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ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRS MILETA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1109

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

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Witness

Thomas Pelican,
Bedford,
Listowel,
Co. Kerry.

Identity.

O/C. Listowel Battalion
Fianna Eireann, 1918.

Subject.

I.R.A. activities, Listowel, Co. Kerry,
1917-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

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ORIGINAL

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STATEMENT OF THOMAS PELICAN

Bedford, Listowel, Co. Kerry

I was born at Convent St., Listowel, Co. Kerry, on the 22nd August 1900. I was sent to the local national school until I was 13½ years of age. When I left school I served four years' apprenticeship to the tailoring business and continued to work at the business ever since.

I joined the Fianna here in Listowel when they were reorganised here early in 1917. The Fianna had been in existence for some time previous to Easter Week 1916. After Easter Week they were disorganised. The officer in charge at the time I joined was Michael Robert McElligott who was known as Bob. A man named Edward Leahy was an organiser of the Fianna at the same time.

The Volunteers had been in existence for some time before this. After joining the Fianna I took part in drilling and parading through the town and carried messages for the officers of the Volunteers. The officers of the Volunteers at the time were James Sugrue, Paddy Landers and Michael Griffin.

In 1918, about the time of the conscription scare, I was accepted in the Listowel Company of Volunteers. It was Cathal Brugha, who was reorganising the Volunteers then in Co. Kerry, who administered the oath to me. Our membership was approximately 500 men. During this period drilling and parading was intensified. Our drill instructor was John J. O'Sullivan, an ex-Boer War veteran. Up to the end of 1918 and all through 1919 we continued to drill and have field manoeuvres. At the end of 1919 I took part in collecting shotguns in the area.

In March of 1920, James Sugrue, Battalion O/C., with the assistance of Thomas O'Donohue, Battalion Vice O/C., of Reenard, Cahirciveen, who was a Gaelic teacher in Listowel,

carried out an attack on Ballybunion R.I.C. Barracks, with the help of the Listowel Company. On that occasion I acted as scout for the attacking party and members of other companies who were engaged in block^{ing}/roads in the neighbourhood. The attack which had lasted a couple of hours was a failure. Although I was not in the actual attack I remember the arms used in the attack were mostly shotguns.

Later in the year, at the time of the boycott of Belfast goods, I took part in raiding Listowel railway station for blacklisted goods such as bacon, tobacco, snuff, clothing and potatoes which we seized and burned at the railway station.

On the night of November Eve, 31st October 1920, the battalion staff, with the assistance of selected men from each company in the battalion area, planned an attack on Ballybunion R.I.C. Barracks. The attacking party, which numbered about 40 men armed with a few rifles and shotguns, was in charge of the Battalion O/C., James Sugrue. Some time before the attack was due to take place, I took out to Ballybunion ^{from} Listowel some .303 ammunition, cartridges and a number of Mills bombs which I handed over to James Sugrue. This proposed attack never came off. It appears that the garrison in the barracks had been informed of the presence of the I.R.A. in the neighbourhood and opened fire on the attacking party as they were about to occupy positions surrounding the barracks after which the I.R.A. withdrew.

Previous to the shooting of District Inspector O'Sullivan in Listowel on 20th January 1921, by members of the Newtownsandes Company, I, with Thomas O'Sullivan and Michael O'Flaherty of Listowel Company, was instructed by the battalion adjutant - Denis Quille - to report on the movements of the District Inspector. We gave a detailed description of O'Sullivan's movements to Quille after which

O'Sullivan was shot dead by Con Brosnan, Jack Ahern, Jack Sheehan and Dan Grady as he crossed the street from the barracks.

Shortly after the shooting of O'Sullivan a Flying Column for North Kerry, or Kerry No. 1 Brigade as it was known, was formed. A meeting for the purpose, to which I was summoned to attend, was held in an unoccupied house at Garryard, Listowel. The column comprised about 20 men at first and was drawn from each company in the Listowel and Lixnaw Battalion areas. Denis Quille was appointed O/C. of the column. At the same time I was accepted on the column and appointed their dispatch rider. Shortly after the first raid on the railway station for blacklisted goods, the R.I.C. raided my house; they had been informed that I had taken part in the burning of boycotted goods. The result was that I had to go 'on the run' and was 'on the run' when I joined the column.

