interest I will  
write

Yours

D. Meade.

Ref. S/2650.

APPENDIX "A".

(see Investigating Officer's comments).

I certify this letter to be as addressed to, and received by me.

*Certified True Copy  
J. M. MacCarthy Lt Col*

*J. M. MacCarthy*  
Lt.-Col.  
(J. M. MacCarthy).

FANNINGSTOWN.

9 - 10 - '52.

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Yours

(signed) S. MEADE.

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