

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILÉTA 1913 21

NO. W.S. 1139

ROINN



COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,139

Witness

DAVID McAlllife (SON MAC),
Knockagno,
Brosna,
Co. Kerry.

Identity.

Captain Brosna Company
1st Battalion Kerry No. 2 Brigade.

Subject.

National activities Brosna,
Co. Kerry, 1915-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S. 2426..

Form B S M 2

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BUREAU STAIRS MILE-1913 21
No. W.S. 1,139

139

STATEMENT BY DAVID McAULIFFE, (Son Mac),

Knockagno, Brosna, Co. Kerry.

My first connection with any national movement was when I joined the Ancient Order of Hibernians (American Alliance). I joined as a young man and remained a member until the Irish Volunteers were formed in Brosna. The Irish Volunteers were organised in my district (Brosna) by Austin Stack and Dan O'Mahony of Castleisland. James Guiney was our local leader. We took no part in 1916 and after the Rising the Volunteers fell away.

The Irish Volunteers were reorganised at the end of 1916 or early 1917 by Garrett McAuliffe from Co. Limerick. Our district adjoins Limerick. Later the area was taken over by Charles and Tom Daly and we were attached to the Kerry Brigade.

In 1917 we were drilling and training our company. I was in charge. The drilling continued in 1918 and in that year nine or ten of our company were arrested for unlawful assembly. Some of the men gave bail, but James McAuliffe and William Reardon were sentenced to a month in jail which they served in Dundalk. We took up the collection for the anti-conscription fund and also a fund which was to be used in the General Election.

In 1919 we continued drilling and training but we were now getting more serious about the business and we were thinking about arms. The order to boycott the R.I.C. was rigidly enforced and in some cases where local residents failed to obey the boycott order and continued to deal with the R.I.C. we fired into their houses. I don't think we

got sanction from our battalion officers for the shooting. We also enforced the boycott of the British Courts and we stopped litigants from attending.

The R.I.C. became active in reply to our activities and commenced raiding houses amongst which was the house of Maurice Hartnett where we held our meetings.

About the early days of June 1920 I went from Brosna to Castleisland with some members of my company and transported rifles, ammunition, bombs, petrol and tar for an attack, which had been prepared, on Brosna R.I.C. barracks. The attack was arranged for 6th June, 1920, and was to be carried out under the orders of Dan O'Mahony and Tadhg Matt O'Connor of Castleisland. Dan O'Mahony was Brigade O/C and Tadhg Matt O'Connor was O/C Castleisland Battalion.

Brosna Barracks was well fortified. Windows were protected by steel shutters and the approaches were protected by barbed wire. It was a two-storey slated building, detached. On one side it was divided from an adjoining house by a passage about 8 feet wide, the gable of the adjoining house running at an angle to the barracks. On the other side of the barracks was the graveyard and Catholic Church. The garrison numbered about 30 armed with rifles, grenades and machine guns. They were also equipped with Verey pistols and there was also a wireless set.

On the day of the proposed attack I got orders to keep the village and the barracks under observation. During the day a party in civilian clothes arrived in the village and called the Sergeant from the barracks. They went up the road with the Sergeant. I informed one of

our officers, who, with other officers, was assembling the attacking party in a field near the village. The British appeared to have knowledge of the proposed attack and were preparing to meet it.

Our O/C had called in men from a wide area and one party coming to the attack by car from Duagh Company ran into a British party which was lying in wait at Feale Bridge on the main Abbeyfeale to Castleisland road. The British party had come from Limerick and they appear to have expected that some of our men would pass by the bridge. Six or eight of the Duagh Company were captured and some of them were sentenced to two years' imprisonment.

Our O/C called off the job and the men were ordered back to their own areas.

