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**ORIGINAL**

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1,138

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,138

**Witness**

Gilbert Morrissey,  
Cahercrin,  
Athenry,  
Co. Galway.

**Identity.**

O/C. Athenry Battalion  
Co. Galway, 1917.

**Subject.**

Elaboration of some points dealt  
with in his earlier statement -  
W.S. 874.

**Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.**

Nil

File No. S.2175

Form B.S.M. 2

# ORIGINAL

W. S. 1138

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1138

SUPPLEMENTARY STATEMENT BY GILBERT MORRISSEY,  
Cahercrin, Athenry, Co. Galway.

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I was born in the year 1887 at Cahercrin, Craughwell, Co. Galway, and was educated at Craughwell National School until I attained the age of fifteen years. After leaving school, I worked on my father's farm.

When I was about nineteen years of age, I was sworn in to the Irish Republican Brotherhood by the late Thomas Kenny of Craughwell. Two of my brothers had already become members. Thomas Kenny was our Centre. Membership was about thirty-five. Meetings were held every two months as far as I can recollect. The thing I remember most distinctly about those meetings is that Kenny always impressed on us that another fight for freedom was impending and that our big aim should be to be prepared for it. He had a wonderful personality and inspired us by his addresses. My recollections of these early days do not go beyond that we were being prepared for another fight for the freedom of our country. I think Kenny's main concern was to keep the spark of nationality alive in us until the opportunity came. This was not so difficult in County Galway because, in a sense, arms were never put away. If the people were not fighting against the British forces proper, they were making a fair stand against its henchmen, the tyrant landlord class, their agents and bailiffs, who were backed up and protected by the Royal Irish Constabulary.

I have already given an account of my joining the Irish Volunteers in the Rockfield Company and my recollections of the Rising of 1916, as far as Co. Galway is concerned, but I would like to add here that many of the Volunteers in Co. Galway suffered a great deal of hardship subsequent to the Rising of 1916. At that time, a great many of them were in poor circumstances. Many of them were bread-winners for their families and, when they were imprisoned after the Rising, the families suffered. The neighbours at that time were not as sympathetic as they became as the fight progressed, and there were no funds out of which any provision could be made towards the amelioration of their conditions. Many of the interned Volunteers belonged to the farming class. At that time, they were not as well-off as they became two or three years later. They could not afford to pay hired men and their crops were left unattended until the general release in December, 1916. They and their families underwent a great deal of hardship which might have affected their later service in the Irish Volunteers and Irish Republican Army, only for the fact that the general public became imbued with their spirit, and the general morale of army and people alike was raised to a high level.

I shall now try to give some details regarding the later period to supplement that which I overlooked in my first statement. I remember that in 1920 there was an order from G.H.Q., through Brigade Headquarters, that all R.I.C. barracks in Battalion areas were to be attacked. I was then O/C, Athenry Battalion. My Battalion was the first in the Brigade (comprising all County Galway at the time) to put the order into

effect. Moyvilla R.I.C. barracks, situated on the main Galway-Craughwell road, about four miles from Craughwell, was the first chosen for attack. We decided this at a Battalion Council meeting; also, our plan of attack which was to mine the gable and rush the building through the breach. The mining was to be done by two members of University College, Galway, Company, to be sent for the purpose by the Brigade Headquarters. The time fixed for the attack was about the second week of June. Volunteers were selected from the Craughwell, Athenry, Clarenbridge, Kilconiron and Derrydonnell Companies - about thirty-five men all told. I gave instructions for their assembly at Coltwood National School on the night of the attack - a Saturday night, as far as I can now remember. I also gave instructions for the blocking of roads leading to Moyvilla, and these instructions were carried out as directed.

The men assembled for the attack were armed with rifles and shotguns. There were about a dozen good rifles, some of them Lee Enfields and some single-shot rifles. Two men from Brigade Headquarters had arrived. I cannot recall their names. A Brigade Staff officer was also present. He was Patrick Callanan (The Hare). He produced a despatch from the Brigade O/C, Seamus Murphy, and handed it to me. It stated that no Brigade Staff officer was to take part in the attack. I handed back the despatch and The Hare left us. This being the first operation of its kind except for the attack on Roscarbery R.I.C. barracks in County Cork, I felt that I should have got more support from Brigade Headquarters than the sending of two men from an Engineering unit. To make matters worse, these two men refused to approach

