

W.S. 884
ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 884

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 884

Witness

Albert Tally,
Galbally,
Dungannon,
Co. Tyrone.

Identity.

Member of Irish Volunteers and I.R.B.,
Galbally, Co. Tyrone, 1913 - ;

Vice O/C. Tyrone Brigade, 1919 - .

Subject.

National activities, Co. Tyrone,
1913-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

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STATEMENT by Mr. Albert Tally,

Galbally, Dungannon,

Co. Tyrone.

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When I was a youth and had occasion to visit Dungannon I habitually called on a Mr. John McElvogue who was a shoemaker. This man's house was a noted place to hear the older men talking and debating on questions of local history and past happenings. McElvogue himself was what the Unionists called a Fenian. He was a Nationalist of extreme views in politics and was one of the very earliest members of the Irish Republican Brotherhood in Co. Tyrone.

In 1913 William J. Kelly, Senior, who had himself been associated with the remnants of the Fenian organisation and had been an associate of Tom Clarke when the latter was teaching in Dungannon, took an organiser named Peter Burns, a native of Belfast, to Galbally area to organise the Irish Republican Brotherhood. Old Willie Kelly discussed with me - previous to this - the question of starting a circle in Galbally. I agreed to help. When Burns came along Kelly introduced me to him. I took a man named James Armstrong into my confidence, together with another man named Michael Boyle, Gortnagala. We were all initiated into the I.R.B. organisation and we organised the Galbally circle. This circle maintained a strength of 30 members. James Armstrong was appointed Centre of the circle. Galbally was a headquarters for the I.R.B. for this end of the county. Galbally later became the battalion headquarters centre for the Irish Volunteers.

Soon after the start of the I.R.B. the Irish Volunteers were organised. The I.R.B. took a prominent

part in organising the Volunteers. We got instructions through the I.R.B. to take control of the Volunteers in a quiet way that would not attract attention from those who were not members of the I.R.B. We started a company of the Volunteers in Galbally and other companies were started in other places like Munderadoe and Aughnagar. Companies were also organised at other places from Dungannon and Donaghmore.

Dr. P. McCartan was Head Centre in the I.R.B. organisation for the County of Tyrone. With the exception of the men who were prominent in the organisation and well known to everybody, it was difficult to know who was a member in circles outside a person's own circle. It was customary for Dr. McCartan to call a meeting of a circle on short notice and he would generally attend at those circle meetings. I was a delegate on a few occasions to a county centre meeting. I would not know the other delegates there but meeting them in such a place I knew they were genuine and members of the organisation.

When Galbally Company of the Irish Volunteers was organised at the end of 1913 James Armstrong who was the local Centre of the I.R.B. became O/C of the Company. As far as I could judge in our other local companies in this part of Co. Tyrone it was prominent I.R.B. men who took control as officers in the Volunteers.

Up to the outbreak of the Great War in 1914 the Volunteers were all in one organisation. The split in the Volunteer organisation came about through John Redmond's-pro-British-war outlook. The I.R.B. men were very anti-British.

Thomas McRory, an ex-British Army man acted as drill instructor for the Volunteers over a wide area in this part of Co. Tyrone. He was a first-class man at his job. In the Cappagh area there was a Hibernian Hall and a company of the Irish Volunteers were organised there. Another ex-British Army man instructed this company. We had secret contacts in this area with the members of this company and as we knew that these men were of different ideas from us about various things, we found it useful to keep them under observation.

We organised a big mobilisation at Cappagh after the outbreak of the Great War. It was arranged that several companies were to mobilise at Cappagh under the one command. When this mobilisation took place the Hibernians wanted their drill instructor - a man named Pantrough - to take charge. Pantrough's sympathies were pro-British. I and a few others had engineered this mobilisation as a showdown as we wanted to know where we stood as far as the war outlook of the various companies of Volunteers was concerned and we would not agree to any person taking charge but our man McRory. It turned out that there could be no compromise on either side and the split took effect from that time onwards. When it became apparent that the split in the Volunteers was inevitable, McRory, on instructions, called upon all Irish Volunteers then mobilised to fall into line in certain order. The vast majority of the young men carried out McRory's instructions promptly and the remnants that were left with the Hibernian leaders were either old men or young Hibernian diehards. This broke the Hibernian influence in the Volunteer organisation.

