

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 815

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 815

Witness

Patrick Mulcahy,
Rathcahill,
Newcastle West,
Co. Limerick.

Identity.

Member of Monagay (Co. Limerick) Company,
Irish Volunteers, 1916 - ;

Adjutant and I.O. 1st (Newcastle) Battalion,
West Limerick Brigade, 1921.

Subject.

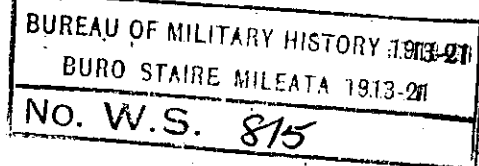
Irish Volunteers,
West Limerick, 1916-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S. 2083

Form B.S.M. 2

ORIGINALSTATEMENTBY

PATRICK MULCAHY, RATHCAHILL,
NEWCASTLE WEST, CO. LIMERICK.

ADJUTANT AND I.O., 1ST (NEWCASTLE WEST)
BATTALION, WEST LIMERICK BRIGADE.

The first day I paraded with the Volunteers was at Seán McDermott's meeting in Newcastle West on 17th March, 1916. I was then 16 years of age. All Companies in the area around the town paraded for the meeting. All with arms carried them. I had a shot-gun myself. Seán McDermott left a cane he carried as a souvenir with the family of Con and Dan Collins with whom he stayed that night. This cane figured with me in an incident with the R.I.C. some years later when it was nearly lost but recovered again. The Collins family suffered and did more for Sinn Féin than most families in West Limerick.

Dan Conway was the first Company Captain - from 1916 to 1918. Dan Collins was O.C. Monagay Company after him and up to the time of his arrest. I was a despatch rider. Jer. Kiely was O.C. Company after Dan Collins up to the time the Battalion was formed. Then Kiely went on the Battalion Staff and Jer. Enright succeeded him with Seán Danaher as 1st Lieut.

The Monagay Company and seven or eight other Companies mobilised at Glenquin Castle under Captain Jim McInerney from Limerick. Father Hayes and Father Wall were there, too. We paraded with arms and got extra ammunition. Dan Collins

and Dan McCarthy collected arms, from what source I do not know, one night about two miles outside Newcastle West and brought them for distribution to Monagay and Killonaghteen Companies. This was before Easter Week and the arms were principally shot-guns.

On Easter Sunday, probably on account of MacNeill's countermanding order, we were demobilised and returned home. After Easter Week there was a meeting in one of our fields and a vote was taken as to the surrender of our arms to the police barracks. I remember I stood out against it and refused to give up my shot-gun. A policeman came later to my father about it and I had to obey him and, much against my will, give up the gun.

Towards the end of 1916 and into 1917 we reorganised. About 50 Volunteers from our area went to the Waterford election at the time of the General Election in 1918. We cycled the 23 miles to Limerick and then went by train to Waterford and were put up in a large hall in Ballybricken Square. We had three encounters with Redmond's supporters and the police came on the scene with fixed bayonets to disperse us. We were there till the election was over. It was the only contest in the General Election in the South of Ireland where Sinn Féin lost, Captain Redmond being elected.

About the beginning of April, 1920 - the first day - we burned the police hut at Strand in our area. Any other huts around were destroyed too; the evacuated barracks at Tournafulla and at Broadford were burnt at the same time. This was in accordance with the general order that all vacated

police barracks be destroyed to prevent re-occupation. The barracks at Ardagh had to be knocked as there were thatched houses adjoining and we could not set fire to it. We smashed in the roof and succeeded in taking down one gable. We were very anxious to knock Ardagh as the Fenians had attempted an attack on this barracks and had failed, suffering one casualty in the operation. In the Fenian attempt the man was wounded.

I remember Fr. Hayes coming to our house for a meeting with Con Collins in 1918. He was a great man and I remember him coming out very strong at a Feis near Rathcahill when in the presence of the police he referred to Germany having England by the throat.

I heard that a couple of years later the Tans were prowling around his house - he was one of the curates in Newcastle West - and even got up on the roof. Apparently they were attempting to get in but failed.

A very prominent Tan and a fine looking man, too, was believed to have some part in getting after Fr. Hayes. He was also supposed to be a very dangerous man with a gun. He was going with a girl, too, out of the town and we were planning to try and get him when he was out keeping an appointment with her. Two armed men - one from the Monagay Company and the other from the Newcastle West Company - were on the watch for him for a week. He never went along this road again that we thought he would frequent. I think there was an order from General Headquarters to shoot him. I heard he was killed in a road accident near Dublin before

the Truce.

The night of the attack on Kilmallock R.I.C. Barracks it was intended to attack the barracks in Newcastle West and one of the Brennans from Clare was supposed to come across the Shannon with 25 men for this operation. We were waiting for the order to take part in it, too, with the Clare men, but nothing happened, perhaps owing to Liam Scully's death at Kilmallock, and the decision to bring his body into our area for burial.

