

W.S. 1.117

DUPLICATE

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1.117

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1.117.....

Witness

John O'Riordan,
70 Mitchell's Ave.,
Tralee,
Co. Kerry.

Identity.

Member of 'A' Coy. Tralee Battalion, 1917 - .

Subject.

- (a) National activities, Tralee, Co. Kerry, 1916-1921;
- (b) Execution of Major McKinnon, 15/4/1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S:2432.....

Form B.S.M. 2

DUPLICATE

48. 6. 1, 117
BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURÓ STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. / 117

STATEMENT OF JOHN O'RIORDAN,
70, Mitchell's Avenue, Tralee, Co. Kerry.

I was born at Boherbee, Tralee, on 17th August, 1900, and was sent to the local Christian Brothers' school until I was 15 years of age. When I left school I served five years apprenticeship to the tailoring trade.

I became a member of the Fianna in the year 1915. They had been in existence here in Tralee for some time previous. The Captain of the Sluagh at the time I joined was Robert Barry. We drilled and paraded all that year and up to Easter Week of 1916. After the surrender of arms by the Volunteers to the R.I.C. after Easter Week of 1916, the Fianna became disorganised. We did meet occasionally in private during the year 1917.

Early in 1918, the Fianna were reorganised in Tralee and surrounding districts by Mike O'Leary, who became Brigade O/C. of the organisation in County Kerry. I rejoined the Boherbee, Tralee, Sluagh at the time. The officers of my Sluagh were Jeremiah Skinnors and Robert Barry. The strength was approximately 20. We met and drilled three nights a week during the year.

In June, 1918, two R.I.C. named Boyle and Fallon were fired on and wounded in The Mall, Tralee, by two members of the Volunteers named Tom McEllistrim and Jack Cronin. It appears that these two R.I.C. were responsible for the deaths of two Volunteers named Laid and Brown in an attack on Gortalea R.I.C. barracks in the month of April. I was told that Boyle and Fallon were armed with revolvers at the time and that it was about then that the R.I.C. started carrying arms openly. The result of the shooting was that

Martial Law was imposed on the town of Tralee for a period of about six months. During the period the Fianna were unable to parade in the open and had to meet secretly in a sports field at Roberbee. It was around this time that I was accepted in the Volunteers by Roberbee Company, which was known as "A" Company, Tralee Battalion.

The officers of the Company at the time were Jack Dowling, Richard Fitzgerald and Richard Sullivan. The strength was about 120 men when I joined. The Company strength was due to the influx of Volunteers during the scare of Conscription earlier in the year. We drilled and paraded all that year. At the latter end of the year a number of Volunteers of the Company went to Waterford to assist the Sinn Féin candidate there at the time of the General Election. Our candidate in Kerry, Austin Stack, was returned unopposed.

In 1919, we continued to parade and drill and received instructions in the use of the rifle. Our instructors were Richard Dowling and William Moriarty, both ex-British soldiers. We had practice shooting at Ballybeggan racecourse which is about two miles from the town. At the latter end of the year I took part, with other members of the Company, in raiding houses in the area for arms. We managed to obtain about seven shotguns.

In March, 1920, previous to the attack by the Ballymacelligott Battalion, Kerry No. 2. Brigade on Gortalea R.I.C. barracks, my Company Captain was ordered by Michael Doyle, Battalion O/C., Tralee, Kerry No. I. Brigade, to which my Company was attached, to demolish a bridge over a river known locally as 'Fitz's river' just outside the town on the main road to Gortalea and Killarney. I took part in this operation which was carried out by the use of crowbars and picks and shovels. I don't remember who was in charge.

At the time of the attack on Fenit R.I.C. barracks on the 2nd June, 1920, by the I.R.A. in charge of Paddy Paul Fitzgerald, Company Captain of Fenit, our Company received orders from the Battalion O/C to block all roads in our area. In our Company area was situated a military barracks known as Ballymullen barracks occupied by a Company of the Lincolnshire Regiment, and the County Jail occupied by the R.I.C. who had a short time before been reinforced by a number of Black and Tans.

Early on the night of the attack we felled three trees across the road and stretched several lengths of wire across the road from one tree to another between the barracks and the town through which the enemy would have to pass to reach Fenit. It so happened that the enemy did not leave their quarters until the attack was over on the following morning. Shortly after, however, they turned out and removed the fallen trees and wires.