the gable to lay down the mine unless the port-holes were blocked by poles. I had received no instructions of any description regarding the provision of poles to block the port-holes. Had I known of this requirement, it would have been an easy matter to have had them ready. Two of my men, Volunteer John Morrissey, Cruaghwell Company, and Battalion Staff officer William Kelly, volunteered to approach the gable and help them to lay the mine, but they still refused. In the circumstances, the plan of attack was completely upset, and I had no option but to call off the attack and dismiss the men which I did. Brigade Headquarters never enquired of me afterwards why the attack did not take place. In my opinion, this incident had a bad effect for some time, at least, on the morale of my Battalion. I was very disappointed in having to call off the attack. All roads in the area leading to Moyvilla had been blocked, either by trees or by barbed wire and stones. The barbed wire had been taken from Athenry railway station. It had been consigned to the British forces in the locality. At least a ton of it had been captured. The R.I.C. evacuated Moyvilla in about a week after. It was burned immediately after its evacuation and rendered useless to the R.I.C.

The next R.I.C. barracks selected for attack was Bookeen. I have given an account of the attack in my first statement, to which I have nothing to add. It was after the attack on Bookeen that I selected Craughwell R.I.C. barracks for our next attack. That would have been about two months or so after the attack on Bookeen barracks, which took place on the night of the 1st/2nd July, 1920. The garrison of Craughwell

barracks was then about thirty R.I.C. under the command of a Head Constable. There was a comparatively large garrison in Craughwell R.I.C. barracks since 1909 owing to the shooting of an R.I.C. Constable, named Goldrick, in that year. Brigade Officer Patrick Callanan (The Hare) and I surveyed the position with a view to the attack. The barracks was a substantial two-storey building in the main street of Craughwell, separated from houses on either side of it by a narrow laneway. We concluded that the roof could be broken in, as was done in the case of Bookeen. The plans were advancing and had taken some shape when The Hare was arrested. Another Brigade officer - Sean Broderick, afterwards elected a member of Dáil Eireann - was arrested about the same time. On top of this, my Battalion Adjutant was arrested and, a little later, my Battalion Quartermaster, Mr. James Barrett. I cannot say for certain whether the Brigade O/C, Mr. Seamus Murphy, was arrested at the same time, but I can say for certain that I received no instructions nor any communication whatever from him from about that time to the time of the Truce in July, 1921.

A good while after the Bookeen attack, in the late harvest of 1920, the Craughwell and Athenry Companies of my Battalion blocked the three roads leading from Athenry to Loughgeorge on the occasion of the attack on Loughgeorge R.I.C. barracks. The number of men engaged would have been about thirty, ten at each road block, under the command of the Athenry and Craughwell Company Captains and myself. The road blocks were meant to prevent reinforcements from Athenry going to Loughgeorge. The three parties of

ten were armed with rifles and shotguns, and held positions inside the road fences convenient to the road blocks at points most effective for their defence. The positions were held from about 11 p.m. to 4 a.m. the following morning, but no enemy forces approached them. I cannot recall what measure of success the attacking party had at Loughgeorge. As far as I know, Michael Newell and Brian Molloy of Castlegar were in charge of this attack. The R.I.C. or the Cavalry Regiment stationed in Athenry made no move outwards from the town while we were in position at the road blocks, or next day.

In the first few months of 1921 my Battalion destroyed the following buildings which had been examined by the British forces with a view to their occupation: Castlelambert House, Moyode Castle and Monatigue House. These places were big establishments with a good water supply. We raided the Customs and Excise offices in Athenry and destroyed all the documents that were found in them.

The arrest of Brigade Staff officers Broderick, Callanan (The Hare), Lardner and Nicholls had an adverse effect on the work of my Battalion. The disappearance of Brigade O/C Seamus Murphy, either through arrest or being recalled to Dublin, did not improve matters. The arrest of Battalion officers Jordan and Barrett added to my troubles. The disorganisation caused was remedied as soon as possible. Joseph Stanford of Gort Battalion, afterwards O/C, South-West Galway Brigade, Martin Neiland, Adjutant, Galway Brigade, and I initiated the moves resulting in the formation of the South West Galway Brigade, with J. Stanford as O/C, Martin Neiland as

Adjutant, Daniel Ryan as Quartermaster. The newly formed Brigade, as well as the newly formed Galway South-East Brigade, became part of the 1st Western Division under the command of General Michael Brennan. The new Galway South-West Brigade was comprised of three Battalions, viz.:

Gort - O/C; John Fahy.  
Ardrahan - O/C, Thomas MacInerney.  
Athenry - O/C, myself.

