

W. S. 1,152
ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1,152

ROINN



COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,152

Witness

Michael O'Dea (Miko),
Main Street,
Tulla,
Co. Clare.

Identity.

Vice O/C.

and later O/C. 5th Battalion Mid Clare Brigade.

Subject.

- (a) Church/^{St.}area Dublin, Easter Week 1916;
(b) Tulla Coy. 5th Battalion, East Clare
Brigade, 1917-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S.2441

Form B.S.M. 2

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1,152

W.S. 1,152

STATEMENT BY MICHAEL (MIKO) O'DEA,

Main St., Tulla, Co. Clare,

formerly O/C & Vice O/C 5th Battalion, Mid Clare Brigade.

I was born in Drumeharley, Tulla, Co. Clare, on 28th January, 1896. My people were farmers and were ~~actually~~ ^{actively} connected with the Land League and "Moonlighters". I was the eldest of a family of eight and received my education at Drumeharley and Scariff National Schools, leaving the last mentioned when I was sixteen years of age to go to work in Dublin as a grocer's assistant.

In Dublin, where I arrived in 1912, my employer was Con McCormack who owned a publichouse in 26, Moore St. He ran in conjunction with this a bookmaker's business, most of the transactions in connection with which were illegal. The employees assisted in both branches of the business and because I had shown a flair for the bookmaking I was not long in the city when the boss allocated to me an area to work and develop. This area extended from Clonliffe Road to Howth.

I joined the Irish Volunteers in Dublin on their formation towards the end of 1913 and in the spring of the following year I linked up with the "Grocers'" Company which had been specially formed to suit the barmen in the city. This company drilled every Sunday morning at Fairview under Captain Robert Monteith, afterwards associated with Sir Roger Casement in the attempted landing of arms off the Kerry coast. I remained a member of the "Grocers'" Company until the Redmondite split in the

autumn of 1914 when the vast majority of that unit went over to the National Volunteers. I remained with the Irish Volunteers and after the split became a member of 'F' Company, 5th Battalion, under Piaras Beasley and subsequently Fionán Lynch.

I had been paying a weekly subscription into an arms fund almost since the commencement of my membership of the Irish Volunteers and I think it was about September 1915 when I had paid for the price of a rifle, I got a short Lee Enfield from the Company Adjutant, Liam Archer, afterwards Chief of Staff of the Irish Army. Around this time also one of the Howth rifles and a .45 automatic were entrusted to my custody by a pal of mine named Jim McKenna who worked in the G.P.O. I kept these guns in a secret hiding place in the bar where I was employed.

Around the end of 1914 I was sworn into the I.R.B. in 41, Parnell Square, then the Foresters' Hall. To the best of my memory the swearing in ceremony was performed by Seán O'Farrelly, who was the proprietor of a publichouse on the corner of St. Stephen's Green West and South King St. Colleagues of mine in that I.R.B. centre were Martin Savage, later killed in an attack on Lord French at Ashtown, and Patrick Moran who was executed in Mountjoy during the Black and Tan fight in 1921. Meetings of the centre were held once a month and the most of the business was devoted to the answering of questions concerning the antecedents of proposed members. There was also a monthly subscription of 1/- paid by the members. A month or so before the Rising in 1916 I received 100 rounds of .303 ammunition at one of these meetings.

The headquarters of 'F' Company were in 29, Parnell Square and I attended drill and parades there about twice weekly. On Sundays also when I was free I took part in route marches and manoeuvres and from time to time had target practice with .22 miniature rifles. Before the Rebellion I also had fired ball ammunition with the service rifle but had not much practice with it.

The first news I got that the Rising in 1916 was in contemplation was from a commercial traveller named Jack McLaughlin whom I knew to be an I.R.B. man and an Irish Volunteer. On Holy Saturday night 1916 he was in McCormack's bar having a bottle of stout and we began to chat. He told me that the Volunteers were going into armed action against the British on the following Monday. I did not treat him seriously and actually laughed at his story. On the previous Thursday night, however, I attended a special parade of my company at the company headquarters in Parnell Square. There was no drill but the parade was addressed by six or seven speakers, most of whom made fiery speeches and referred to the coming fight. These speakers included Ned Daly (executed after the Rising), Piaras Beasley and Fionán Lynch. Instructions were given that each man should parade at the same place on Easter Sunday, bringing with him full kit and a couple of days' rations, and that if anything should happen in the meantime each man should try to make his way fully equipped to Blackhall Place. Definitely we were not told on that occasion that we were to participate in open insurrection on the following Monday.

