

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 811

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 811

Witness

James Halpin,
Shannongrove,
Pallaskenry,
Co. Limerick.

Identity.

O/C. Pallaskenry Company (Co. Limerick)
Irish Volunteers, 1913 - ;

O/C. 4th (Rathkeale) Battalion,
West-Limerick Brigade.

Subject.

Activities of Irish Volunteers,
Pallaskenry, Co. Limerick,
1913-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

N11

File No. S. 2085

Form B.S.M. 2

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STATEMENT

BY

JAMES HALPIN,SHANNON GROVE, PALLASKENRY, CO. LIMERICK.O.C. 4TH (RATHKEALE) BATTALION,WEST LIMERICK BRIGADE.

I am 62 years of age now and when, before the Volunteers were started, if there was any organisation of a national character in Pallaskenry I joined it. I was in the local branch of the Gaelic League and I was in the hurling team too.

When the Volunteers started in November, 1913, I helped at the beginning to organise the Pallaskenry Company, which nearly every man, old and young, joined. I was drilling the Company after a while and was made Captain, and the strength was over 40. We had no arms, of course, except timber guns, but from drilling and marching we got discipline

At the time of the Howth gun-running a number more joined the Company. After that came the Split when John Redmond was trying to get complete control of the Volunteers. Our Company held firm, however, and we carried the usual training of that time on into 1915. There were still no arms but some items of equipment. A few men had revolvers, though they were not much good.

When I heard of the fighting in Dublin, myself and a few others made our way to Limerick on bicycles, 12 miles away, to try if we could connect up with the Volunteers if there was anything to be done. Actually, we knew no one there and had to return. It was a bit of a mystery to us

what was really going on, so we just had to wait for future events. We were not connected with any other Volunteers in the County and had to depend on ourselves. After Easter Week there were no arrests by the Pallaskenry R.I.C. We stayed quiet during that year. After 1916 when the prisoners had been released we resumed drilling and so forth. Our Company strength was about 40 still, if not more. I was Captain, Jim Nash was one of the Lieutenants. We were not interfered with by the police during this year, though we were watched. Still the Company had no arms.

The same as everywhere else, a big number had joined the Company when the threat of Conscription came early in 1918. Most of these fell away again when the Conscription scare, as it was to them, had faded out.

Then came the German Plot.

I had been at a meeting of Officers of the 4th Battalion in Rathkeale one Monday night and cycled home. I was living in the same house as I am now, and in the middle of the night - about 12 o'clock - when I was in bed, the house was surrounded by British military, with R.I.C. to guide them. I was taken away handcuffed and put in a lorry which was waiting down the road. Though my elder brother was a Volunteer he was not arrested. Tom Wallace, one of the Company Lieutenants, was arrested and we were brought to Adare R.I.C. Barracks and tried there that very morning. This may have been a Special Court. We refused to recognise it and got two months, if we accepted bail, or, if not, five months. We did not agree to the bail and were brought off to Limerick Gaol, still handcuffed.

This was at the beginning of June, 1918, and on the 24th we were transferred to Belfast Prison.

We walked into a row there. There was a big number of prisoners there and there was a revolt, headed by Austin Stack. We took part in it, of course, breaking the glass of the peepholes and of the windows, and breaking down the doors and in some cases the walls between the cells. We had our part of the Prison barricaded so that the staff could not get through.

However, the 'flu came and struck down a good number. I was in the jail hospital and I remember Miceál Brennan of Clare there, and Jack O'Sheehan too. Terence MacSwiney and Kevin O'Higgins were in jail that time too. The staff got very civil to us then because they thought we were going to die. Nobody did die as it happened. A fortnight after my sentence expired I was released, direct from the hospital. Tom Wallace was out already, and was waiting for me in Belfast, and we both came home together.

It was now about the end of November, 1918, and the General Election was on. Volunteers from Clare and from Limerick City came with us to help in Waterford, and we carried out escort work and provided security at the polling booths. We all had batons and had any amount of encounters with the Ballybricken crowd and the soldiers back from the war. In our constituency there was no election, Michael Colbert, I think it was, being returned unopposed.

Before going to Waterford I was asked to take over command of the 4th Battalion, Maurice Quaid, the O.C., having died in Ballingarry. I became O.C. There were about ten Companies, two of them being sub-Companies of others. (SEE PERSONNEL LIST). Pallaskenry Company became 'C' Company when the Battalion was organised. The organisation in force at this time continued up to the Truce. Rathkeale was Battalion Headquarters, really too far away for me. The Battalion was formed late in 1917, or early in 1918. Up to then I didn't know of any Officer in Rathkeale. I didn't know anyone in Rathkeale until late in 1917, that is, Volunteers. I had no knowledge of the Volunteer movement, it was more or less underground that time, until I was called to Rathkeale late in 1917. Brigade Headquarters was generally around Newcastle but had to shift to Athea later on account of enemy activity.

During 1919 things were fairly quiet in the Battalion area. There were raids by all the Companies for arms, shotguns and revolvers principally being got. Bicycles were also taken. There was a certain amount of enemy activity, principally by the R.I.C. in keeping an eye on us, but, so far as I can remember, there were no arrests. Myself and other members of the Battalion Staff had to keep going around the Companies on parade nights.

In 1920 the Ballysteen Company attempted a raid for arms on the house of Peter Switzer, a loyalist. Something like this had happened at the same house in his father's time, in the days of the Land League. The house is about $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles from Pallaskenry in the Castletown area.

