

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BUREAU STAIRÉ MILITAIRE 1913-21
No. W.S. 1,066

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,066

Witness

Manus Moynihan,
Loo^l Bridge,
Co. Kerry.

Identity.

Captain Rathmore Company 5th Batt'n.
Kerry No. 2 Bgde. 1917 - ;

O/C. Batt'n. Column 5th Batt'n.
Kerry No. 2 Brigade.
Subject.

Rathmore Company Irish Volunteers
(Co. Kerry) 1914-1923.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

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STATEMENT BY MANUS MOYNIHAN,

Loo Bridge, County Kerry.

The Redmond Volunteers were started in Rathmore in 1914. I joined the Irish Volunteers which had split with Redmond. I joined prior to the Rising in 1916. Daniel Dennehy was our O/C. at that time. We had only a few members.

In Easter Week 1916 we 'stood to' awaiting orders to start. It was our intention to take the R.I.C. Barracks at Rathmore. 'No orders came to start and the men returned to their homes.

The Rathmore Company was reorganised in 1917 under Dan Dennehy. Our membership increased to about thirty and we were known as "E" Company, 5th Battalion, Kerry No. 2. Brigade. Humphrey O'Sullivan (now deceased) was Officer Commanding the Battalion.

In 1918 we were preparing to resist Conscription and carried out drilling and training. Con Morley, who was 1st. Lieutenant of Rathmore Company, was arrested about this time. Dan Dennehy, the Company O/C., was a guard on the train between Rathmore and Tralee and when the arrests started he found he could not carry on as O/C. Con Morley replaced Dan Dennehy as O/C., Michael Rahilly became 1st Lieutenant and Malachy Moynihan became 2nd Lieutenant. Dominic Spillane, Vice O/C. of the 5th Battalion, went to Waterford for the Elections and he was arrested on his return. He was replaced by Jeremiah Kennedy.

Drilling and training went on until 1919. In 1919 a general order was received for each Company to collect all arms held by civilians in the area. We collected a few shotguns. It was not necessary to use force at any house. We got one rifle in the collection.

The R.I.C. had a barracks at Rathmore. It was situated in the village beside the railway station. It was the usual garrison of four or five. The barracks was detached, two-storey.

The R.I.C. were active watching the movement of Volunteers and it was this observation which led to the arrest of Con Morley and a man named Sharry who were tried and convicted for illegal drilling. The prisoners were tried in Killarney and when they were being removed from Rathmore a crowd collected and there was much booing and cheering.

When Con Morley came out of jail an election of officers took place. Con O'Leary, who was then Battalion Quartermaster, was responsible for having the collection. He wanted the Company reorganised. I was a native of Knocknagree which is about half a mile from Rathmore but actually across the border in County Cork.

At the election I was elected Company Captain, Denis D. Reen (deceased) 1st Lieutenant and Dan Courtney (deceased) 2nd Lieutenant. The Company was divided into two half Companies and one of the Lieutenants placed in charge of each half.

About June, 1920, a Feis was held at Rathmore and another at Barraduff. The Tans and Military attempted to enter the fields where the Feiseanna were being held. We had our men at the gates. They were unarmed. When the Tans and Military tried to force their way in some blows were struck but they got in. No arrests were made.

About the same time or maybe a bit later we planned a surprise raid on Rathmore R.I.C. Barracks. It was the practice for members of the garrison to sit on the wall outside the barracks in the evening. We picked a time when there was a mission on in Rathmore and it was our intention to join the crowd coming from the mission

pass the Barracks and rush the Barracks from the shelter of the crowd. On the evening selected the R.I.C. remained inside and as we had only a couple of revolvers the job fell through.

About this time Con O'Leary, Battalion Quartermaster, took some of our Company to Killarney with a horse and cart and removed an old cannon from Ross Castle. The cannon was brought to a smith named Din Murphy who had a forge at Newquarter between Gneviquilla and Ballvdesmond. The smith made a platform for the cannon and it was then brought to the Paps Mountain where it was tested by Con O'Leary. The test was a success and the canon was brought back to Din Murphy. It was again tested against an old house but this second test was not so successful.

Din Murphy repaired all the guns brought to him and he became quite expert at the business. We then made plans to attack Rathmore R.I.C. Barracks, using the old cannon. The attack was planned by Con O'Leary, Fred Hugh Crowley, Mick Dennehy, Dave Crowley and myself.

The Barracks was a two-storey stone building built with the gable to the road and the front of the Barracks facing the railway. Steel shutters had been fitted to the windows. The shutters were short, leaving a space at the top.

We blocked all roads leading to Rathmore and placed a section of men armed with shotguns guarding each road block. We had only one rifle in the Rathmore Company but Con O'Leary got four or five riflemen from the Breahig and Scartaglen areas.