On Easter Sunday morning, due to the cancellation

notice which appeared in the papers over the signature of John McNeill, I did not report at company headquarters, as instructed, but after Mass went to Flanagan's in Moore St. Four of this family were in the movement and were very friendly with me. I remained there until about 3 o'clock that evening to see if anything would happen, but as nothing did I went home. Next morning I went off to Howth to collect bets for my boss, returning to the city at 2 o'clock, when I had my dinner.

While I was having dinner I noticed that the trains were not running and after I had finished this meal I went on my bike towards O'Connell St. to make enquiries as to what was occurring. Along Parnell St. I ran into the "Lancers" after being repulsed from the G.P.O. I continued my way into Moore St. and taking the guns and ammunition which I had hidden in my employer's premises I went off to Blackhall Place. At Church St. I met members of my own company, with whom were the Battalion O/C, Ned Daly, and Fionán Lynch, both of whom were very anxious to learn how things were going round O'Connell St. and other parts of the city. Having given them all the information I had I was posted to a barricade near the Four Courts. There was nothing happening at this position and about 5 o'clock in the evening I was transferred to another barricade beside Jameson's distillery where things were also very quiet. At 6.30 the same evening myself and two others whose names I cannot remember volunteered to erect and hold a barricade in Mary's Lane. Early next morning we were joined there by one of the London Irish, an ex British soldier. He took over command of the post. Until the following Thursday morning

we were not involved in any shooting. We were getting a bit tired of inactivity and of being continuously stationed at the barricade taking snatches of sleep in our turn. On Thursday morning I left the barricade and went to the corner of the Market building where a friend of mine, Seán Byrne, was on sentry duty. He had been without sleep during the previous night and I suggested that I would relieve him for a while, to which he agreed. I was there about a quarter of an hour when there was a sudden outburst of fire, one bullet striking the butt of my rifle and then ricocheted and wounded me in both thighs and in the abdomen. I was able to walk back to the barricade and from there on to the Father Mathew Hall where we had a first-aid post. My wounds were dressed by one of our own first-aid squad, Martin Conlon, a Roscommon man, who afterwards became a T.D. I was put to bed in the Hall where I remained until the following Saturday night, when along with twenty-six other wounded men I was removed by a group of medical students to the Richmond Hospital. On the way to the hospital we had to pass through a cordon of British troops in North King St., whose questions were answered by the students. None of the wounded were detained or interfered with by the soldiers.

I remained in hospital for three weeks under the care of Sir Thomas Myles, who did not allow any of the wounded to fall into British hands except Edward Martin, a prominent officer of Fianna Éireann. I do not know whether Sir Thomas was afraid lest it might afterwards be discovered that he had shielded such a well-known leader or whether he thought that Martin would not recover, as that man's wound - a bullet through one of his lungs - was very serious.

After my third week in hospital my employer, Con McCormack, called for me one day and got me out. He took me in a cab to his own home in 32, Clonliffe Road, where in the course of about a month I fully recovered from my wounds. I immediately went back to my work and was not interfered with by the authorities.

The Volunteer and the I.R.B. movements in Dublin were in a disheartened and disorganised condition for a couple of months after the Rising. After a lapse of about four months, due to the efforts of Liam Archer and Seán O'Farrelly both bodies were again revived in the city. Under the guise of the Gaelic League, lectures on military subjects were delivered in a number of halls. I attended such lectures in a hall in Parnell Square, and though there was no drilling or parades in my opinion the nucleus of the revived Irish Volunteer organisation was firmly established before the prisoners arrested in connection with the Rising were released from the jails in England. Of course when the prisoners were released considerable impetus was given to the organisation, and the I.R.B., too, was not long in getting back to the important position it occupied prior to the Rising. I remained a member of 'F' Company, 5th Battalion Dublin Brigade, and also of my old I.R.B. centre until August 1917.