Another attack was planned for 19th June, 1920. This attack was better planned and kept secret. In preparation for the attack I was ordered to have all the roads leading to Brosna blocked on the evening of 19th June. The principal points from which danger might be expected were Feale Bridge, 4 miles away, Abbeyfeale, 6 miles, and Castleisland, 10 miles. On the evening of the attack I met Humphrey Murphy, Brigade Q/M, and Tadhg Matt O'Connor at the assembly point near the village. Volunteers were assembled from West Limerick, Castleisland, Cordal, Breahig, Knocknagoshel, Lyre and Currow. I detailed local men to act as guides for the men from the different areas and, as I knew the village, I was ordered to move between the different posts and keep in touch with Humphrey Murphy who appeared to be in charge.

The plan of attack was to occupy the house

adjacent to the barracks and, by throwing bombs and weights on to the roof, break a hole and throw in petrol to get the barracks alight. Other parties were to occupy positions round the village and bring fire to bear on the barracks.

The windows of the house adjacent to the barracks (Curtin's) were sandbagged by our men and houses across the square from the barracks were also protected by having the windows barricaded. The attack was opened by a bomb being thrown on to the roof of the barracks from the adjacent house but the bomb failed to break through the roof and the garrison went into action. The garrison sent up Verey lights and the attacking party in Curtin's house broke out on to the roof of that building and threw two more bombs on to the barrack roof. The further bombs failed to break the barrack roof with the result that it was not possible to bring the petrol into use. The attack continued until daylight on the morning of 20th June, 1920, but the garrison continued to resist and orders were given for our men to withdraw. The party which had been firing on the barracks from a house opposite the barracks on the other side of the squad found difficulty in withdrawing as their way of retreat was under fire from the barracks and one of them was wounded.

When retiring from Brosna, some of the attacking party ran into reinforcements coming to Brosna from Castleisland. A fight took place and our men retired. A party of Volunteers who were holding a road block on a by-road at Glenashrone ambushed a party of R.I.C. coming to the aid of Brosna barracks. It was reported that one of the R.I.C. was wounded.

After the Brosna attack we continued to keep the

roads blocked and in July we got orders to protect the road blocks with parties armed with shotguns to prevent any reinforcements getting through to Rathmore where the barracks was being attacked. The attack took place on 11th July, 1920.

In June 1920, between the Brosna attacks I carried out a hold-up of the pony car carrying the mails from Abbeyfeale to Brosna. The mails were censored but we got no information. The idea in carrying out the raid on the mails was not alone to obtain information; we also wanted people to know that the mails were likely to be raided and frighten anyone who might be inclined to write information to the enemy. After the letters were examined and marked "censored by the I.R.A." they were left at the post office in Brosna during the night.

During the Spring of 1921 we continued blocking roads and, in April 1921, I lay in ambush with members of the battalion at Knockafreghane and at Carrigeen in May. Nothing came our way, so we held up the mails. I also captured foodstuffs intended for the R.I.C. garrison at Brosna. The taking of the foodstuffs was intended to force the enemy to send an escort with the food and give us an opportunity for attack.

In June 1921, I got orders to collect all bicycles in my area and, on the night of 13th June, 1921, I brought the members of my company into the village of Brosna to collect bicycles. I broke the company into different parties and arranged with members of the Cumann na mBan to scout for us. While the search for the bicycles was going on, a party of R.I.C. left the barracks.

One of my parties, consisting of Dick Reardon, David Cahill, Daniel O'Connor and some others, saw the R.I.C. coming. Reardon, who was in charge of the party, called on the R.I.C. to halt. The R.I.C. replied by opening fire and our party replied. The R.I.C. party consisted of two and both were wounded, but they continued to fire. Daniel O'Connor was shot in the body; the wound was serious. We covered the removal of O'Connor and got him out of the village. Miss Kathleen Hartnett, a member of Cumann na mBan, who was acting as scout, was slightly wounded in the leg and removed for treatment in a local house.

We moved Daniel O'Connor to O'Donnell's house north west of the village at Carrigeen. Dr. Hartnett of Abbeyfeale was brought out and he removed the bullet. No arms were lost by either side.

The following day the R.I.C. raided around the district and closed the Creamery as a reprisal.

In July 1921, I was called to a prepared ambush at Knockpogue but nothing came of it.