Around this time I received a dispatch from Michael O'Leary, Brigade O/C. Fianna, in Tralee, to reorganise the Fianna throughout the Listowel Battalion area. I went to work at once and succeeded in forming companies or sections of the Fianna in each company area of the battalion. The total strength of the Fianna in the battalion after its formation was approximately 450. I was appointed by O'Leary Battalion O/C. Fianna. The company officers were as follow:

| <u>Company</u> | <u>Company Officer</u> | <u>Address</u> |
|----------------|------------------------|-----------------------|
| Listowel | Patrick Flaherty | Charles St. Listowel. |
| Duagh | James McDonagh | Duagh |
| Ballylongford | Michael Callaghan | Ballylongford |
| Finuge | James Whelan | Finuge |
| Newtownsandes | Patrick Walsh | Derry, Listowel |

In the company areas of Asdee, Beale, Bedford, Behins, Tarbert and Knockanure there was only a small number of Fianna available and not enough members to form a company. In these areas they worked under the company officers of the I.R.A.

Following the formation of the Fianna in these areas, I continued as Battalion O/C. Martin Howard, Charles Street, Listowel, became Vice O/C., Patrick Corridan, William Street, Listowel, became quartermaster, and William McCabe, Ballybunion, became adjutant.

Shortly after the formation of the column, while they were located at Dirk, Duagh, I discovered that the enemy here in Listowel were preparing for a large scale round-up of the I.R.A. in that area. A Major McKinnon, an officer of the Tans, was to take charge of the round-up. I received my information from a man named John Michael Murphy, who was a Boots in the Listowel Arms Hotel. He had overheard some Tan officers say that they (Tans) were going to Dirk to destroy the column. I at once contacted Bob McElligott, Battalion O/C., I.R.A. He ordered me to go to Dirk immediately and inform the column.

I then discovered that all roads out of Listowel were cordoned off by the military and Tans and that they were not allowing anybody except schoolboys to leave the town during the period. I borrowed a pair of shorts and a school cap from a local boy, which I put on instead of my trousers and cap, and managed to get through the cordon as a college boy from the local college of St. Michael's. I went to Duagh, which is six miles from Listowel, where I contacted James Costello, company captain of Duagh, who in turn informed the column which, upon receipt of the information, immediately moved out of Duagh to the neighbourhood of Stack's Mountain.

The following morning when the enemy reached Duagh the column had gone. The dead body of an I.R.A. man named Bob Browne, who had been on his way to join the column, was later that day found in a nearby bog. He had been shot by a party of Auxiliaries who had raided Duagh that morning.

In this month, February 1921, I was sent by Denis Quille,

O/C. of the Column, to tell Jack Enright, company captain of Ballylongford, to prepare for a visit of the column to the area for the purpose of an attack on a Tan patrol in the village. Having delivered the message I reported to Quille. The column then proceeded to Ballylongford and assembled a short distance outside the village. Quille sent me once again into the village to ascertain the position. When I got there I was informed by members of the local company that 7 or 8 Tans were in a certain publichouse. I returned to the column and reported the matter to the O/C. after which they entered the village and took up positions at Well St.

Some short time afterwards, two of the Tans left the publichouse and approached the ambush position. The column opened fire killing both Tans, after which their arms were seized. While the column were in position I, with three members of Ballylongford Company, took up position between the barracks and the attacking party so as to prevent members of the garrison leaving the barracks. The garrison, however, made no attempt to leave the barracks. I was armed with a Winchester rifle on the occasion, the three Ballylongford men were armed with shôtguns.

Within a month of this attack I, with members of the local company, sniped at the barracks on two occasions. Some time later the column visited Ballylongford again and raided several shops in the village for Belfast goods which were boycotted at the time. The column seized a quantity of cigarettes, tobacco, snuff and clothing which was taken out and burned in the street. At the same time we raided the Post Office and destroyed telephone equipment.

