

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1,156

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21
STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,156

Witness

Thomas Francis Meagher,
4 Friary Hill,
Enniscorthy,
Co; Wexford.

Identity.

Member of
North Wexford Flying Column.

Subject.

Enniscorthy Company Irish Volunteers,
Co. Wexford, 1914-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

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ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1.15b

W S 1.156

STATEMENT BY THOMAS FRANCIS MEAGHER,
4 Friary Hill, Enniscorthy, Co. Wexford.

I entered the Postal Department of the Civil Service in 1909. I was assigned to the Post Office in Enniscorthy. I joined the Enniscorthy Company of the Irish Volunteers when it was formed early in 1914. The late Seamus Rafter was Company Captain. The late Pat Keegan was Lieutenant. An ex British soldier, named Paddy Tyrrell, was Training Officer. There were about sixty men in the Company which was known as A. Company. At the beginning, we had no arms. Later, we got some of the Howth rifles. I bought my rifle - a long Lee Enfield - and my uniform.

When the split took place in the Volunteer movement, I remained loyal to P.H. Pearse's belief that Ireland had first claim on her sons and that, in Ireland alone, would Ireland's freedom be won. As practically every man in the Company held the same belief, the split did not affect our Company at all. I was sworn into the I.R.B. by Pat Keegan. I was advised by Commandant Rafter to remain quiet and not make myself conspicuous. He also said that, as I worked in the Post Office, I was in a splendid position to pick up information that might be important to the Volunteers, and to be on the look-out for any such information and to pass it on to him. From this on, I ranked as Intelligence Officer to the Volunteer Headquarters in Enniscorthy. I continued to attend all Company parades.

During Holy Week, 1916, instructions were issued to the Company to parade at Volunteer Headquarters in

Enniscorthy, which was commonly known as Antwerp, at twelve noon on Easter Sunday and to bring all arms and ammunition and twenty-four hours' rations. We mobilised, as ordered, and we were brought on a route march around Vinegar Hill and through the town. When we arrived back at Antwerp, we were dismissed but told to hold ourselves in readiness for further orders. At this time, the atmosphere was tense and I realised that something big was going to happen - that the long awaited day to strike a blow for Irish freedom was at hand. So, wearing my uniform and with my long Lee Enfield and between forty and fifty rounds of ammunition close at hand, I eagerly awaited further orders. They did not arrive until 6 a.m. on Thursday of Easter Week. I went to Pat Keegan's of Irish Street and assisted at removing all arms, ammunition, pikes and our home-made grenades to Antwerp. Later, when the Athenaeum was taken over as Headquarters and the Republic of Ireland proclaimed, we moved all the stuff there. I spent some time on guard duty at the National Bank. I also carried out raids for arms and commandeered foodstuffs and bedding which were brought to the Athenaeum.

About 11 p.m. on Friday, between eighty and a hundred Volunteers were assembled in the skating rink in the Athenaeum. We were addressed by Commandant Paul Galligan who was in charge of the Enniscorthy area. He told us we were going to march to Ferns and attack the R.I.C. barracks there. We arrived in Ferns at dawn on Saturday morning. We found that the R.I.C. had evacuated the barracks. We heard they had retired to Gorey. We took over the barracks and Commandant Galligan established his headquarters in it.

On Sunday morning, Eugene Devereux , Tommy Doyle and I were on duty at a cross-road on the Camolin side of Ferns. A motor car approached from the Camolin direction and flying a white flag. We halted the car. In it were a priest, whom we did not know, and Head Constable Drake, R.I.C. The driver was also unknown to us. The priest said, "It's all right, boys, don't fire! The surrender in Dublin has taken place". I replied, "I am taking no chances. You can tell that to our officer". "Where is your officer?", he asked. "In Ferns R.I.C. Barracks", I said. Tommy Doyle escorted them to Commandant Galligan. I do not know what took place when they met Commandant Galligan. On Sunday we were instructed to return to Enniscorthy. Some went by car; the others marched back. When we arrived at the Athenaeum, we learned that the late Seán Etchingham and Seamus Doyle had gone to Dublin to get verification from Pearse of the order to surrender and that they had an interview with P.H. Pearse, first President of the Republic, in his prison cell and that he had ordered our officers to comply with the order to surrender.

We were addressed by Seán Etchingham, Seamus Doyle, Commandant Seamus Rafter and Captain Robert Brennan. They explained to us that our comrades in Dublin had surrendered and that we must comply with the order received from Pearse to surrender. They said that they (the officers) were surrendering themselves to the British military authorities and that we would be allowed to go free. They told us to look after our arms and keep them safe. Father Pat Murphy, then attached to the Mission House, Enniscorthy, now Parish Priest of Glynn, Co. Wexford, also told us to mind our arms, that Ireland would need them again. I dumped my long Lee Enfield. It was not found. I also helped to dump other guns, etc.