Around this time I took part in raiding the railway station in Tralee on several occasions when we seized military stores such as hospital equipment, foodstuffs, bedding, tents, ground sheets, trench tools and waterbottles. Any of this stuff useful to ourselves we retained; the rest we burned. I might add that the majority of the railway men employed at the station were members of one or other of the three Companies of I.R.A. in the town of Tralee. The Companies were known as "A", "B" and "D" Companies. These men always notified the officers of their Companies when military equipment was on the goods trains. In fact if a waggon-load of petrol happened to arrive at the station consigned to a military barracks, the waggon was always shunted to a convenient siding so that the entire contents could be burned without much damage to the station.

On one occasion two of our men, James Mullins and Denis Donohue, were detailed to open a petrol waggon and destroy the contents. Having opened the waggon they burst open one of the large drums of petrol - the petrol was consigned in drums in those days - and applied a lighted match and only escaped being burned to death by being pulled away by their comrades. As it was they were badly burned. I would say that in all we burned about three waggon loads of petrol at the station.

On November Night 31st October, 1920, on the occasion of an I.R.A. attack on a Tan patrol in the town, all three Companies in the town were on duty. I, with about twenty members of my Company, acted as scouts for the attack. We were not armed. The other members of the Company took up ambush positions with members of the other two Companies. Two scouts were located every 200 yards from Ballymullen barracks and County jail to a temporary headquarters of the I.R.A. which had been set up at a place known as "The Gardens" for the proposed attack.

I, with the other scouts, was on duty from about 8 p.m.. Some time before the attack two Tans were captured in the town. The attack itself took place around 11 p.m. As I was not in the actual attack I cannot give details except that I was told that a couple of Tans were wounded. While I was on duty the Military in Ballymullen barracks or the Tans in the County jail did not leave their quarters. The Tans who had been captured as well as the Tans that were wounded were from a different barracks in the town. After the attack all of the three Companies on duty in the town were dismissed. They had been located at different points around the town. Through some misunderstanding the scouts were not dismissed until about an hour after the attack. The two captured Tans were executed early on the following morning.

Some hours later several shops and houses in the town were burned down by the Tans. Most of the prominent I.R.A. had to go 'on the run'. My Company, on the orders of the Battalion Commandant, were 'standing to' awaiting an order to attack the Tans if they continued to burn down the town. While waiting for this order our Company Captain, John Dowling, received information that a public-house, the property of an I.R.A. man named Vale, which was situated in our Company area, was also to be burned by the Tans. Dowling decided to attack the Tans if they attempted to burn down the pub. Having selected about twenty men, most of whom were armed with shotguns, he occupied No. 6 Urban Terrace, which was nearly opposite Vale's pub, and waited for the Tans to appear.

After a time about twenty Tans came along, passed Vale's public-house and proceeded to No. 17 Urban Terrace and from there arrested two I.R.A. men named Stephen and John McCarthy whom they took into a field at the back of the house. From our post at No. 6, we could distinctly see the two men and the Tans, but could not open fire in case we shot our comrades. After some time the Tans released the two men and returned to their barracks. The next day the military took control of the town from the Tans after which the burnings ceased. Our arms were later collected by order of the Battalion O/C., and deposited in a dump outside the town.

From the 1st November, 1920 to the end of December, 1920, at least 30 I.R.A. were arrested out of our Company alone in the town. It appears that a photograph of the members of the Company which had been taken some time previously was captured in a raid by the Tans on the house of one of our members. From this photograph the Tans, with the help of the local R.I.C., identified nearly every member of the Company.

All these arrests caused some disorganisation in the Company. New officers were appointed from time to time, but no sooner were they appointed than they were arrested. Eventually the Company became active again under a new set of officers who were Jeremiah Hanifin, Captain; John Moran, 1st. Lieutenant and Jim Connor, 2nd Lieutenant.

About the month of March John Joe Sheehy, who was at one time Company Captain of my Company, was released after serving about three months in jail for refusing to recognise the Court on a charge of membership of an illegal organisation. Sheehy at the time lived at No. 3 Urban Terrace while I lived at No. 8, a few doors away. He had been promoted around this time to Vice O/C. of the Tralee Battalion. A short time later the Brigade Adjutant, Paddy Garvey, formed an Active Service Unit within the Tralee Battalion. The members of the A.S.U. were composed of men drawn from the three Companies in the town of Tralee and were mostly employed in the town. Sheehy became O/C. of this A.S.U. This unit worked independently of the Brigade Flying Column which had been formed earlier in the year or a short time after the attack on the Tan patrol on November eve, 1920. I became a member of the Active Service Unit on its formation and as I lived only a few doors away from John Joe Sheehy, he always called on me or sent for me whenever anything of importance was contemplated.

