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ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRG MILIT. HIST.

No. W.S. 1118

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,118

Witness

James Houlihan,
Benmore,
Ballyduff,
Arablee,
Co. Kerry.
Identity.

Captain Ballyduff Company Lixnaw Battalion
Co. Kerry.

Subject.

Ballyduff Company, Lixnaw Battalion,
Co. Kerry 1913-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No S. 2435

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STATEMENT OF JAMES HOULIHAN,
Benmore, Ballyduff, Tralee, Co. Kerry.

I was born at Benmore, Ballyduff, Tralee, in 1897. I was sent to the local National School until I was fifteen years of age. When I left school, I went to work on my father's farm.

I joined the Volunteers when they were first formed in Ballyduff at the end of 1913. We drilled with wooden rifles for a time. Our drill instructor was a man named James Hennessy, an ex British soldier. Our strength at the time was a hundred men.

When Redmond called on the Volunteers to join the British Army, it caused a split in the Company. The majority of the members were against Redmond's policy, with the result that the Company ceased to exist.

When the Volunteers were reorganised early in 1917, I rejoined. Our strength at first was about sixty men. The Company officers at the reorganisation were Patrick Sheehy, Captain, John McDonnell, 1st Lieutenant, and William Creegan, 2nd Lieutenant. We drilled and paraded all that year. In the Company at the time were about fourteen shotguns.

Early in 1918 at the conscription scare, the strength of the Company increased to about a hundred men. After the scare was over, all the new Volunteers continued as members of the Company. During the period, drilling was intensified. In this year, a Sinn Féin Club was formed in the village.

A man named Daniel O'Connor became Chairman, Denis Lynch, Vice Chairman; Thomas O'Sullivan, Secretary; and Patrick O'Connor, Treasurer. The Club was formed by the Volunteers from amongst its members. Funds for the Club were collected through the parish by William Creegan, John McDonnell, Jeremiah Lawlor, myself and others.

During 1919 we continued to drill and have long route marches. In April of this year, my brother, William, and John B. Sullivan were arrested for drilling the Volunteers. They were tried in Tralee and sentenced to six months each - three for the drilling and three for refusing to recognise the Court.

At the time of the attack on Ballybunion R.I.C. barracks by the I.R.A. on the 13th March, 1920, I, with nine men of this Company, participated in the actual attack. The attack was planned and carried out by the Battalion Staff, Listowel Battalion, under James Sugrue, the Battalion O/C. I, with William Creegan, attended the meetings of the Battalion staff at the Gymnasium in the sports-field, Listowel, where the plans for the attack were discussed.

On the night of the attack, all roads around Ballyduff and other Company areas adjacent to Ballybunion were trenched or blocked by fallen trees. Just prior to the attack, William Creegan was ordered by Sugrue to remove an old man and woman from a house which adjoined the barracks. The house formed part of the barracks at one time, but it had been let to the old couple some years previously. Creegan, with the help of John B. Sullivan, James Sullivan and Anthony Ross, all of whom were members of Ballyduff Company,

removed the old couple.

Having removed the old couple to a place of safety, the attacking party took up positions around the barracks. I was in charge of a section of five men located behind a low wall which ran north-east of the barracks from the house of a man named Beasley. The wall was approximately thirty-six feet from the gable end of the barracks. The names of the men with me behind the wall were William Dee, James Slattery, Patrick County, John McCarthy and Tom Barrett. In Beasley's house, another section of fourteen men under Thomas Kennelly of Mooneen, Liselton, were located. A third section of about twelve men took up position in the public house of a man named James Clarke; the public house was directly opposite the barracks. A fourth section, numbering five men, was located behind a low wall which ran from the gable end of Clarke's public house alongside the road. A fifth section of three or four men occupied the house of the old couple, while a sixth section of about six men occupied positions at the back of the barracks; this section included the four men who had removed the old couple from the house. In all, over forty men took part in the attack, while a further ten or twelve men were on outpost duty. Ten of the men were armed with rifles; the remainder were armed with shotguns. I was armed with a shotgun. In addition, the three or four men in the old couple's house had a home-made mine with which it was intended, in the first instance, to blow up the dividing wall between the barracks and the house. I don't remember what the mine was made of, but I believe it was made from the wheel box of a donkey's cart, with the use of gelignite and fuse.