About ten days later I went to Ballylongford on my own to interview a man whom I suspected to be delivering official letters from Ballylongford R.I.C. barracks to Listowel R.I.C. barracks. I met the man, whose name was Maurice Enright-Egan, in the village. I held him up at the point of a revolver and

searched him and found on him four official letters addressed to Listowel R.I.C. Barracks. I warned him that he would be shot if he persisted in helping the enemy. I later handed the four letters to the O/C. of the column.

After warning this man I was under the impression that I had this line of enemy communication destroyed, but the next week I received a message from John Kiely, a member of the Listowel Fianna, who was a telegraph messenger in Listowel Post Office, that he had seen Enright-Egan passing two letters to a sergeant of the Tans in Listowel.

As the monthly reports of the enemy in outlying districts usually came into Listowel on the last or first day of each month I waited outside Ballylongford on the last day of the month and again held up Enright-Egan as he was leaving the village. This time he had no enemy communications on him, so I let him go about his business. On the following day, however, I held him up again and took from him the official monthly report from Ballylongford R.I.C. Barracks together with a letter from a Sergeant Gilhooley addressed to Head Constable Smyth in Listowel. I again warned him, saying that he would be shot if he continued working for the enemy. I should have said that Enright-Egan worked as a carrier delivering goods daily between Ballylongford and Listowel. I handed the monthly report and Sergeant Gilhooley's letter to the O/C. of the column.

A short time later I received a report that a Mrs. Wallace of Ballylongford was friendly with the enemy garrison in Ballylongford Barracks. This woman's husband, who was an I.R.A. man, was at the time serving a sentence of six months in jail for I.R.A. activities. I ordered Patrick Flaherty, company captain, Fianna, Listowel, and James Sullivan, company captain, Fianna, Ballylongford, to have her kept under observation and to report her movements to me. As a result

of the information received from the two Fianna men, I, in company with William Sheehan and Charlie Hanlon of the Listowel Company, I.R.A., held her up between Listowel and Ballylongford and took from her two letters signed by Head Constable Smyth, Listowel. One of these letters was an order to the Sergeant, R.I.C., Ballylongford, to arrest Jack Enright of Ballymackessy, who was O/C. of the local company, and take him to a remote place and shoot him as soon as possible. The other letter was an apology to a lady named O'Carroll for having taken her bicycle some days previously. This letter was a surprise to me as Miss O'Carroll was very friendly with the I.R.A. in the area. I went immediately to Enright and showed him the order for his arrest and execution. He left home at once and went on the run. I then gave both letters to the O/C. of the column. He had Miss O'Carroll placed under arrest in the house of one of her relations. I should add that Miss O'Carroll was a frequent visitor to the R.I.C. barracks in Listowel where she became very friendly with a couple of the Tans. She was kept under arrest until the Truce.

After taking the letters from Mrs. Wallace, she told me that the Tans had promised her that they would have her husband released if she delivered these letters for them and that she had carried similar letters only once before.

In April I was sent by the column to Tarbert to arrange for an attack on enemy forces there. I contacted two local Volunteers named McCarthy and O'Donnell and told them that the column were about to attack a Tan patrol in the village and arranged with them to have the local company act as scouts for the following night.

On the following night a number of the men of the column went to Tarbert where they split into two sections. Quille was in charge of the section to which I was attached. We were armed for the most part with rifles; some of the men had shot-

guns. Having taken up positions at a corner of one of the side streets of the village, we awaited the patrol. After about half an hour a patrol of about ten Tans approached our positions. We had been warned of their approach by one of our scouts. When the patrol was within about 40 to 50 yards of our positions, Quille ordered 'open fire'. We fired about two or three rounds each. The Tans turned and ran for the barracks dragging a couple of wounded men with them. Having reached the barracks, they opened fire, at the same time fire was opened from a place known as the Island where a company of Royal Marines were stationed. The odds against us was too great, so we decided to withdraw.

In the meantime, I worked hard to perfect the Fianna organisation and, by the end of April or early in May, it was working in close co-operation with the I.R.A. in each company area carrying dispatches and reporting on enemy activity generally in the battalion area.

I next received orders from the Column O/C. to break the enemy communication line between Ballybunion and Listowel. We had already raided the mails carried on the train between Ballybunion and Listowel several times, but could never find any communications between the Ballybunion and Listowel R.I.C. and had come to the conclusion that the enemy was not using the ordinary post.