In August 1917 as I was not enjoying very good health I went home to Clare, where I joined the Tulla Company, 5th Battalion, East Clare Brigade. The Company O/C was Michael (Goggins) Maloney, who was also a former member of the Dublin Brigade. Tulla was then in the East Clare constituency where in the previous month de Valera was elected as the Sinn Féin candidate after a

bitter contest with the Irish Party nominee, Paddy Lynch. This election had brought hundreds of young men in East Clare into the ranks of the Volunteers and there was a very enthusiastic spirit among all ranks of the organisation. In addition public drilling had recommenced about this time and in this respect Clare, I think, was in the vanguard of the rest of the country. Parades of the company were being held every Sunday and there was also drilling on at least one other night in the week. The Workhouse in Tulla, too, was occupied by a battalion of English soldiers since the Rising and until the Truce in 1921 it remained the headquarters of the military in Clare.

In addition to public drilling which the Tulla Company carried on without interruption throughout 1917, for a few months at the end of that year and in the beginning of 1918 it became involved in a number of cattle drives. These were generally of a peaceful nature in so far as there were no clashes with the R.I.C. or the military. In March 1918 an order was issued by headquarters forbidding Volunteers to participate in any form of agrarian trouble and this order was observed.

A Sinn Féin Club was established in Tulla in August 1917 and though I became a member I did not take an active part in it, nor am I now in a position to give any information regarding its activities.

Towards the end of 1918 an order was received to collect all arms held by the civilian population. Most of these guns, shotguns principally, were held by local farmers and they were generally sympathetic to the

struggle for independence. We got about seven or eight shotguns from these people by simply asking for them. There was one house in the area, Colonel O'Callaghan's, Westropp's, Coolreagh House, Bodyke, which was not approached for guns until early in January 1920. The owner at that stage was very much opposed to the Sinn Féin movement. I am not able to say why his house was not raided for arms until January 1920, but at any rate on the night of 7th January, 1920, a party of Tulla Volunteers under the Company Captain, who then was Tim Byrnes, and which included Paddy McCarthy, Patrick Hawkins, Mick Reidy, John Howard, Jack Hayes, Michael Flanagan and myself raided the place. We were all armed.

The house had a basement and two upper storeys and we made entrance through the basement, where two men were left in charge. The remainder of us quickly got on to the upper storeys by means of a back stairs, and though the Colonel, his wife and a guest named Malcolm had guns at their disposal and had, I believe, every intention of using them too, they were taken by surprise and surrendered without firing a shot. Our capture comprised two revolvers, .38 and .45, 1 rifle, 1 rook rifle and a hammerless shotgun and a quantity of ammunition.

In December 1918 I was one of a party of about a dozen from the Tulla area who went to East Mayo to help the Sinn Féin candidate in his campaign against the Irish Party nominee in the general election of 1918. Our job there was protecting the meetings of the Sinn Féin nominee from the attacks of the Irish Party supporters and also canvassing work. I was armed with a revolver during this

campaign but I never had any occasion to even produce it.

As far as I can remember it was about the commencement of 1919 when there was a general reorganisation of the Volunteers ~~organisation~~ in Co. Clare. The county was divided into three brigades and each brigade in turn had its battalion and company areas recast. There were numerous changes made also in the personnel of the officers as a result. I was appointed Vice O/C of the 5th (Tulla) Battalion, East Clare Brigade, and Michael (Goggins) Maloney became Battalion O/C. I held that post until March 1921 when I was appointed O/C of that battalion. This vacancy arose through the arrest of Michael Maloney (Goggins) and I held the post until after the Truce.

On 2nd April, 1920, I went with 7 or 8 men from the Tulla Company to Bodyke to help in the destruction of the R.I.C. barracks in the village. The operation was under the control of the Battalion O/C and was a simple affair which passed off without any excitement. The building was completely knocked down by using pickaxes and crowbars, and scouts were posted along all the roads leading to Bodyke to guard against surprise by R.I.C. or military.

The first occasion on which I was involved in an armed clash with the British forces in Co. Clare was on the night of the attack on Scariff R.I.C. barracks on 18th September, 1920. This operation was unsuccessful. I would attribute the failure principally to the fact that too much was expected from the destructive force of hand grenades which the East Clare Brigade had received from G.H.Q. in Dublin. These grenades were made in an I.R.A. factory in that city and it was the first time, so far as

I know, that they were used in Clare. Several of the grenades were thrown through the roof of the barracks after the slates had been broken from the roof of the adjoining houses, but none of them exploded. Disheartened by their failure the O/C, Michael Brennan, called off the attack.