Just as we had taken up our positions, Sugrue sent a man to the men in charge of the mine to say that all was ready and to tell them to explode the mine. The mine failed to explode, after which Sugrue gave the order, "open fire". We opened fire at once, to which the R.I.C. replied with rifle fire, at the same time sending up Verey lights. We continued to direct our fire on the windows - they were not protected at this time by steel shutters. After about an hour, our ammunition became exhausted, so the attack was called off. The failure of the mine to explode was a big disappointment. We subsequently dispersed to our Company areas.

Prior to the attack, a number of men of the Ballyduff Company, whose names were John McDonnell, William Houlihan, Patrick Mahony, Michael J. Sullivan, Simon Mulvihill, Walter Kearns, Jeremiah Supple and William McCarthy, were detailed to take up positions on the roadside between Cashen coastguard station and Ballybunion. Cashen coastguard station was about one and a half miles from Ballybunion R.I.C. barracks. All these men were armed with shotguns and their duty was to prevent the coastguards from going to the assistance of the Ballybunion R.I.C. The coastguards, however, made no attempt to go to the assistance of the R.I.C. When the attack on the barracks was called off, word was sent to these men after which they returned to their Company area.

In the month of April, 1920, a Sinn Féin court was established in the village. Patrick O'Connor of Causeway became President. Other judges were Michael Harrington and Timothy Hanlon. The clerk of the

court was a man named William Casey. Sittings of the court were held from time to time in different farm-houses in the area. The local members of the I.R.A. acted as police, serving warrants, delivering summons and collecting fines. I took part in these activities. The police force proper was not formed until after the Truce.

In the month of June, due to the inactivity of some of the officers of the Company, elections for new officers took place. The new officers elected were: William Creegan, Captain; I became 1st Lieutenant; and William Dee, 2nd Lieutenant.

In the month of July, the Company officers of Ballyheigue and Causeway, which formed part of the Ardfert Battalion, and Company officers of Ballyduff of the Listowel Battalion decided to attack and capture, if possible, the coastguard station at Cashen. The strength of the guards there was fifteen men, fully armed. Having made our plans, we informed Paddy Landers of the Battalion staff, Listowel, of our intention and asked for permission to carry out the attack. Paddy Landers sent a man named Michael O'Brien of Listowel to Ballyduff to say that he would not permit of the attack. It appears that Lander's reason for not permitting the attack was due to the fact that he had not been consulted prior to the plans being made.

Soon after, however, the Listowel Battalion, which by now had become unwieldy somehow, was divided, with the result that another Battalion, which became known as the Lixnaw or third Battalion, was formed.

The first O/C of the Lixnaw Battalion was a man named Steve O'Grady of Lixnaw. The Companies comprising the new Battalion were: Lixnaw, Leane, Ballyduff, Ballybunion, Ballydonoghue, Rathea and Ardoughter.

On the formation of the Lixnaw Battalion, the Staff decided to attack Cashen coastguard station. Selected men from Ballydonoghue, Ballybunion and Ballyduff, under Tom Kennelly, took up positions around the building which was a well constructed stone building. About eight of our men had rifles, the remainder had shotguns; I had a shotgun. I would say that the attacking party numbered about forty men.

Having taken up our positions, Tom Kennelly, with a couple of men, advanced to a look-out building attached to the main building where he captured the guard on duty without much trouble. He took the captured guard around and showed him the men surrounding the building. The captured guard was then ordered by Kennelly to inform the officer in charge of the position. This the guard did, by shouting in to the officer within to surrender as it would be useless to put up a fight. The officer refused to surrender. The guard was taken away and placed in charge of one of our men. Kennelly gave the order, "Open fire". After a few rounds had been fired, the guards shouted out that they would surrender. They walked out, taking their rifles with them which we collected. We had captured five rifles. The guards were then taken to a neighbour's house. after which their furniture was removed to safety. The building was then set on fire. We then returned to our Company areas.