I decided to hold up the train at the end of the month and, instead of raiding the mails, to search at least two people whom we suspected of assisting the enemy in this respect. I called on four I.R.A. men - Dan Brown, Edward Quirke, Pat Enright and Maurice Kelleher to assist me. We held up the train about one mile from Listowel railway station. When the train came to a halt, the guard immediately threw out the mail bags; he was accustomed to our intentions by this time. As he threw out the mail bags, he informed us that five

lorry loads of enemy forces were within 600 yards of us on a nearby road which ran almost parallel to the railway line. We were also aware of this, but we also knew that a bridge on the road near a point where we had held up the train had been blown up by the local company a short time previously and that the enemy lorries could not possibly negotiate a gap in the road after the bridge had been blown.

I ordered Enright to take the guard, whose name was Patrick Boyle, off the train and search him. With the assistance of Brown, Quirke and Kellegher, Boyle was searched. They found on him six enemy dispatches addressed to the District Inspector, R.I.C. in Listowel. Having warned Boyle of the consequences of helping the enemy, we allowed him back into the guard's van after which he took the train into Listowel.

I took the six letters to the O/C. of the column, who opened them. One of the letters was a report on the strength, arms and ammunition in the R.I.C. Barracks in Ballybunion. Another letter contained the names of some I.R.A. men and civilians in the area of Ballybunion and Listowel whom the local R.I.C. sergeant suggested should be arrested. We immediately informed these I.R.A. men and civilians of the enemy's intentions.

In an attack on enemy forces at Toureengarriff near Castleisland, by Sean Moylan of the North Cork Flying Column, an enemy intelligence officer named Major General Holmes was among the enemy killed on the occasion. When Holmes was searched and correspondence found on him examined, a letter bearing the name of Keane of Listowel was found which, apparently, proved that Keane was a spy working for the enemy in Listowel. I understand that the letter was sent to G.H.Q. Dublin, and that a courtmartial was held at which Keane was sentenced to death. The Battalion O/C., Patrick Joseph MacElligott, it appears, received the order from G.H.Q. to

have Keane arrested and executed. He ordered me to go to Listowel area and have Keane kept under observation and to ascertain his movements. Keane was an ex-Detective Sergeant of the R.I.C. and was employed as a fishery patrol officer on the River Feale.

With other members of the I.R.A. I spent some four or five days on the banks of the river near Listowel waiting for Keane to put in an appearance. Eventually Keane appeared and was arrested by four members of the Listowel Company - Michael Flaherty, Charles Hanlon, Tom Sullivan and Maurice Kellegher. I witnessed the arrest from the opposite bank of the river and I left immediately to contact members of the Finuge Company to have him taken over from the men of the Listowel Company. He was taken from Listowel through Finuge, Bedford and Derry Companies and held prisoner at Patrick Broderick's house at Gurtamagouna near Knockanure where he was detained until the following night.

Early the following night I was ordered by Denis Quille to go to Newtownsandes and bring a priest from there to hear Keane's confession. Having brought the priest to the house, Keane made his confession after which he made his Will. He was executed at Shanacool, near Kilmorna, at midnight that same night. I was present at the execution which was carried out by six members of the column under the O/C. Denis Quille. The company captain of Knockanure, in whose area the execution took place, was present as well as the members of the column. The execution took place on 14th June 1921. After the execution, Denis Quille handed me Keane's Will and some pound notes found on him when arrested and ordered me to post them to his daughter in Listowel. I posted the Will and notes in Tarbert.

During June and July, I was one of a section who carried out sniping attacks on Ballylongford barracks on three

occasions. In this period I took part in raiding Listowel railway station where we destroyed telephone apparatus.

Although the Fianna in the area were well organised and working and co-operating with the I.R.A. throughout the battalion area for some months we held no regular meetings until after the Truce.

After the Truce I attended training camps at Bedford, Listowel and Churchill, Tralee.

Signed: Thomas Pelican
(Thomas Pelican)

Date: 7th March, 1955

Witness: John J. Daly
(John J. Daly)