The complete plan of attack was as follows :- A land mine was prepared with a piece of piping and this was to be dropped over the steel shutters on the second storey by using a hod (such as bricklayers use) with a very long handle. The old cannon had been loaded into a

railway truck which was sandbagged for protection and the truck was to be manhandled into position on the railway line when the attack was commencing but before the R.I.C. had time to open fire on the railway. There was a Signal box on the railway to the right of the barracks. There was an overhang on the gable of the barracks and in order to prevent the garrison rolling grenades on us over the overhang we prepared a piece of iron mounted on a long piece of timber to block the passage of grenades.

The job commenced by Michael Dennehy, Jimmy Daly and John Moynihan lighting the fuse and lifting the hod, dropping the land mine over the shutter. I blocked the overhang with the iron. Con O'Leary was in charge of the party with the cannon but here a mishap occurred. The whole job depended on timing and the land mine had been dropped over the shutter before the gun was nearly in position so that although the mine exploded killing two and wounding two of the garrison, the garrison which remained was able to recover and bring fire to bear on the railway. The gun never got into position and although the attack held for about two hours we had to retire without capturing the barracks. When the job was over we had great difficulty in getting the cannon away. The Tans came out from Killarney the next morning and burned the creamery.

We had no further activity in the area until Christmas 1920 when we made another attempt on Rathmore. We planned to rush the barracks while the garrison was drinking, but nothing came of it.

At this time the Tans commenced sending out patrols round the village of Rathmore. We made up a basket of odds and ends and left it on the road to see if they would approach it but the patrol did not appear. We sniped the R.I.C. barracks at Rathmore during January and February 1921. It was to keep the garrison on the jump but we heard that a couple of the garrison were wounded. I cannot vouch for the accuracy of the report.

We knocked all the bridges in the Rathmore area and dug the road surface in spots to give the impression that the roads were mined.

About the 4th March, 1921 I went to the Bower between Rathmore and Barraduff for an attack on a British convoy. The Kerry No. 2. Column and a large number of men from the Kerry 2 Brigade under Humphrey Murphy were there together with the North Cork Column under Sean Moylan. The roads were mined. A big convoy was expected but after waiting for two days we moved out of the position. The Kerry No. 2 Column went to Clonbannion with the North Cork Column where they had a fight. I was not there as I had returned to my own area from the Bower.

After we had been at the Bower a lad who was not a Volunteer but the brother of a Volunteer was arrested. He was Eddie Crowley whose brother, Fred H. Crowley had helped to plan the Rathmore Barrack attack. Eddie Crowley was held a prisoner in Killarney and then released. On being released he reported to us that while a prisoner he saw an old man coming in and out to the Tans. He had recognised him as Thomas O'Sullivan, a travelling man. Thomas O'Sullivan was known as "Old Tom". I don't know where Old Tom came from.

When we got the report from Eddie Crowley we went seeking Old Tom and he was picked up by the Knocknagree Company on the North Cork side of the border. He was handed over to me. In the meantime we had picked up two British Army deserters and they were brought to the place where Old Tom was being held. Old Tom had been questioned but he would give no information. But the two deserters when brought face to face with Old Tom identified him as a man who was in and out to the Tans. These events took place about April 1921.

While I was considering what I was going to do Humphrey Murphy, O/C., Kerry 2. Brigade and Jeremiah Riordan, who was then (or later became) O/C. Kerry 3. Brigade, came into my area on their way to a

Divisional meeting. I drove them from Rathmore to Millstreet, County Cork. During the journey I told them of the case of Old Tom. They told me to have Old Tom and the witnesses available when they were returning. They returned in about two weeks and I had Old Tom and the witnesses ready. A Court was set up to try Old Tom. The Court consisted of:-

Humphrey Murphy, O/C. Kerry No. 2. Brigade,
 Jeremiah Riordan, O/C. Kerry No. 3. Brigade,
 Denis Reen,
 Con O'Leary,
 P.D. Moynihan, and
 myself.

After hearing the evidence of Eddie Crowley and the two deserters the Court found Old Tom guilty and he was sentenced to be shot. The prisoner was left in my custody and I was given discretion as to when and where he would be shot. After thinking things over I decided that when I executed Old Tom I would use his body as bait in an attempt to draw some of the garrison out of Rathmore barracks.

I contacted some of the North Cork Column through Con Morley, a former officer of our Company who was then in North Cork. I also contacted Con O'Leary who was at Brigade Headquarters somewhere near Scartagh, asking for a few riflemen and telling him of my intentions regarding Old Tom.