The three Battalions were in a good state of organisation and in working order in the early summer of 1921. I have, however, nothing of interest to relate as regards operations between then and the Truce on the 11th July, 1921.

There were seven Companies in my Battalion in the newly formed Galway South West Brigade. They were along with their officers, as well as I can remember the latter:-

<u>Company</u>	<u>Captain</u>	<u>1st Lieut.</u>	<u>2nd Lieut.</u>
Craughwell	Martin Rooney	Thomas Fahy	John Moloney
Athenry	Christopher Barrett	Michael Walsh	Joseph Egan
Oranmore	Martin Costello	Thomas Furey	Cannot remember.
Maree	Michael Athy	(Cannot remember the Lieutenants)	
Kilconiron	John Hannaffy	Daniel Kearns	--- Kennedy.
Killimor Daly	Edward Burke	Michael Hanlon	Hubert Dillon
Claren- bridge	John Byrnes	Joseph Fleming	Martin Newell.

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Before then, there were thirteen Companies in my Battalion - the seven named above and the following:-



Newcastle  
Derrydonnell  
Cussaune  
Monivea  
Cregmore  
Menlough.

Morale of the men under my command was at all times at a high level, in spite of the fact that on many occasions they were badly beaten by R.I.C. and British forces at night time. As a result of these nightly visitations by the R.I.C. and British forces (the Cavalry Regiment stationed at Athenry), many officers and men of my Battalion had to go on the run as a result of which they suffered great hardship which, in many cases, affected their health for the remainder of their lives. In my own case, I did not, except for a few occasions, sleep in a house during the twelve months from the attack on Bookeen R.I.C. barracks to the Truce the following July. I slept during that time in a canvas tent which was extremely cold in winter. On the few occasions I slept in a house, it was raided shortly afterwards. I had a very narrow escape from being captured while staying one night in a house in Cahercrin. I gave up sleeping in a house after that. The local people did everything in their power towards our maintenance and comfort on all occasions. Their circumstances had vastly improved from those of a few years earlier owing to high prices obtained for their produce following World War I. I think the improved economic circumstances had a very great bearing on the outcome of the War of Independence.

The following is a list of the enemy posts in my Battalion area, together with the approximate number in

each post:-

- Athenry - Cavalry Regiment (eighty) and,  
R.I.C. barracks - thirty  
Constables under the command of a  
District Inspector, Head Constable  
and two Sergeants.
- Craughwell - R.I.C. Barracks - thirty Constables  
under a Head Constable and one  
Sergeant.
- Bookeen - R.I.C. Barracks - thirteen Constables  
under one Sergeant.
- Moyvilla - R.I.C. Barracks - twelve Constables  
under one Sergeant.
- Clarenbridge - R.I.C. Barracks - ten Constables  
under one Sergeant.
- Kilcolgan - R.I.C. Barracks - twelve Constables  
under one Sergeant.
- Oranmore - R.I.C. Barracks - fifteen Constables  
under one Sergeant.
- Monivea - R.I.C. Barracks - twelve Constables  
under one Sergeant.
- Menlough i. .-.R.I.C. Barracks - about ten  
Constables under one Sergeant.

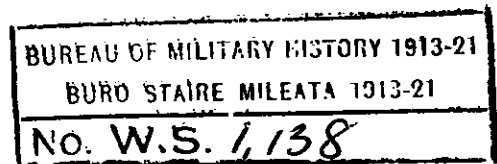
The District Inspector in Athenry was in charge of all these R.I.C. posts, with the exception of Clarenbridge and Kilcolgan which came under the command of the District Inspector in Gort.

I remember some of the Cumann na mBan Captains in my area. Those I remember are:-

Athenry - Julia Mary Morrissey.  
Craughwell - Katie Fahy, now Mrs. Nelly, Gort.  
Killimor Daly - Mairin Burke, now Mrs. Cormican,  
Redford Mills, Kiltulla, Co. Galway.  
Clarenbridge - Gretta Walsh, now Mrs. Mullins,  
Ballyhaunis.

The Cumann na mBan catered for the Volunteers in 1916 and in the later period. They were very active, especially in Moyode Castle in 1916 where, in addition to catering, they prepared bandages and, in some instances, acted as despatch carriers. They deserve to be remembered with gratitude.

SIGNED: Gilbert Morrissey  
(Gilbert Morrissey)  
DATE: 26 March 1955  
26th March 1955.



WITNESS: C. Moynihan  
C. Moynihan