During the next few days, large numbers of the Volunteers were arrested. I was among the number. We were brought to Richmond Barracks, Dublin. One day, I was taken away from my comrades and interrogated by G-men. An R.I.C. Sergeant, named Oliver, from Enniscorthy was with them. They questioned me about my duties in the Enniscorthy Post Office where I had been employed, and also about the part I took in connection with the taking over of Ferns R.I.C. Barracks. I refused to answer any questions

I was then put back into a different room. Most of the prisoners in it were Dublin men. After some days, with a large batch of prisoners, I was deported to Stafford Jail. After some weeks here, we were transferred to Frongoch Internment Camp, North Wales. While I was in Frongoch, I received my dismissal notice from the Civil Service. I was kept at Frongoch until the general release of unsentenced prisoners at Christmas, 1916.

Immediately after my release, I rejoined A. Company and, having been dismissed from the Civil Service for having taken part in the Rising, I had no employment. I spent all my time with Commandant Rafter, Pat Keegan and T.D. Sinnott, making gun powder, grenades, running buckshot and filling cartridges. On the 18th September, 1918, Rafter was engaged on the manufacture of gun-powder at his own home. Whatever went wrong, an explosion occurred and the Commandant received severe burns from which he died soon afterwards. He was given a military funeral. The Volunteers marched and those of us who had uniforms wore them. We also fired three volleys over his grave. It was one of the biggest funerals ever seen in Enniscorthy. It was a fitting tribute to him, which he richly deserved as he was one of the finest Irishmen I have ever known.

Soon afterwards, I was arrested with some others, including T.D. Sinnott. We were charged with "wearing uniforms and firing volleys over the grave of James Rafter". The charge was read out by a British officer, Major Crosby. We were tried by court martial and I was sentenced to one month's imprisonment. I served the sentence in Waterford Jail.

On my release, I took an active part with picked men of A. Company, raiding for arms. I also continued to assist at the making of munitions at Antwerp. Sometime in 1919, Antwerp was raided by a large force of R.I.C. and the premises were closed by "order of the competent military authorities". In the raid, very little was found as it was the custom to remove all articles of munitions, as soon as they were completed, to a dump in my old home.

This dump was constructed by, I think, Pat Tobin, Stephen Hayes, Jim O'Brien and other Fianna boys, and, I must say, no better lads have I ever met. They cut a square in the concrete floor of one of the stables and made a dug-out under the floor. When leaving after putting stuff in, or taking it out, the square of concrete was put back in position and the floor covered with straw, etc. The boys always referred to it as "the stunt". Although my mother's house and premises were raided several times by the R.I.C. and military, "the stunt" was never discovered.

From the middle of 1919 onwards, I did not sleep at home as I had no intention of going back to jail if I could avoid it. After some time, a Volunteer named Kelly, who was a clerk in Enniscorthy Post Office, reported to our Intelligence Officer, Albert Smyth, that he had seen an instruction passing through the Post Office for the arrest

of Frank Gibbons, ——— Gallagher and myself. Smyth advised us to go on the run. Gibbons and I went to an old friend of mine, Martin Kelly of Tombrack, three or four miles outside Enniscorthy. We stayed that night with Martin.

The following day, Martin Kelly drove us in a pony and cart to a small station outside Enniscorthy where we got a train to Dublin. We went to Hughes' Hotel, Lower Gardiner Street, where we stayed while in Dublin. The Hughes' - two sisters and a brother - who owned the hotel were natives of Monamolin, Gorey. I renewed acquaintance with many of the Dublin Volunteers I had known in Stafford and Frongoch, including Tim Roche of Seville Place. I also made friends with Peadar Clancy and Tom Hunter of Talbot Street. Phil Shanahan sent for me one evening and told me that Paddy Wafer, brother of my friend, Captain Tom Wafer, who was killed fighting in the Rising in Dublin, wanted to see me at a place known as the Five Lamps. I went there, and Paddy told me that Hughes' Hotel was to be raided for me and that a Sergeant Oliver of Enniscorthy had arrived at Dublin Castle to identify me. I went back and waited near the hotel and, sure enough, a large force came and raided the hotel. Sergeant Oliver was with them.

Shortly before he was captured and murdered by British forces, Peadar Clancy sent for me and told me to try to get back to Wexford as it was intended to start a Flying Column there soon. I returned to Wexford and made my way to Martin Kelly's, Tombrack.