The day after the Kilmallock attack I went into Newcastle West for the mountings for his coffin which was being made by our Vice O.C. Battalion, Jer. Kiely, who was a carpenter by trade. His body had been brought to John O'Gorman's of Killikilleen directly after the fight and was being waked there. The first thing I saw when I went into Newcastle West was a British armoured car in front of the police barracks. It was like as if they suspected this barracks would be the next on the list and were taking no chances. In a few days Newcastle West was garrisoned by military who stayed there till the time of the Truce.

Liam Scully's funeral was to Templeglantine and a big crowd of Volunteers paraded for it. Fr. Dick McCarthy of Ballyhahill and Fr. Ryan, the curate in Tournafulla, attended. In fact Fr. McCarthy had gone to Kerry beforehand to tell the Scully family of the death in action of Liam and had brought his brother back for the funeral.

The attack on Brosna R.I.C. Barracks was in 1920 and I

took part in this. There were Kerry men under Humphrey Murphy there, too. I noticed that night that the Kerry men seemed to be old seasoned men, well used to this kind of thing, while we seemed very young. There were about four from our Company and about a dozen West Limerick men altogether. We mostly had rifles. I had one of those which had been used at Kilmallock as they had all been brought into the West Limerick area. The Barracks was a very strong building and was garrisoned by about twenty. The bombs we had, which were supposed to make a breach in the roof, did not explode and, as the building stood alone, we could not get near enough to burst in the slates. The police sent up Verey lights and the police in Abbeyfeale sent reinforcements which were ambushed on the way, one being wounded. They did not reach Brosna. The roads were blocked, anyway, and would have delayed them, and probably we would have encountered them on our way back from the attack which we had to call off by daylight.

After Sológhhead Dan Breen and Seán Hogan stayed in our house at Rathcahill. They went away after a day and a night. I brought them to another house - Roches' at Ballyeid - and from there they went to Tim Connor's at Newbridge near Rathkeale.

After the rescue at Knocklong, about a month or six weeks later, I was up the road and saw two priests cycling towards me. I looked at them as they passed and smiled and they dismounted. They were Dan Breen and John Hogan and were disturbed at being recognised until I told them they had been stopping in my place recently. I brought them to the house now for a cup of tea and they came a few times after. Breen

had just recovered from the wounds he got at Knocklong and this occasion was the first time he was out.

Fr. Hayes sent word out by a boy on a bicycle one night in 1920, and whom I met on the road with a message for me that a girl in the Post Office in Newcastle West had told him the houses in the townland of Camas were to be raided that night. The girl - Miss Ambrose - said a policeman named Gildoy, who actually had a very bad reputation with us, had given her the information. I acted on it at once and got word round to all the houses to the lads to clear out. Con Collins was one of them. The raids were carried out in the morning about two o'clock. Curfew was on at the time and it had been very hard for Fr. Hayes to find anyone to bring the message to me. The messenger he found was from North Cork working in the creamery in Garryduff near our place. His name was Con Riordan and he was a Volunteer.

Curfew had been imposed on account of the attempted shooting of a suspected spy in Newcastle West, an ex-soldier named Hanley. He was only wounded and was got out of the district and never returned.

After this particular shooting four or five ex-British soldiers in Newcastle West left the town and were never again seen.

I had become Adjutant and I.O. of the 1st Battalion early in 1921 and was attending a Brigade Conference at Kilcolman at the house of Matt Colbert, brother of Con who was executed at Easter, 1916. Seán Finn, the Brigadier, presided, and I think Donncadh Hannigan from East Limerick was there, too. There

was a discussion as to how best to meet and counter the British moves. Seán Finn was shot at Ballyhahill two days afterwards.

About this time, too, - in March, 1921, I was one of a party drawn from the Battalion to hold up the train at Ardagh and take the mails. When the train was coming into the station the O/C. Newcastle West Company, McDonagh by name, was to put his head out of the window of the first carriage and wipe his face with a red handkerchief if there were Crown forces on board. As it happened there was none on board and we got the mails away in two pony traps and spent the night going through them. All we found was something about lorries and the rest were letters from the Tommies to their girls in England.

We were to hold up a train another time to destroy military stores but we got word that there was a heavily armed escort on board so we did not attempt the job. The Flying Column was away in East Limerick at the time and the amount of arms left to us was very poor and insufficient to attack a well-armed party.

When it was decided to carry out general reprisals some-time in May, 1921, Garrett McAuliffe, our Brigadier, was being sought for in our Battalion area by Liam Lynch, the O.C. 1st Southern Division. I was able to tell where he could be found as no one else seemed to know, and the night we were supposed to carry out reprisals Lynch was in the district and they had to be called off.

Garrett McAuliffe had to send out despatches to all the

Battalion Commanders to get them with the Brigade Staff to meet Liam Lynch at Brigade Headquarters at John O'Connor's at Garryduff. I had to deal with two of the despatches and found it hard enough to find a carrier as I had already been sending despatches all day to all the Companies in the Battalion to report fully armed at Battalion Headquarters in Garryduff, too. This was in connection with the intended reprisals though the Companies were not told for what. They all turned up and then were told their jobs were off on account of Liam Lynch being in the area.