Con O'Leary sent David McCarthy, Pa. (Ned) O'Connor, Denis Prenderville, Mick Learv, Jack O'Connor and Jack Prenderville.

The North Cork men were Con Morley, Denis Galvin, John Vaughan and Mick Sullivan: there may have been one or two more.

We had no officer of the 5th Battalion, Kerry No. 2. Brigade with us. I asked for assistance from my own battalion officers, whom I knew

had rifles, but they were very busy raiding a train at Headford for British Army stores and they could not assist me.

I had decided to execute Old Tom at a place called the Bog Road near the village of Rathmore. The road is clear of fences on both sides and the country on both sides consists of flat boggy land crossed by drains. A breen intersects the road and curves slightly towards the road. The breen is bordered by hedges which give a certain amount of cover and by reason of the curves it was possible to bring the Bog Road under fire while remaining in cover..

I had all my plans completed on the 1st May, 1921. This was a Rathmore Company job and I as Captain of the Rathmore Company was the officer responsible for carrying out the job.. Old Tom was held about half a mile from the spot selected for the job. On the night of the 3rd May, 1921, I sent one of my men, P.D. Moynihan (deceased), to the Presbytery at Rathmore for a priest to come out and give Old Tom spiritual consolation.

About 6 o'clock on the morning of the 4th May 1921, Old Tom was brought to the spot on the Bog Road selected for his execution and three separate shots were fired. His body was labelled as a Spy and left on the roadside.

The ambush party were moved into position under cover in the breen covering the road and we settled down to await developments. Tea was brought to us as we waited. I should mention that the ambush party were in position during the execution. The first people to come along the road were two men going to the bog on a donkey cart. One of the men was old: the other, a younger man, wanted to travel on to the bog and ignore the body. The old man insisted on going to Rathmore to report his find. This would be about 8 a.m.. We were looking at the whole business but we remained unseen.

When the old man made his report at the Barracks in Rathmore the R.I.C. said it was a hoax, but the Tans taunted them with a charge of cowardice. A mixed party of R.I.C. and Tans was organised to investigate.

They advanced along the Bog Road from Rathmore in close formation with the exception of one who lagged some distance behind. We saw them from the time they entered the Bog Road but held our fire. When they approached the body four of them moved to the side of the road and bent over it. I gave the order to fire. It was a fine clean volley. It sounded like one shot. Whether they were hit or not the whole party dropped to the ground. We continued firing. Only one or two of the Tans returned the fire. Three of the Tans rolled off the road to our right and were dead when we found them: three lay on the road dead and two (the only ones who fired) lay just off the road to the left behind a couple of stunted bushes. The member of their party who had been lagging behind ran for Rathmore when the firing started. One of our party opened fire on him and he dropped his rifle and made more speed. He got back to Rathmore.

I ordered my men out on the road and we commenced collecting the arms. We had to pull three bodies out of a drain into which they had fallen to get their stuff off them. We collected eight rifles and about 200 rounds of .303 of each body. We also collected the rifle of the one who got away. Our party dispersed to their own area and all got back safely.

The Military and Tans turned out in force and took the bodies off the road. The following day they came out again and burned four houses amongst them the home of Florrie O'Donoghue and that of a family named O'Connor whose son had been killed in Dublin in 1916.

Along with the Breahig and North Cork men who took part in the Bog Road ambush, the following members of Rathmore Company were there: -

Denis (D) Feen, Dan Courtney, Denis J. Reen, John Lenihan (Baby), John Cronin, Mick Rahilly, Pat Cronin (R.I.P), John Moynihan, Din Batt Cronin.

Before the ambush I had sent the two British Army deserters out of my area to the Barraduff Company and where Battalion Headquarters was then situated. The two deserters were shot later, but I have no knowledge of the date or the reason for the shooting.

After the Bog Road ambush I was appointed Officer Commanding the Battalion Active Service Unit.

I should mention that Liam Lynch visited the Bog Road position during the Truce and complimented me in the presence of the Brigade Officers for the manner in which the job had been carried out.

When we returned from the Bog Road we went into Camp at Clydagh which is a valley leading from the Killarney to Cork Road and extending into the mountain for a distance of about ten miles to near Millstreet, County Cork. The Battalion staff moved into the valley along with all the Company Captains in the Battalion.

While in Camp we underwent all sorts of training and while under training an order was received (whether from Brigade or Division, I do not know) that a couple of Tans were to be shot at every post they held.