The Hibernians at the split broke up as a Volunteer organisation as there were so very few of them. It is necessary to mention in this respect that there was a noticeable difference in the outlook of the Volunteers even before the split in areas where the Hibernian organisation had control as, in some of those Hibernian districts, the Volunteers called themselves National Volunteers, while in the Republican districts they called themselves Irish Volunteers.

In 1916 we were not sure that a Rising would be called for. There was a tightening up of the Volunteer organisation shortly before the Easter Week 1916. We then suspected that something serious was coming off but we did not know when or ⁱⁿ what form the Rising would take. The local Unionist population had been a great curb to the Volunteers in carrying out any open preparation for a Rising in areas where the Unionists had the majority.

A short time before Easter Sunday, James Armstrong got an order from Dungannon, probably from Mc Elvogue, that ~~the~~ mobilisation was ordered for Easter Monday. This order was conveyed to the Volunteers by Armstrong. On Easter Sunday nothing happened except that all the Volunteers had orders to mobilise at James Donnelly's place at Milltown on Easter Monday and that we were to take whatever arms, such as shotguns and revolvers, as we we had and two days' food rations. This mobilisation was carried out on Monday evening. We remained on duty all Monday night as Armstrong was awaiting instructions from, I think, Carrickmore. No orders came and on Tuesday morning in the absence of orders we were told by Armstrong to go home. Later on that morning, Tuesday, the Donaghmore and Dungannon men came to Galbally in twos

and threes. They dumped their arms in the vicinity of this place, some at my place and others at neighbouring houses. Nothing further happened as far as I can now remember. Armstrong was arrested in the week following Easter Week and was interned in Frongach.

After the events of Easter Week nothing of much interest happened until late in 1917 or early 1918 when efforts were being made to reorganise the Volunteers. In the period between Easter Week and the end of 1917 the I.R.B. may have held a few meetings.

We had a by-election in early 1918 in East Tyrone, in which Seán Milroy was defeated by W. J. Harbison, a follower of John Redmond. At the time of this election, April, 1918, the Volunteers were organised again and they did police duty all over the constituency during the election. I was at this time Company Captain and was in charge of my company in the little town of Pomeroy at the election. My company strength was then between 40 - 50 dependable men. There were others attached who were only nominally Volunteers. We had greater numbers in the Company in 1916 but some of these pre-1916 Volunteers were lukewarm and dropped out and did not rejoin at the organisation. After the re-organisation in 1918 the Volunteers did not associate very much with the Sinn Féin Clubs. We helped the Sinn Féin Clubs when necessary and endeavoured to keep them travelling in the right direction.

In the year 1919 the Volunteers in County Tyrone were organised in one Brigade which embraced the whole County and which was known as the Tyrone Brigade. I remember at the start of the Tyrone Brigade Jack Shiel's attending Brigade meetings and taking charge. After some time Frank Dorris, Clogher, was appointed Brigade O/C. I was appointed Vice O/C of the Brigade. Jack Shiels was then

appointed Brigade Adjutant - my memory is now vague as to who was Brigade Quartermaster but perhaps Hugh Rogers occupied that position. In addition to being Vice O/C of the Tyrone Brigade I was also appointed O/C of the Galbally Battalion. I cannot now remember who were the other officers of this Battalion. Frank Dorris was arrested in June or July, 1920. Dorris before his arrest had made arrangements with G.H.Q. that all communications from G.H.Q. would come to me in the event of his arrest. From the time of Dorris' arrest until I was arrested in September, 1920, I acted as Brigade O/C. After my arrest, I think it was Tom Leonard who took charge of the Brigade. At least he acted in that capacity for some time.