Switzer got up in a kind of turret over the hall-door and opened fire on the raiders, shooting one dead. This was Dan Neville, a farmer's son. Jackie Finn, our Brigadier, reported the matter to Dick Mulcahy when in Dublin shortly after, and Mulcahy said on no account were reprisals to be taken against Switzer. After the shooting, Switzer, who was an elderly man and a fighting Protestant, used come to church armed. We did not shoot him but we took him by surprise one Sunday morning and got two revolvers off him. Then we drove him in a pony and trap to his house and demanded more arms. He refused, but his womenfolk, thinking he would be shot, brought us out a shotgun and ammunition. We then released him unharmed.

One of the Rathkeale Company men was killed, his name was O'Brien, in 1920 when lifting a stone to open a bridge which had been barricaded. A mine had been concealed there by the Tans. The Tans were in Mount Brown, a big empty house, and in Rathkeale R.I.C. Barracks. All the outlying police barracks had been evacuated about the middle of this year and we knocked them all after this, three altogether being destroyed.

Our arms then were principally shotguns, as if we did succeed in getting a rifle at all the Brigade collected it for the Column. A number of the Rathkeale Company having to go 'on the run' were taken into the Column. I served with the Column, too, but not constantly. Those of us who did this would be sent back for periods to look after our own area.

Early in 1921 I remember seven or eight of us going to Askeaton to try and ambush the Tans who were stationed in the R.I.C. Barracks. We were watching out for a patrol as our arms and ammunition were by no means suitable or enough for an attack on the barracks. No patrol came out, however.

In the Summer coming on to the Truce about eighty of the 4th Battalion went to the Barns area, between Newcastlewest and Abbeyfeale, in the hilly country, to join the North Cork Column to hit up a big convoy of military, generally about six lorries, which used pass along once a week. Nothing came, however, though a plane passed over, flying low.

The North Cork Column was billeted in houses in the area and so were we as we waited in the area about a week. When nothing happened we returned home. Jackie Finn had been killed in action in March at Ballyhahill, and Garrett McAuliffe was now O.C. Brigade and also O.C. West Limerick Column.

Miceál Brennan used come into our area, sometimes by car and sometimes across the river Shannon. He often had to retreat across the river after ambushes in his own area in East Clare until things got quiet again, and he would return to prepare for more. I used ask to go with him as my own area was so quiet, but he would not let me. He would tell me to remain in my own area.

After the rescue at Knocklong in 1920, Seán Tracy, Dan Breen and John Joe Hogan came into my Battalion area for awhile. It was Garrett McAuliffe, the Brigadier, who

drove them here and they rested for awhile at Wallaces, near Pallaskenry. I had to provide scouts and patrols while they were there. They used come to Sheehys at Shannon Grove House. It was near the river and was a good place for them to be. They went across the river to Clare after that.

General Lucas was brought through the area at night as a prisoner but I did not see him. They came from the Rathkeale side with him and were in a hurry to get him across the Shannon into Clare.

When the Truce came some 14 or 15 of us went to a Camp at Dromore Castle and carried out training there. We had as instructor an ex-soldier from one of our Companies.

SIGNED:

James Halpin
(James Halpin)

WITNESSED:

C. Saurin
(C. Saurin)

LIEUT. COLONEL.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRE MILITA 1913-21
No. W.S. 871

DATE:

March 4th 1953

4TH (RATHKEALE) BATTALION, WEST LIMERICK BRIGADE.ORGANISATION AND OFFICER PERSONNEL (11th July, 1921).Battalion Staff.

O/C.	James Halpin.
V/O.C.	William Fitzgérald.
Adjutant.	Laurence Meade.
Quartermaster.	Thomas O'Rourke.
Transport:	Thomas Hanely.
I.O.	Christopher Enright.
Signals.	John Nash.

'A' (Rathkeale) Company.Strength: 131.

O/C.	John Roche.
"	Patrick Roche (joined A.S.U. March 1921).
"	Edward Walsh (from March, 1920.)
"	Timothy Healy (from July, 1920).
1st Lt.	Bernard O'Donnell.
"	John Gleeny.
2nd Lt.	Neal McDonnell.

'B' (Stonehall) Company..Strength: 71.

O/C.	John Pender.
1st Lt.	Patrick Mulcaire.
2nd Lt.	Patrick Fitzgibbon.

'C' (Pallaskerry) Company.Strength: 103.

O/C.	David Moloney.
1st Lt.	Patrick Moloney.
2nd Lt.	Thomas Murphy.

'D' (Ballysteen) Company.

Strength: 67.

O/C. John Neville.
1st Lt. James Ranahan.
2nd Lt. Daniel Neville.

'E' (Askeaton) Company.

Strength: 60.

O/C. Michael Murphy (joined A.S.U. July, 1920).
1st Lt. Christopher Sheahan.
2nd Lt. Michael Sheahan.

'F' (Croagh) Company.

Strength: 43.

O/C. James Sheehy.
1st Lt. Thomas Cotter.
2nd Lt. Michael Neville.

'G' (Ballingarry) Company.

Strength: 83.

O/C. Michael Boohan.
" Edward O'Keefe (arrested 9th July, 1921).
1st Lt. George Purcell.
2nd Lt. Patrick Donohoe.

'H' (Granagh) Company.

Strength: 43.

O/C. Michael Madden.
1st Lt. Denis O'Shea.
2nd Lt. James O'Regan.

'I' (Kilkinny) Company:

Strength: 25.

1st Lt. Thomas Noonan.

This Unit was a Sub. Coy. to 'F' Coy.

'J' (Cappagh) Company:

Strength: 13.

1st Lt. David Kennedy.

This Unit was a Sub. Coy. to 'A' Coy.

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