

W. S. 940

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURU STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 940

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 940

Witness

Leo Skinner,
King's Square,
Mitchelstown,
Co. Cork.

Identity.

Member of Mitchelstown Company Irish Volunteers,
1919-1921.

Subject.

Mitchelstown Company Irish Volunteers,
1919-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
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STATEMENT BY LEO SKINNER NO. W.S. 940

King's Square, Mitchelstown, Co. Cork

1st Lieutenant, Mitchelsyown Company
6th Battalion, Cork II Brigade.

Originally part of the Galtee Battalion, the Mitchelstown Company was formed as such in 1918 when Liam Lynch decided to reorganise the unit and make it part of Cork II Brigade. Dan O'Keeffe was O/C. Company then when I joined the Volunteers at the end of 1919. I was young then. Maurice Walsh was 1st Lieutenant and subsequently went on the Brigade Staff as adjutant to Lynch. Pat Luddy was 2nd Lieutenant. He became V.O/C. Battalion afterwards.

The company was about 120 strong. Active Volunteers numbered about 60 to 80. The usual training and weekly parades were being carried out at this period. I was made one of the despatch riders, this being the first job I got. Mostly I went round on a bike.

There were three to five rifles held since 1916. About 60 long Lee Enfields had been given up to the R.I.C. after the Rising. The five we managed to hold eventually went to the column.

The company gave all the assistance possible at elections, sending 30 or 40 men to the by-election in Waterford and again at the General Election.

The famous Galbally Patrol, all cyclists, under the officer known as 'Shaky Head', a formidable fighting man, came into Mitchelstown to the barracks in August 1920, so we decided to ambush it. We secured two of the five rifles left and three rounds of ammunition each. Liam Walsh was in town and met one of our lads and came on with us. Maurice Walsh was there too, and the two Luddys. We actually took up a position on the

Limerick road about two miles out. There were two riflemen and a number of men with shotguns. Subsequently three more riflemen came, but by this time the job was off as we learned that the patrol had returned to their base by another road. We couldn't hope for any success against this experienced bunch of tough men, strung out along the road, and so we disbanded.

A couple of men from the company were sent to take part in the attack on Mallow Barracks under Ernie O'Malley. I can only remember the name of one of those from Mitchelstown - Jerry Clifford. William, or 'Dorney', O'Regan, then V.O/C. Battalion, went with them on this job.

The battalion column was formed shortly after this - in late autumn, 1920. Men were drawn from all companies of the battalion and at first totalled about 20. Tom Barry of Glanworth was O/C. Column. I volunteered first of my company for the column. I wasn't on the run and was in a position where I could get in touch with the R.I.C. and keep a watch on their movements. For these reasons I was turned down, it may be said because of my youth. Anyway, it was all men on the run were being taken in. Some of these even who volunteered for the column had to be refused as the numbers were restricted to the extent of the armament.

After the Mallow Barrack attack, Walsh, the D.I., came to Mitchelstown. He was black-listed by Liam Lynch, who decided he was to be shot. I was selected for this job along with Dick Perrott. D.I. Walsh went to daily Mass and it was considered the easiest way to get him - on his way back from Mass. I sent this information to Brigade, despite the fact that I thought him rather harmless. Eventually, one Fair morning, 'Dorney' O'Regan came into town and had a look at Walsh and decided to call it off. His idea, probably, was that it would be very bad propaganda.

In December the battalion column arrived in the area to carry out the Glenacurrane ambush. Up to this there had been the usual run of things, such as seizures of petrol, mail hold-ups attempted ambushes which didn't come off generally on account of the non-arrival of the expected enemy. The local crowd mobilised as security for the column which, however, withdrew, evidently after hearing from Donnchadh Hannigan and came back a week later and joined the East Limerick Column of which Donnchadh Hannigan was O/C. They were looking for a big convoy. All the local Volunteers were mobilised again and slow moving traffic diverted off the expected line of approach of the enemy - the main road - about three miles from Mitchelstown, where the road runs through a deep glen on the way to Ballylanders.

First a military touring car with four or five in it and a Lancia with eight to ten came along and were let through. The column waited all day and nothing else came through. The two vehicles which passed in the morning came back from Fermoy on their way to Tipperary about 4 o'clock in the evening.

The column's Hotchkiss opened fire and the riflemen joined in. Two enemy were killed and the rest surrendered and all their arms and a box of bombs were taken. In the mails which were being carried two medals were found, one to a sergeant and another to a Lieut. Latchford 'for bravery in Ireland'. Actually, he had a very bad record in Tipperary town. ~~Actually, -he-had-a very-bad-record-in-Tipperary-town.~~ That night, the military broke out in Tipperary and wrecked the town. I came in with a revolver and so did Dick Perrott in case there would be an outbreak in Mitchelstown, but nothing happened. Actually, about fourteen Tommies, unarmed, were out making a noise and I suddenly ran into them round a corner. They called on me to stand and I produced my shiny .38 and pointed it. They were discreet and when I stood my ground they went off shouting in bravado after one of them said: "Come on, Red, he's all right".

Perrott and myself got two bombs, egg-shaped and with stick handles, which we were to use on any lorries which came our way. However, we didn't get the chance.

A Tan who used to come once or twice a week from Ballyporeen courting a girl was put on the list for shooting. About three or four miles out the road Perrott and I carried out the job with our shiny .38. The second bullet I fired stuck in the barrel. My first one, however, got him in the back of the skull and dropped him. He survived, however, and used be brought out in Fermoy to try and identify his attackers whenever there were prisoners brought in there. This was about February 1921.