The Battalion Staff under Steve O'Grady now planned an attack on a Tan patrol in the village of Ballyduff for the 31st October, 1920. This attack had been ordered by the Brigade O/C, Paddy Cahill, following the death of Terence MacSwiney on hunger-strike a short time before. Members of Ballyduff and Lixnaw Companies met at Ballyhorgan House which was known locally as Ballyhorgan Great House, situated about half a mile outside the village where final details were discussed. After a short time, we proceeded to the village where we divided into two sections. I was in charge of a section of ten men at Moriarty's haggard, near the centre of the village. The other section under William Creegan took up position a short distance away, on the same side of the street, at a gateway which led into the back yard of a man named Carey. In all, about twenty men took part, of these, one or two had rifles; the remainder had shotguns. I was armed with a shotgun. Early on the night of the proposed attack, all roads around the village were trenched.

We took up our positions at about 10 p.m. on the night of the 31st October, 1920. It was 1 a.m. on the morning of the 1st November when three Tans came along through the village making for their barracks. They had apparently come out of a public house. As they passed my position, I gave the order, "Open fire". The men fired on the spot. One Tan was shot dead; the other two were wounded but continued on their journey. We collected the dead man's revolver after which we withdrew.

The names of the men who took part in this attack were: William Dee, Anthony Ross, William

Houlihan, John Costello, James Sullivan, Peter Sullivan, Pat County, Tom Kearns, Simon Mulvihill, Patrick Mahony, Michael J. Sullivan, John McCarthy, Maurice Mulvihill and Richard Cantlow. All of these carried arms while a number of other men acted as scouts but were unarmed.

That morning eight lorry loads of Tans arrived in the village. After dismounting, they made for my house, first thing. In anticipation of this visit, my brother, William, and I decided to sleep elsewhere after the attack, but my brother, John, decided to sleep at home. After surrounding the house, the Tans broke in the doors and windows, searched the house and found my brother, John, in bed upstairs. They seized him, not giving him time to dress, pulled him downstairs and out to the side of the road, placed him against a ditch and riddled him with bullets. As he was dying, he moaned, after which one of the Tans approached and drove a bayonet through his body. They had previously dragged my mother out on to the roadside to witness the shooting. While this was taking place, another party of Tans were engaged setting fire to a shed full of hay and straw.

Having shot my brother, the Tans proceeded to the village where they looted several shops and set fire to a number of buildings. While all this was going on, they were shooting all around them, firing direct into houses where, in one house, they wounded a girl by the name of Sheehy.

At my brother's funeral, the Tans came to the cemetery so as to prevent a military funeral, or perhaps

on the look-out for members of the I.R.A. who might attend.

Four nights later, the Tans burned down the hay sheds and contents of two Sinn Féin Peace Commissioners, named Timothy Hanlon and Michael Harrington, the Creamery of a man named William Sweeney, the house of an I.R.A. man named Bill Dee, and the house of two brothers named James and Michael Slattery, all of which were located in the Company area.

A short time after my brother's death, a man named Tom Kennelly became O/C of the Lixnaw or 3rd Battalion, replacing Steve Grady. From then to the end of the year, I took part in trenching roads in the area from time to time.

Shortly after District Inspector O'Sullivan was shot dead on the 20th January, 1921, by members of the Newtownsandes Company in the town of Listowel, a Flying Column for North Kerry was formed from members of the Listowel and Lixnaw Battalion area. Tom Kennelly became O/C of the Column. There were no men on the Column from the Ballyduff Company at first.

Tom Clifford, Battalion O/C, Ardfert Battalion, had planned an attack on Causeway R.I.C. barracks for the 2nd March, 1921. On the occasion, William Creegan, Company Captain, was ordered by Kennelly to block all roads in the Ballyduff Company area. I participated in carrying out this order with other members of the Company.

On the day of the proposed attack while the attacking party were located in an old fort, about half

a mile from Causeway, they were almost surrounded by military and Tans. The I.R.A. succeeded, however, in making good their escape. The proposed attack did not take place. There seems to be no doubt that the enemy had been informed of the movements of the I.R.A. and the contemplated attack on the barracks that day.