Early in April, 1921, Sheehy called on me and informed me that he was anxious to have a man named John O'Mahony, who was known as Boxer O'Mahony, arrested and tried as a spy. O'Mahony, who was an ex-British soldier, had always been friendly with the R.I.C. and was a constant visitor to the R.I.C. barracks in Tralee. He was a native of Tralee but had worked for several years in Belfast.

National Archives Act, 1986, Regulations, 1988

ABSTRACTION OF PART(S) PURSUANT TO REGULATION 8

Form to be completed and inserted in the original record
in place of each part abstracted

- (i) Reference number of the separate cover under which the abstracted part has been filed: WS 1117/A
- (ii) How many documents have been abstracted: 1p
- (iii) The date of each such document: 12 March 1955.

- (iv) The description of each document:
WS1117 Witness Statement John O'Riordan p.7
name of individual

(Where appropriate, a composite description may be entered in respect of two or more related documents).

- (v) Reason(s) why the part has been abstracted for retention:
(c) Would or might cause distress or danger to living persons on the ground that they contain information about individuals, or would or might be likely to lead to an action for damages for defamation.

(These will be the reasons given on the certificate under Section 8(4).)

J. Moloney
Name: (J. Moloney.)

Grade: Col.

Department/Office/Court:

Date: 7 March 2003.

I, with Pat Moriarty who was known as 'Bass' and Michael Sheehy who was known as 'Buddle', arrested O'Mahony in the public house of a man named Dan Paul Rourke in Boherbee, Tralee. He took him to the Rock Street area to a place called Boreen Bawn where a Court was sitting. The Court consisted of John J. Sheehy, Tom Clifford, Battalion O/C., Ardferd Battalion, and other members of the Brigade Staff. Having delivered our prisoner, Moriarty, Michael Sheehy and I withdrew.

O'Mahony was tried, found guilty and sentenced to death. I was one of six men present at the execution which was carried out at Rahonane, Tralee. The actual execution was carried out by an I.R.A. man named _____ on the direct order of John Joe Sheehy, O/C. of the A.S.U. The reason that _____ was ordered to carry out the execution was that the Brigade Staff were afraid of _____ in so far as he had on several occasions discussed I.R.A. matters in the presence of strangers and generally talked too much about I.R.A. activities. So having carried out the execution himself he would have to remain silent about it. The execution took place on the 7th April, 1921, after which O'Mahony was labelled "Soy". The body was not found for two days after.

The Auxiliaries arrived in Tralee around December, 1920. The officer in charge was a man named Major McKinnon. Upon their arrival searches and raids on the homes of I.R.A. men were intensified. Civilians were constantly being ill-treated. McKinnon was responsible for the deaths of two I.R.A. men named Moss Reidy and John Leen on Christmas Eve 1920, in the house of a man named John Byrne at Rallymacelligott. For these two murders the Brigade Staff issued an order for the shooting of McKinnon at the first opportunity.

John Joe Sheehy sent for me and informed me of the order. He instructed me to contact Con Healy, Denis Donoghue, (Boherbee Company) Patrick O'Connor and Paddy Kelly (Strand Street Company) and to arrange between ourselves for the shooting of McKinnon.

We got together and discussed the matter. I was issued with a revolver. Healy, who was an ex-British soldier, was a crack shot with a rifle. He asked for a rifle, saying "All I want to see is just a bit of his head and I will get him". The other three men were supplied with shotguns. The reason Healy wanted the rifle was that he had heard that McKinnon, who was a fearless man, used a steel waistcoat under his tunic and he (Healy) was of the opinion that shotguns would probably be ineffective.

From the moment the order was received relays of scouts assisted us and kept us informed of McKinnon's movements. We were several weeks on his track waiting for an opportunity to strike but somehow he was always protected by a bodyguard wherever he went. There was only one place that he could be possibly got at, and that was on the golf links near the town. He was a great golfer and often played golf with the 'grandees' or local loyalist ladies.