Reprisals were, however, carried out in Drumcollogher in the 3rd Battalion area where the men were already in position in the houses. Here one policeman was killed and another wounded.

I was at Garryduff but was not in at the private meeting, only the Brigade Staff being in, though maybe the Battalion Commanders were present, too. That same night Liam Lynch went back into North Cork by car, and at every turn of the road for six or seven miles until he left the Brigade area there was a Volunteer posted to ensure his safe passage or to warn him of danger.

About June, 1921, Newcastle West was very fully occupied by British forces. The R.I.C. had the barracks, military were in the Courthouse and the banks and the library and the Castle and Castleview, and the Auxiliaries were billeted in private houses and in the pubs. Then the troops in the Courthouse went off as a flying column towards Abbeyfeale and we felt this was our opportunity to burn the Courthouse before

they got back and deprive them of this stronghold at least.

The operation was successfully planned, nearly all the Newcastle West Company doing the scouting, while I was engaged with Monagay, Newcastle and Killyknockdeen Volunteers, about twelve in all, on the preparations for the actual burning. Joseph Ambrose, now the Clerk of the Court in Newcastle West, gave considerable help. He was watching the Courthouse all day and all night for signs of enemy activity and reported all being clear. The petrol was got from the Old Mill Creamery by raiding for it. It was carried in cans and bottles full were brought in a bag. We brought a pump for drenching the inside of the building with the petrol, but it failed and we had to throw in the bottles.

We had a guard of six or eight riflemen around as there were military quartered both sides of the approaches. We came in by way of the railway, having arranged for all gates and doors to be unlocked. We had to start the job at the front of the Courthouse as the back was heavily netted with barbed wire entanglements. We also had to take down the sandbags from the walls and we spread them on the footpath. A ladder was used to get on top and when the fire was started by means of a flare I threw in some cakes of pitch to get it really going. The fumes from the burning pitch nearly gassed us before we could get clear. However, the whole party got away and retired about half a mile along the railway line and got home to my house where the burning party and the riflemen, who belonged to the Column, had breakfast.

We heard afterwards that the Officer in charge of the

military was reduced on account of his inactivity that night. The military were very officious for a few days afterwards. Our house was raided the night after and I was questioned closely as to my movements on the night of the burning but evaded the cross-examination and was left alone. I had always stayed at home and never gone 'on the run' no matter what operations I was taking part in, and my name being up behind the door - as was supposed to be done by order of the British, I was apparently beyond suspicion when I was found in the house.

I was selected with others from the 1st Battalion, that is, the Battalion Flying Column, for the Barnagh ambush. All the Companies of the Battalion in fact were out blocking the roads with trees and trenches and strewing broken bottles on them. All the West Limerick and the North Cork Flying Columns were engaged on this operation, that is, the ambush. The Columns were very well armed and had two machine guns. In addition, six mines were planted on the road over a distance just below the position where we lay in wait on the main road to Abbeyfeale and behind Barnagh station. It was a good position and there was a fine retreat out of it.

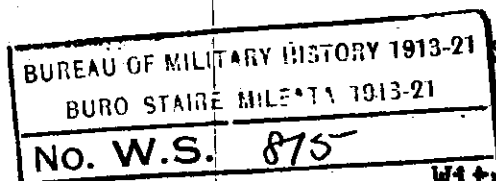
We were waiting for a couple of days before the Truce and myself and a few others had been told off to pick off the motor cyclist who rode in front of the enemy who travelled in four or five lorries and were supposed to have machine guns as well as rifles.

For the first time they did not travel back the same road as they had gone out. We were in position coming on to the

time the Truce was to become effective, but it was only after 12 o'clock in the day that the British appeared. They had some talk with the North Cork men, it seems, but I had gone by this time, to reassure my people at home that everything was alright. They and everybody else had heard firing at 12 o'clock when one of the North Cork machine gunners had let off a few bursts from his Hotchkiss to announce the Truce.

The O.C. 1st Battalion - Jim Liston - had been 'on the run' and used stop in a dug-out we had about a mile from Rathcahill. He did a lot of the normal work that myself as Adjutant might have done, such as preparing orders and despatches. I used visit the different Companies of the Battalion to keep control. We used hold Battalion meetings at which the Company C.Os. used attend and I used be there, of course. When a Brigade meeting was held at Kilcolman it was a night's work getting there and back again. It was easier when Brigade Headquarters was shifted to Garryduff, much nearer to my own home.

As Battalion I.O. I had to get reports of enemy movements from Newcastle West, the only place in the Battalion area where they were stationed. I would pass on these reports to Ned Cregan, the Brigade I.O. I had a number of young chaps in the Newcastle West Company who used supply me with this information and they were very reliable. Joseph Ambrose was very young at the time but he was one of the best.



Signed:

Patrick Mulcahy
(Patrick Mulcahy)

Witnessed:

C. Saurin LT.-COL.
(C. Saurin)

Date: March 10/1953