Soon afterwards, a meeting was held at Ballindaggin Hall. Among those present were the Brigade O/C, Phil Lennon, the Brigade Quartermaster, Pat Doyle, the Piers,

Coolree, and his brother Tom, Jimmie Jordan, Frank Gibbons and myself. Phil Lennon informed us that he had decided to start a Flying Column which would operate in the North Wexford Brigade area. He said he would start with about ten men and build up until he had it at full strength, which would be about thirty men.

The Brigade O/C had information that an enemy supply lorry frequently travelled the Enniscorthy-Ballycarney-Bunclody road and it was decided to attack it. Some of us stayed at Martin Kelly's, Tombrack, and the others at Tom Bolger's, Crowpark, for a few days, waiting to complete the arrangements for the attack. The spot selected for the ambush was about a mile outside Ballycarney, on the Bunclody road, and known as the White Woman's Hollow. The Ballycarney Company was instructed to have a tree sawn almost through and held up with ropes; it was to be dropped when a signal was given that the lorry was approaching.

We occupied positions in extended order on both sides of the road. At about 8 a.m., the lorry came along but, for some reason or other, the tree did not fall. We opened fire, ~~at it~~, but the driver accelerated and soon was out of range. Phil Lennon was in charge on this occasion. Others who took part in it were:-

Frank Gibbons,	Enniscorthy.
Michael Maguire,	"
Tom Roche,	"
Tom Dwyer,	"
Jim Whelan,	"
Thos.F. Meagher(myself),	Enniscorthy.
Michael O'Brien,	Ferns.
S. Pender,	"
O. Redmond,	"
Wm. Kavanagh,	"

J. Maguire, Ballinakill,
Andy Nolan, Boolabeg,
J. Quirke, Ballindaggin.

We retired to Cromogue and remained there for a few days. It was proposed to attack Bunclody R.I.C. Barracks. One night, the O/C, Phil Lennon, took Ned Murphy (since deceased and who had been out in the Rising in Dublin), Maurice Spillane, Paddy Dwyer and myself to have a look at the barracks and the area surrounding it, so that we could decide on a plan of attack. Having completed our reconnaissance, Ned Murphy went to Kelly's public house, to see the local Intelligence Officer, who worked there, and to get information regarding the strength of the garrison, or any other information which might be of use to us. Constable Jones, R.I.C., was on the premises when Murphy entered. Jones approached Murphy, saying, "We are looking for you this long time". Murphy fired at him and shot him dead. Phil and I heard the shooting and we ran towards the pub to see what was wrong. We met Ned coming out of the pub. He told us briefly what had happened. We made our way back to Cromogue and, with the rest of the Column, went to Tom Coady's, Carrigeen.

The Column was now brought up to full strength and Mylie Breen took over command of it. Among the new members were:-

Jim O'Toole, Ballyduff.
Paddy Carton, Camolin.
Jim Kelly)
John Kelly) (brothers) Clonee.
Dick Humes, The Bleach.
Mick Breen
Paddy Kenny, Ballycarney.

Our next move was to attack a party of Black and Tans who each night acted as escort for the mails from Gorey Post Office to the railway station. We were to attack them on the Forty-Foot road which leads to the station. We left Coady's of Carrigeen at night, which was the usual time we moved from place to place. We went to the house of an old farmer, whose name I think was McDonald and who lived alone. It was about 6 a.m. when we reached McDonald's which was a short distance outside Gorey and near Mount St. Benedict's College. The local Company made arrangements for the feeding and accommodation of the Column. We remained there all day, and apparently the enemy got information of our whereabouts. Just before we were due to move that night, one of our sentries reported that there were lights of cars or lorries shining along the road. It was enemy forces all right. We were alerted and took up positions in extended order along the ditches. The enemy had to approach through open fields. When they came within range, we opened fire on them and they retreated to their lorries. We had no casualties except Tom Roche of Enniscorthy who sprained his ankle when getting over a ditch. We brought him with us to safety. Tom Doyle of Coolree was in charge of the Column on this occasion. It was a bitterly cold night, with sleet and rain falling, and we had to make a long retreat to Coady's of Carrigeen without attempting to carry out our original intention, for we knew that, when daylight came, the area would be swarming with enemy forces. The old farmer also left his place, for he knew too what would happen to him when the Black and Tans came round.