At the latter end of April, a large-scale round-up by enemy forces took place in the Lixnaw and Ardfert Battalion areas. Every young man in the area was arrested; most of these men were civilians but a good number were members of the I.R.A. They were all taken to Ballyheigue Castle - a very large country mansion which was unoccupied at the time. I was captured on the first morning of the raid, about a mile outside the village. I was taken with others into Causeway village where we were lined up in the street in front of the barracks. One of the Tans having identified me, I was taken out and brought before a Major McKinnon, the officer in charge. This Tan had previously questioned me about the shooting of the three Tans in Ballyduff some time earlier. He then searched me and accused me of being implicated in the shooting which I denied.

After a short time, McKinnon ordered the Tan to take me back to my place with the other prisoners in front of the barracks. The Tan, on the way back, told me that I would not leave Causeway alive that night. I knew I was in for it and made several attempts to get into a public house behind me, from which I could try and escape. Each time I left the ranks, the Tan stopped me. After a while, a funeral passed through the village. Just as it had passed, I, with another

I.R.A. man named Tom Kearns, succeeded in reaching the public house. After a drink at the bar, we managed to get into a field at the back and eventually made our way through some fields to a place named Drumnacurra. We found we were in territory which was almost certain to be raided next day. We remained there until dark and, with the help of some Cumann na mBan, we crossed the cordon back to the countryside already searched and comparative safety.

All the civilians and I.R.A. taken in the round-up were brought to Ballyheigue Castle where they were detained for three or four days. Each day they were scrutinised for wanted men and eventually released.

Ballyheigue Castle was owned at one time by people by the name of Crosby, one-time landlords of the area. It later came into the possession of a farmer by the name of Leen.

Early in May, the Flying Column was divided into the two Battalion areas. The Listowel Battalion Flying Column was put in charge of Denis Quille while the Lixnaw Flying Column came under the charge of Tom Kennelly.

At the end of May, 1921, Michael Pierce, Company Captain of Ballyheigue, on the orders of Tom Clifford, Battalion O/C of Ardfert, with the assistance of men of Ballyduff and Ballyheigue Companies, burned down Ballyheigue Castle. I, with William Dee and James Slattery, took part in the destruction of the building. Having removed doors and shelving for the purpose of making dug-outs, we sprinkled paraffin and petrol through the rooms, after which we set it on fire.

Around this time, a deserter from the British Army, who went by the name of Hathaway, arrived in Ballyheigue and was contacted by members of the Ballyheigue Company. A day or two later, a party of military on bicycles arrived in Ballyheigue looking for him. They did not find him. Michael Pierce decided to ambush the party if they came next day. The attacking party were of the Ballyheigue Company, assisted by William Dee, James Slattery and myself of Ballyduff Company.

We took up positions on each side of the road at the old wireless station at Ballyheigue. In all, about twenty men awaited the coming of the military. We were armed with a few rifles but the majority of the men had shotguns. We waited all day but the military never turned up. Late that evening, the proposed attack was called off.

Tom Kennelly, O/C, Lixnaw Flying Column, which numbered twenty-four men, decided to attack a party of fifteen Tans who usually paraded from Ballyduff barracks to Cashen in extended formation, about three times a week. By this time, I, with four other members of Ballyduff Company, named William Creegan, William Dee, James Slattery and William Houlihan, were accepted on the Lixnaw Flying Column.

The date chosen for the proposed attack was the 6th June, 1921. We took up positions on each side of the road at a place called Knopogue, in extended formation. About ten men were armed with rifles, the remainder, including myself, were armed with shotguns. We waited all day for the Tans to appear but they failed to put in an appearance. That evening, Kennelly

decided to call off the proposed attack.

Around this time, due to ill-health, there were some changes in the Company's officers. A man named Patrick Mahony was acting Captain for a short time. After a while, I became Company Captain; William Dee, 1st Lieutenant; and John Costello, 2nd Lieutenant.

From then to the Truce, activities were very few.

SIGNED: James Houlihan
(James Houlihan)

DATE: 14 - 3 - 55

WITNESS: John J. Daly
(John J. Daly)