O'Sullivan and Clifford were caught with r evolvers in their possession, a .32 and a .38, when they cycled into a military lorry halted on the road on a bright April evening. This was on the Ballyporeen road about two miles out and the troops in the lorry had actually held up two lads who were with me but who were unarmed. I just got away in time, luckily, as I had two revolvers on me, and hid behind a furze bush in a fence with the officer from the lorry only 30 yards away standing up on a cross ditch but looking in the wrong direction.

Clifford and O'Sullivan were taken to Mitchelstown and a despatch was found on Clifford. The patrol that took them consisted of two single turret armoured cars and a lorry. Their case was brought up in the House of Lords. They were tried in Fermoy and s entenced to death. They were in Victoria Barracks, Cork, and my father, who had defended them at their courtmartial, got a wire from them to come and see them. He went to Cork immediately and the British/^{there}were very curious to know how the wire had got out and cross-examined him closely. They wouldn't let my father leave Cork that day, but he came home on the Sunday and a petition was signed at the Church gates after Mass and it was brought to Dublin by the mail from Knocklong to the Lord Lieutenant. My father went to Dublin, too, to a pply for a

habeas corpus. That was granted conditionally and then refused and then appealed on the civil side. Michael Comyn handed in the appeal after the order being refused by Judge O'Connor. The cause was brought to the House of Lords and was continued until the Truce period, when decisions were given in the Irish Courts.

The nights were getting too short and the days too long for the column to operate as such in open country, so it was disbanded and the members returned to their own units. However, at the end of May and in June we kept up sniping posts to fire on any enemy patrols. We spent day after day to have a shot but the enemy never appeared in the country. They were completely confined to barracks.

It was decided then to carry out an ambush in the town on the patrol which acted as escort to a party which drew water from a fountain on the Ballyporeen road just in front of the Creamery. This party consisted of a mule-drawn tank on wheels and the escort was twelve men, under a sergeant. They belonged to the K.O.Y.L.I.

Our force consisted of six revolver men, fourteen riflemen split up into various parties (I was one of those and armed with a carbine) and about three shotgun men. The idea was that two parties of three riflemen covered the military and police barracks to hold any coming out and cover our main body getting away after the ambush. The remainder of the riflemen got into the Creamery before dawn. Other positions were taken up at the same time. When the water party arrived, the attack was to start and the riflemen, who all had bayonets except myself, were to come out with fixed bayonets and demand hands up. If this order wasn't complied with, they were to attack with the bayonets. The revolver men were to be close and demand the hands up when the riflemen came out of the Creamery.

The Creamery doors were opened wide and we swung out on the footpath in a line. We demanded hands up and fired at the same time. The military grabbed for their rifles from where they were sitting on the steps of the fountain. There were four there. One ran without his rifle and with his hands up and got into a gateway. The other three fell wounded.

There was a lull then and the other party of riflemen and the revolver men failed to silence the military opposite them. The firing became general. The five of us were the only ones visible and the man beside me was shot through the lung and fell up against me. I was occupied in a duel with the sergeant and had already been shot through the left thigh. A soldier behind a low wall opposite about 20 yards away had hit me. Two soldiers, who had been with the sergeant and were firing, also came under fire from the revolver men cleared off and brought their rifles with them. The sergeant suddenly ceased firing as I was loading and I looked up and he was gone.

We decided to get away as we had two wounded - Gallahue, shot through the lung, and myself, a walking wounded case. Myself and Sean O'Neill half carried Gallahue three miles into the country and eventually he was got to a place where he was looked after.

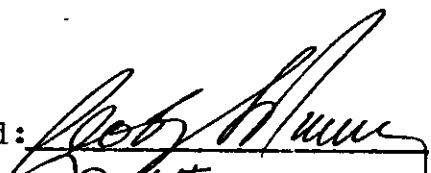
In the meantime, covering fire was directed on the two barracks. One of the revolver men, Mark Ahern, came down and got two of the soldiers' rifles, for which he got honourable mention in "An tOglach" subsequently. He got them away safely. Covering fire was kept up on the two barracks for about twenty minutes and then the parties under B.J. Luddy at the military barracks and under Moss O'Donoghue at the police barracks withdrew.

The military came out before them but they were slow and our men got away all right, though under heavy machine gun fire. Three or four armoured cars came in from the camp at Kilworth and soon the town was packed with troops who apparently were not too anxious to go out into the open country. This engagement, incidentally, happened on the day before the Truce.

Earlier in March of that year, the British started extensive round-ups and literally combed the area, taking in every man they could find to clearing stations. Actually, they only got one whom they kept in the first round up. The column had only left the area three or four days before.

About a fortnight or three weeks after, the second round-up was over the eastern side of the area and they almost got the South Tipperary Column. They had cavalry with them and the horses were eating off one side of the fence behind which on the other side lay the column ready to open fire if discovered. But the British moved away and a man called Sheahy guided the column away to safety.

As the Truce came into being, I was a patient with a bullet hole through the thigh. I was at O'Donoghue's of Gurteenaboul. Gallahue had been taken by car to hospital in Cork and recovered eventually. I got over my wound and lived to fight another day.

Signed: 

Date: 6th April 1954.

(Leo Skinner)

Witness: Phil O'Donnell.

6th April 1954.

(Phil O'Donnell)