Having made up our minds as to the best place to shoot him we had the rifle, three shotguns and my revolver ~~conveyed~~ ~~conveyed~~ conveyed by the scouts to Kenny's fort, where they ~~were~~ were concealed with stones. We had previously examined the golf course and decided that our best opportunity to get him would be when he had reached the third green. Kenny's fort was only a few yards from the place selected for the shooting.

We had scouts all over the place. It was the 15th April, 1921. I got a signal - McKinnon had started his round of golf.

We seized our arms and approached a ditch surrounding the course. Healy, Donoghue, O'Connor and Kelly took aim. At the third green, McKinnon steadied himself to hit the ball. Healy fired, hit McKinnon in the forehead and before McKinnon hit the ground Healy fired again and hit him a second time. As Healy fired the second shot the other three men opened fire with the shotguns. McKinnon dropped dead, having received two rifle bullets and the contents of three shotguns.

On the golf links with McKinnon at the time were his Adjutant, a man by the name of Valentine, and a bodyguard of Auxiliaries. Immediately the first shot was fired Valentine ran for a bunker falling three times before he reached it. In a subsequent press statement Valentine stated that he had returned the fire of the attackers, which was untrue.

The shooting over, we retreated behind a low wall after which we planted the arms in a hedge and dispersed. We returned to town by a roundabout way and were in time to see McKinnon's body being conveyed in a tender to the technical schools which the Auxiliaries used as their headquarters since coming to Tralee. A few days later McKinnon's body was taken by train from Tralee railway station.

Following the shooting, the Auxiliaries went to Ballymacelligott where they burned down a number of houses and shot dead a boy by the name of Reidy. The proprietors of a local newspaper - "The Liberator" - were ordered by the Authorities to go into deep mourning in its next issue the following Saturday for the death of McKinnon. This they refused to do, with the result that the premises were wrecked and burned down the following Sunday by the Tans.

On the night of the shooting the arms were found by a man named Denis Curran, who was working for a man named Chapman - a Superintendent on the railway and owner of the property on which the arms had been dumped. Curran called the following morning on John Joe Sheehy and informed him about the arms. Sheehy ordered the guns to be removed. I, with two other I.R.A. men, collected the arms that night and took them to our usual dump at Ballybeggan.

Early in June, 1921, John Joe Sheehy sent for Michael Sheehy, Thomas Barrett, Pat Cantillon, Percy Hanifan and I and told us that an ex-British soldier named John Fitzgerald was to be arrested and tried by courtmartial as an agent of the enemy. Fitzgerald had been under suspicion for a long time but nothing definite could be proved against him. The Brigade Staff had at last received definite information that he had identified certain men to the Tans as being members of the I.R.A. and had issued the order for his arrest and Courtmartial.

Michael Sheehy, Barrett, Cantillon, Hanifan and I arrested Fitzgerald in front of Rath Churchyard on the night of 6th June, 1921, took him through the graveyard to Ballybeggan racecourse. He resisted arrest and very nearly escaped. He was recaptured, however, and handed over to members of the Battalion and Brigade Staff who were awaiting us on the racecourse.

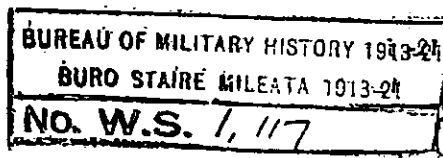
John Joe Sheehy presided at the Courtmartial which was held on the spot. After evidence of the supply of certain names of members of the I.R.A. and other information relating to the activities of the I.R.A. generally, by the prisoner to the enemy, had been furnished to the Court, Fitzgerald was sentenced to death. John Joe Sheehy took charge of the execution which was carried out there and then. The men taking part in the execution used revolvers. The body was labelled "Spy". The execution took place on a Friday night but the body was not found until Monday evening.

From then to the Truce two Tans were under constant observation. These two Tans were held to be responsible for the murder of an I.R.A. man named McCarthy who was a member of the Lixnaw Company. McCarthy had arrived in Tralee one day in the month of March, 1921, and was arrested in the Railway Hotel by the Tans and taken to the R.I.C. barracks in Bridge Street. The next morning his dead body was found in ^{the} Green which is now called the Town Park. We had received information that these two Tans had actually murdered McCarthy and we were determined to get them, but the Truce came along and hostilities ceased.

During the Truce I went to a training camp at Courtbrack, Farmer's Bridge.

Signed: John O'Riordan

Date: 12th March, 1955



Witness: John J. Daly

(John J. Daly)