My part in this attack was, due to another unfortunate incident and which also may have helped in no small way towards the failure of the operation, not very great. I was one of a party of five or six men, all armed with revolvers and under the control of Paddy Brennan, who were detailed to go along a lane which led into the rear of Duggan's publichouse and which, on the right-hand side facing the Square in Scariff, was next door to the police barracks. Apparently this house was very much patronised by the police and at nighttime they drank there a good deal. Our job was when we had secured an entrance through the back of this pub to hold them ^{up} and make them prisoners. Just as we were approaching the back door one of the party accidentally discharged a shot which alerted the police and caused them to run into the barracks. I would say this occurred about 9.30 p.m. Had we been successful in our mission and captured the police who were about the pub, it would certainly have a demoralising effect on the others and might have resulted in causing them to offer a far less stern resistance in the fighting which began as soon as the police escaped in the barracks and lasted until about midnight. As the police fled from Duggan's to the barracks the O/C, Ml. Brennan, happened to be watching how things were going from a house on the other side of the street opposite the barracks. He opened fire on them

and shot a Sergeant. So far as I know this was the only casualty which occurred on either side.

The next operation in which I took part was the most successful job carried out by the East Clare Brigade during the course of the Black and Tan war. It took place at Glenwood on the road between Broadford and Sixmilebridge and about one mile on the Sixmilebridge side of Belvoir Cross. Though the attack took place in my own battalion area and perhaps more than a dozen men from the unit carried arms in it, I can give with certainty only the names of four - Paddy McCarthy, Joe McNamara, Paddy Quinn and Paddy Hanrahan. They went with me to the mobilisation place at Denny Donelan's of Clounboun where we reported to the Vice Brigadier, Tom McGrath. After that we went on to Loughboro where details of the impending attack and instructions were given by one of the Brennans, either Austin or Michael.

A lorry of police was expected to travel from Broadford to Sixmilebridge and it had been decided to attack it at Glenwood. I have no idea now how many armed I.R.A. men comprised the attacking party but I would say about thirty. Their equipment consisted of rifles, revolvers and shotguns. The party was divided into a number of sections but I forget all about the other sections and can only think of the one to which I was allocated. It included Paddy McCarthy, Paddy Quinn, Jackie Ryan, Jack McCormack, Martin McNamara (The Neighbour), Joe McNamara and Joe Clancy, with Michael Brennan, who had a revolver, in charge. All other men had rifles.

Positions were taken up about 7 o'clock on the morning of 20th January, 1921. Our section was placed

behind a wall about $4\frac{1}{2}$ feet high on a bend of the road at the back entrance to Glenwood House. We had a good command of the road coming from Broadford for a distance of fifty or sixty yards. Another section was placed also inside the wall about thirty or forty yards nearer to Broadford, while the third section was some distance back in the fields at our rear. Scouts were posted on all the roads about the place.

It was after three o'clock in the evening when the scouts sent word that the police lorry was on its way. It came very close to our position before fire was opened. In the first volley the lorry was brought to a halt and it was a matter of a couple of minutes only when the firing ceased. Apart from one or two of the police who managed to get away, all the rest were dead or badly wounded.

With the other men in my section I rushed over to the lorry and among the corpses I picked up a rifle and two revolvers. When all the guns and ammunition carried by the police were gathered and the dead and wounded were removed to the roadside, the lorry was burned. The I.R.A. party moved off to Oatfield and there dispersed. The men who came with me along with seven or eight others remained with Michael Brennan, who took us to Kilmore, near Broadford, where we stayed that night in Vaughan's hayshed and the following day. We remained together for about a week, moving from place to place. Unfortunately we were not strong enough to encounter large forces of R.I.C., Black and Tans, Auxiliaries and military which scoured the countryside, indulging in indiscriminate shooting and widespread burning of houses. At the end

of the week I and the men from the Tulla side were sent back to our own area.

In the first week of April 1921, with James Houlihan, Paddy McCarthy, Paddy and Seán Quinn I joined about twenty-five or thirty men under the Brigade Officers Michael and Austin Brennan and Tom McGrath who were proceeding to Mountshannon to attack a party of Auxiliaries from Killaloe who had been making it a habit to raid the Mountshannon district very often. We arrived at our destination after nightfall and were met by members of the local I.R.A., who made arrangements for food and billets and also supplied scouts while we slept. About 5 o'clock next morning we were roused by the scouts, who informed us that military and police were on the way from Tulla. I was only outside the billet when the enemy forces arrived a short distance - half a mile or so - away. With my companions I went off to join the remainder of our forces in Kilraheera higher up on rising ground to the rear. There Michael Brennan gave orders to take up positions. While doing so we were seen by the enemy troops. It appears that at first they took us to be the Auxiliaries whom they expected to be out also that morning. They came towards us across an open bog when Brennan ordered us to open fire. They instantly halted and took cover. As the positions in which we were in could be cut off at the rear if an armoured car came along a road which ran behind us and as our ammunition was not sufficiently plentiful to engage in prolonged fighting in open country, we were ordered to break off the engagement and to retreat into the mountains. The retreat took place in an orderly and disciplined manner and led by the local men we made our way into Killaneena, Feakle, after a wide detour covering about