I went into Rathmore with Denis J. Reen, Dan Courtney and Denis Sullivan. We went in before dawn and broke into the Courthouse which gave us a good view of the R.I.C. Barracks. It allowed us to cover the barracks with our rifles. Very early in the morning two R.I.C. men came out of the barracks and walked towards the Courthouse. We opened fire, each man firing two rounds. The two R.I.C. men dropped. We got out of the Courthouse and made out of the town under heavy fire from the barracks. We got no

accurate account of the fate of the two R.I.C. men but the garrison kept up a heavy fire for a considerable time.

On the 6th June, 1921, British troops moved from all sides closing in on the Clydagh Mountains. There were thousands of troops engaged with cavalry going through the valleys. The whole of the Clydagh Valley was combed but we got out before the troops moved in and while the round-up was on I felt safe enough to return to our own farm and I was drawing out manure while the British troops were searching. I was outside the circle.

Every man caught in the surrounding area was carried into Killarney. They were carried by rail in cattle wagons. After examination the prisoners were released. Not one of our men was caught in the round-up. A couple of civilians were killed and several wounded. Anyone seen trying to get away was fired on.

When the round-up was over we re-assembled and resumed training.

Just before the Truce I had chanced going home and having crossed the Blackwater was at Rathmore going towards Barraduff. I decided to have a crack at Rathmore Barracks. I took up position, armed with a rifle, overlooking the barracks and fired about ten shots. The garrison opened up and I was in my position for some time before I could get away.

When I got to Barraduff I received orders to go to Brigade Headquarters at Scartaglin. On arrival there I was ordered to proceed to Millstreet to meet Liam Lynch, and the Divisional Staff, to guide them through the Clydagh Valley to a Hunting Lodge which had been prepared as Divisional Headquarters. I got to Millstreet during the night of Sunday the 10th July, 1921, and the next morning I got orders home as the Truce was on that day.

After the Truce a Battalion Camp was set up at Tureenamult, Gyevequilla. The camp was designed to cover all special services. It held for about one month. When the camp was over the officers returned to their Companies along with the men who had been trained in the different branches of the special services and the camp was repeated in each Company area.

On the handing over of the barracks by the British in the spring of 1922, our Battalion Staff moved into Rathmore Barracks and we took over policing the area.

Before the outbreak of the Civil War trouble started in Listowel between the Republican Forces and men who were supporting the Provisional Government I was sent to Listowel with about ten men to support the Republican Forces. We were billeted in the hotel for about one week and we then returned to Rathmore.

Friction started in Rathmore when Denis Galvin who was with the Provisional Government forces came to Rathmore with a lorry recruiting for the Provisional Government. We called out reinforcements from Killarney but after a parley he withdrew.

When the Civil War broke out I took a Column of 30 men by train to Charleville. We then moved towards Bruree. We had a few engagements with Free State troops round Bruree.

The Free State troops were coming in from all sides and we were ordered back to Kerry. We had several skirmishes with Free State troops who were moving towards Rathmore from Killarney.

The Free State troops occupied Rathmore and we moved around outside sniping and pinning them to the village. The Free State troops tried a round-up round Clydagh and we had several engagements heading them off. We took to the hills and we had several running fights as they came after us.

In September, 1922 all our Brigade Active Service Units were assembled for an attack on Kenmare. I moved into Kenmare with my Column from the Kilgarvan side. We had no trouble entering Kenmare. The Free State troops held the Library and the Provincial Bank. I got a guide to take me to a spot near the Bank. The Bank was under fire from our men. I led a party of about eight and we entered a house about two doors from the Bank. We bored through the walls of the intervening houses and then tackled the wall of the Bank. We broke through to the Bank and lobbed in some grenades. The Free State garrison surrendered. The garrison in the Bank then gave in.

We established Headquarters in Kenmare. I marched the captured Free State troops outside the town and released them.

I took my Column back to my own area. We faced a hard winter, sleeping out most of the time. We had little food and many people were unfriendly. At times we had to commandeer cattle for food.

When we commandeered cattle the Free State troops took cattle from Republican supporters as a reprisal. Cattle were taken from my father and Denis (D) Reen's father.

The position got very bad; men were tired and badly clad. The principal thing was to evade arrest. In January 1923, we travelled from Clvdagh Valley across country to Castlemaine. I still had a Column of 30 to 35 men. We travelled by night and moved into position on the mountain between Tralee and Castlemaine. Our job was to prevent reinforcements coming from Tralee. The attack on Castlemaine was in progress when we got into position. The attack was beaten off and in the evening we started back to Clvdagh.

On the first night we only got as far as Kilsarkin near Scartaglin where we rested and the next day we went on to Clydagh.

From the attack on Castlemaine to the 'Cease Fire' we were just able to evade arrest.

(Signed) Manus Moynihan
(Manus Moynihan)

Date: 22-1-55
22.1.55.

Witness: James J. Connor
(James J. Connor)

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