Military Operations:

Instructions came to me to carry out the destruction of the papers in Income Tax offices all over the Co. Tyrone. I took charge of this operation in the town of Dungannon. We were able to gain admittance into the offices after dark and we moved all the papers and documents in sacks and burned them in an old disused quarry near the town. As this affair was carried out quietly it did not attract much notice and did not cause any raiding or arrest of Volunteers.

Another place where Income Tax papers were destroyed was in Cookstown area. An Income Tax Collector named Quinn had his papers seized and destroyed. This operation was carried out by a local company.

We held up trains for mails and took mails on one occasion from the train at Donaghmore and, on another occasion, at Carrigmore. These operations were for

the capture of police letters and communications from the postal bags carried on the trains. After each of these raids all the civilian letters were extracted from the bags and posted again, and police letters were retained. As an example of what we were liable to get in these raids, I may mention that in one police despatch which was captured in a train raid we found a letter addressed to the Police Headquarters in Enniskillen. This letter came from Police Headquarters in Dublin and gave particulars about Eóin O'Duffy's movements and what they knew about his activities. As soon as I got the letter and read it I despatched it through a line of communication we had from Ballygawley through Clogher. O'Duffy received it in good time. Later on O'Duffy complimented us on the capture of this ^{police} despatch as he stated that his digs were raided shortly afterwards and the despatch had warned him that the British authorities were keenly interested in him.

In the summer of 1920 we also received orders to destroy all evacuated barracks in our area. Castlecaulfield Barracks was then evacuated. We burned this place and left only the shell standing. Later, after my arrest, Donaghmore Barracks was burned. Other barracks were burned in the Cookstown area.

Cookstown Barrack Attack:

The arrangements for this attack were put into the hands of Tom Leonard and Willie J. Kelly. These men discussed the plans they had made for this attack with me and I sanctioned the plans. The attack was planned in the form of a raid and was carried out on 20th June, 1920. For this attack I commandeered a local car. Another car was made available from Dungannon area. There was a constable in Cookstown Barracks who handed out all the inside plans of the barrack; the lay-out of the rooms; where arms were kept, etc. This constable also undertook

to leave the back door of the barrack open so that we could walk in. Near midnight on the night of the attack we moved into the vicinity of the barrack. There we removed our boots so that we might make the least possible noise and we went into the barracks by the door which had been left open by the policeman. Each man had been allotted to a particular room in the barrack: the idea was that all the rooms would be attacked simultaneously. The Head Constable, his wife and family occupied a part of the barrack building as a family residence. A couple of the men were allotted to this part of the barrack. These men, on entering the place, alarmed the wife and children of the Head Constable who became panicky and created a lot of noise. This noise aroused the police in other parts of the barrack.

I went into the day-room and succeeded in holding up the two policemen there. One of them was in bed and the other sitting at the table. After disarming the policeman at the table of a revolver, and the other man of his rifle, it was my duty to undo the chains and locks of the front door. When I had done this I signalled the two cars which were waiting outside to come down to the barrack door. Whilst I was doing this the men who were allotted to other parts of the barrack were fired on by the police and as they were out-numbered they had to retreat under fire. In retreating they had to return the police fire to make good their escape. One Volunteer - Pat Laughran - was shot in the stomach with what proved later to be fatal results. I was lucky enough to locate Laughran at the foot of the stairway. He was in great pain and was holding on to the bottom rail of the stairs. I was able to carry him outside and put him into a

car before the police could get him.

The position at this time was most confusing, not alone for us, but also for the police. It turned out that the police believed that we had a large number of men in the barracks, whereas we had only a small number - about nine altogether.