twenty-five miles. Again the local I.R.A. fixed up arrangements to have us supplied with food and billets. We had a good night's rest and next day moved off again until we got as far as Glendree. There the party were dispersed and ordered to return to their own districts.

I cannot say if any casualties were inflicted on the enemy troops in this operation. Our party escaped "scot free".

A fortnight or so later I took four men with me from Tulla, all armed with rifles, in response to brigade orders and made our way to Rineanna on the banks of the River Fergus. Here men from all parts of the East Clare Brigade area assembled to ~~dis~~embark by boats to help the West Clare Brigade in an attack on the enemy posts in Kilrush. As far as I can now remember there were about thirty men all armed with rifles in the party. Michael Brennan was in charge. It was well after nightfall when we moved off from Rineanna and about midnight when we landed somewhere along the Shannon on the Clare coast. After landing we made a long march under the guidance of local scouts over country with which I'm not familiar, but eventually halted a few miles from Kilrush at a townland which I think was called Tullycrine. Here we were joined by the West Clare men, eight or nine armed with rifles and a number of unarmed Volunteers. We stayed in Tullycrine until the following night and then the whole party was divided into sections, a couple of the West Clare men being attached to each section. I and the remainder of the Tulla men and a few of the West Clare crowd were led into Kilrush by Bill Hough, who took us to a position overlooking the military barracks at a crossroads two

hundred yards from the barrack gates.

The firing started somewhere down the town and it was not long in progress when the police came out "at the double". We opened fire on them, apparently with effect as they instantly retreated. About twenty minutes later they attempted to come out again, this time more cautiously, but a further few volleys from us again put them to flight. This was their last attempt and, so far as shooting was concerned, the last of this, too, for us. We remained in our position for about another hour and then hearing the signal to retire - a few whistle blasts - we moved out of the town and through the county until we arrived at Cree, seven or eight miles from Kilrush. At this place we got food and rested until the next evening, when we again set off across country. Actually it was a couple of nights later before we finally got back to the Shannon, where boats again met us and landed us at the point from which we had set out - Rineanna. Arrangements had been made in advance for our billeting by the local I.R.A. men, and after a good night's rest the column was disbanded on the following day and the men dispersed to their own areas throughout East Clare.

I doubt if the correct figures were ever ascertained by the I.R.A. regarding the losses inflicted on the British during that attack in Kilrush. At any rate, I'm not able to throw any light on that aspect of the operation.

Though after Kilrush ambushes were prepared in a number of places in the East Clare Brigade in which I was among the men who were to take part, no action followed because of the failure of enemy troops to come along. I am now too confused in regard to these occasions to be

able to give any information of value concerning them. Just prior to the Truce, however, I can remember being one of a column of fifteen men which under David Reynolds and "Greenshirt" Martin, both Corkmen who had come into East Clare, were sent into South Galway to try to stir up things in that very inactive area. All the column had rifles and met in Feakle. Leaving there that evening we marched into Killaneena, where we halted for a rest at a publichouse (Canny's). I can distinctly remember the proprietor standing a drink to the whole column. Moving along the Gort road we halted for the night on the Galway border. In one of the houses the people were very friendly and it was not long until a dance was arranged, to which a lot of the local people came. The dance went on until a late hour when we had a brief rest. We learned from the locals that a police patrol comprised of R.I.C. and Tans frequently came out from Gort towards this district. A suitable position was found along the road which skirts Lough Cutra, which was occupied about 10 or 11 o'clock in the morning. We remained there until 6 o'clock in the evening but the patrol had not arrived when we received word from the Brigade O/C to return home as the Truce was imminent.

Signed:

Michael O'Dea

(Michael O'Dea)

Date:

28.3.55

Witness:

D. Griffin

(D. Griffin)

(Investigator)