During the truce training camps were held in our battalion area for the company officers. Camps were also held for special services, signalling, first-aid, engineering and communications. Each Company Captain who had been trained at the battalion camp organised training camps in his own area.

On the outbreak of the Civil War I went to Listowel with a Brigade Column. The town was held by Free State troops. On arrival at Listowel I was assigned to hold a bridge at the entrance to the town.

We held on there until the troops in the town surrendered. We then entered the town and collected the arms from the troops. The troops were released when they were disarmed.

After the capture of Listowel I went to Co. Limerick with the column. I was stationed in the new barracks and later in the library. After being in the library for about two weeks we evacuated Limerick and I returned to Brosna, where I remained for a few days.

I was called up to the column again and we moved to Mague Bridge, near Charleville. The Free State forces held positions opposite us. There was fighting going on in the area but it was our job to hold the bridge. We were there for about two weeks, after which we returned to the Brosna area.

In our own area we had a column of 6 or 7 and carried out sniping attacks on any Free State troops moving in the area. When bigger jobs were planned we were called together with other small columns and acted as a Brigade Column.

In January 1923 the brigade carried out an attack on Free State troops holding Castlemaine. Just before the attack I was called with my group to Breahig where we joined up with other groups, and after about two days we moved off for Castlemaine area. My job during the attack was to hold a road-block to the south of Firies village near Molahiffe. My party did not come under fire during the attack, which lasted for a day. At nightfall we retired and moved to Knocknagoshel, where we remained for one night before returning to the Brosna area.

On the 27th January, 1923, the Brigade Officers planned an attack on Free State troops who travelled regularly between Abbeyfeale and Brosna. The main ambush was laid between Feale Bridge and Brosna. I was posted with my group in position overlooking Brosna village. On the day of the attack a Free State party moved out of Brosna towards Feale Bridge. We let them pass. A larger party was expected to come on cycles from Abbeyfeale side into the main ambush position. The party of six which had left Brosna was attacked by the main ambush party. Capt. Coy of the Free State Army was killed in the attack and three soldiers were wounded. During the ambush a party of Free State troops moved out of the quarters in Brosna to go to the aid of the party being attacked. Another Free State party left Abbeyfeale for the scene.

I had a party of twelve covering Brosna village and when the troops attempted to leave we attacked them and pinned them to the village until the ambush was over. We broke off the attack and moved about one mile from Brosna and were having tea when troops from Brosna came on again.

We opened fire as they approached and moved back to join the party who had laid the ambush at Feale Bridge. We joined them at Knockbrack and got on to the road at Meenletrim where we stopped. Our officers were discussing the line of our further retreat when we came under fire from troops who had followed up. We scrambled off the road and retired towards the main Knocknagoshel - Castlemaine road.

The troops continued to follow us up and we lost

touch with the party. We were on boggy ground without cover and the troops were firing from cover. One of our men, Denis O'Connor, Brosna, was killed, and Jerry Lyons of Knocknagoshel was wounded. We continued to retreat but our party was well broken up by this time. Myself and Denis Keane were cut off from our own party and we were on our own. As the troops came after us they collected any young men they found and made them prisoners. We did not know the position of our main party and we were hampered by not knowing whether the troops or our own party were firing from different positions.

After travelling some miles we came into the view of our own main party, who saw how we were fixed. Our party opened fire on the troops over our heads and gave us cover until we joined them. It was now getting dusk and when the troops came under fire from our party they retreated.

I returned to the Brosna area and we continued the fight by sniping the Free State posts in Brosna. There was no other big fight before the cease fire.

Some of our men had been captured and it was stated that one of them was marked out for death. In an effort to save him I decided to surrender. I went to the Free State troops in Brosna and surrendered my rifle. I was not taken prisoner and three of the prisoners were released as the result of my surrender.

Signed: David McAlliffe
David McAlliffe.

Date: 30/3/55.
30/3/55.

Witness: James J. O'Connor
(James J. O'Connor)
(Investigator)

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRE MILITIA 1913-21
NO. W.S. 1139