The total result of this raid was the capture by me of a revolver and a rifle in the day-room. It was reported in the papers that there were about 300 men engaged in the attack, whereas all our forces were nine or ten men in the barrack and the car drivers! No roads were blocked nor wires cut for this operation.

After the attack the police and military became most active and tough towards the I.R.A. Extra police and military were drafted into the area and raiding and arrests were common.

About this time also plans were made to attempt to capture Clogher Barracks on similar lines to those of the Cookstown attack. The Clogher and Carrigmore companies were involved in these plans. I was asked to attend on the night of the attack merely as a spectator to watch and to be on hand and, if necessary, to help. I commandeered a car and went to Carrigmore with two revolvers in my possession: one of them the revolver I had captured in Cookstown. Having arrived in Carrigmore I found that there was only one car available - that is the car I had already commandeered. I then commandeered another car and we proceeded in the two cars to Clogher. When we arrived at Clogher I parked the car I was driving about 300 yards from the barrack. I later went up towards the barrack. Near the barrack I met one of the attacking party who informed

me that the whole operation had been called off as some upset had taken place. As far as I could make out from this man some patrol which usually went out from the barracks each night did not that night leave the barracks. There was a friendly policeman in the barrack who had promised to leave the barrack door open but was not in a position to give the help promised on that particular night.

After this attempt I insisted that the services of the friendly R. I. C. man should be utilised on a subsequent night. It turned out, however, that the attacking parties' presence in the vicinity of the barrack had been noticed by police or that they had been made aware of it by some locals. It was reported to me later that additional police were drafted to the barrack. No attempt was subsequently made by us on the barrack.

From June up to the time of my arrest in September, 1920, there were no further major events to relate. From June onwards we cut wires, disrupted telephonic and telegraphic communications. This cutting of wires was done periodically. It was an activity with a certain nuisance value which kept the British authorities on their toes trying to prevent our cutting wires, or protecting men repairing them when they were cut. Another activity carried out at this time was the imposition of a strict boycott on all Belfast goods. Wholesalers and retailers in all the local towns were approached by the I. R. A. and asked not to stock goods of Belfast origin and were warned of unpleasant consequences if they disobeyed the orders. Belfast breadcarts - especially Inglis's breadcarts - when caught distributing bread were burned.

On the 20th September 1920 a party of military - about 150 in number - came on 3 or 4 motor lorries and surrounded my home place. The family were then in for dinner. I got the alarm from my sister that the military were outside and I rushed out the backdoor into a party of military numbering about 50. The military had apparently surrounded the place before they approached the front door. As soon as I was made prisoner the house was raided and searched all over. Not an inch was left unsearched. No arms were found. About 55 rounds of .45 ammunition were found in my bedroom. Some Sinn Féin literature was also found about the house. I had a little printing press which they also found and took away: also a small Volunteer drill book. These finds, especially the ammunition and the drill book, provided sufficient material for the military authorities to trump up a charge against me at my courtmartial later. I was removed to Crumlin Road Prison, Belfast, and was kept there as an untried prisoner for nearly two months before my trial took place. On or about the 1st November I was taken down to Victoria Barracks and tried by a military court. The trial was of short duration as I had not put up any defence, not recognising the court's jurisdiction over me. About 10 days after the court martial I was called to the Prison Governor's Office and a military officer read out the court martial charges against me, and the findings of the court martial, which were two years' hard labour. I was then removed to the convict part of the prison. I was only a week in Belfast Prison after notification of my sentence when I was taken away with many other I. R. A. prisoners from various

parts of Ireland. We were handcuffed in pairs and taken on to a boat and landed at Liverpool port.

We were kept in Liverpool some time. In Liverpool there were so many Irish prisoners that we nearly took over the place. After about three weeks there I was taken to a prison in Worcestershire. I remained there until the general release in January, 1922.

Signed

Albert Tally

(Albert Tally)

Date

13. 8. 53

Witness

John McCoy

(John McCoy)

Date

13/8/53.

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No. W.S.

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