Our next job was to attack the Ferns R.I.C. barracks. It was a strongly built, detached building situated on the fringe of the town. It had a valley roof but, as this had

been covered with a cage made of strong netting-wire, the plan to throw bombs and bottles of petrol into the valley had to be abandoned. All windows in the barracks had steel shutters with loopholes in them. The barracks was about twelve feet from the footpath. It was surrounded on the other three sides by a hedged-in garden. The garrison was between fifteen and twenty R.I.C. men and Black and Tans. The Ferns Company was mobilised for this attack. Their job was to block all roads leading to Ferns, to place outposts at all points as blocked and to cut all telephone wires in the area. The Column was divided into four sections, and each section allotted its position, one section to attack the front, another the rere, and a section to each gable end. The task given to the section, with which I was, was to attack the gable end on the Ferns side. We occupied positions behind Haughton's corner. As the wall was about eight feet high, the local Company had been instructed to erect a platform behind it by placing planks on top of barrels, and this had been done. We were instructed to open fire when the church clock struck twelve (midnight). As instructed, we opened fire and the garrison replied. They continuously fired Verey lights. We continued the attack for about two hours. The rank and file did not agree with the order to withdraw but, of course, we had to obey orders. I think Tom Roche was in charge of the attack.

After a few days, we lay in ambush at a place called Kilthomas Rocks for a lorry of R.I.C. and Black and Tans which was expected to come that way. However, it did not come our way. It did travel to Ferns, but by another route. When the information reached us that the lorry had arrived in Ferns, we withdrew.

We were resting at Murphy's, the Bleach, when we got word from the late Tom Brennan, who was O/C of the 4th Battalion and later T.D. for Wicklow, that a lorry of R.I.C. and Tans would be going to the Gorey fair the following Saturday morning and that they would be travelling the main road from Arklow. I assisted Dan Byrne, Coolnaleen, to make a mine. A blacksmith, by the name of Brennan who lived in the district, made the iron casing. The Column moved off that night. We had a long way to go. We travelled mostly through the fields, as we had to give Gorey a wide berth to get to Inch, on the Arklow side of Gorey, near where it was arranged that the ambush would take place. As far as I can remember, where the actual ambush did take place was called Corcannon which is just outside the village of Inch, on the main road to Gorey. We were met by Tom Brennan who had arranged for food and shelter for the Column. Mylie Breen, who was in charge of the Column on this occasion, asked me to have a look at the ambush position with him. It was certainly an ideal spot, with plenty of cover and a fine country behind our backs for retreat.

Before dawn next morning (7th May, 1921), the mine was placed at a sharp bend in the road. The Column took up position in extended order on one side of the road, i.e., the right side when travelling from Inch to Gorey. Our instructions were to fire first at the driver and, when the lorry came to a halt, to open up at the occupants. Between 8.30 and 9 a.m., our look-out man, John Maguire, reported that a cycle patrol of six or eight R.I.C. was approaching from the Inch side. They were in pairs, with an interval of about fifty yards between each pair. We passed this information along the line to the O/C, Mylie

Breen, who decided to attack. I was on the extreme right of the position - the Gorey side - and Luke Byrne, Cromogue, was on my left. The Column withheld its fire until the leading pair had come almost directly opposite my position, and then opened fire. The fight was short as, after the first volley, three R.I.C. were stretched on the roadside. At the moment the attack opened, an old woman in an ass and cart and with a herd of cattle, presumably coming from the fair in Gorey, came round the bend. The cattle stampeded and ran in all directions. The last pair of the patrol had not reached the ambush position when the shooting started and they made back towards Inch as fast as they could. When the firing ceased, a few of us went on to the roadway and relieved the dead Tan and the wounded R.I.C. Sergeant of their shooting arms. The Sergeant asked me to put a bandage on him and, as a soldier, I did so. We suffered no casualties. The official enemy report admitted two casualties, Constable F.H. Duprez, a Black and Tan, and an Englishman, was killed, and Sergeant P. Dolan, R.I.C., severely wounded. The Column made its way back to the Bleach. The following is a list of some of the men who took part in this attack:-

Myles Breen - Tinnashrule - O/C.
John Kelly)
James Kelly)(brothers) - Clonee.
Tom Roche - Enniscorthy.
Maurice Spillane - "
Frank Gibbons - "
Tom Dwyer - "
Thos.F. Meagher (myself) - Enniscorthy.
Jim O'Toole, - Ballyduff.
Ned Murphy - Cloneybyrne.

Paddy Carton - Camolin.
Luke Byrne - Cromogue.
John Maguire - Ballinakill.
John Dundon - Ballindaggin.
Tom Doyle - Coolree.
Paddy Kenny - Ballycarney.
Pat Murphy - Cromogue.
Dick Humes - The Bleach.

The British carried out official reprisals for this attack. They included the burning of a hotel in Courtown, the property of Seán Etchingham, T.D. The other houses burned were those of Fred Vaney, North Parade, Gorey, Paddy Kenny, Ballycale, and James Kelly, Clonee, Camolin.

Many other things happened, but really I cannot recall them all after such a lapse of time. When the Truce came, I say here that I, for one, did not see eye to eye with it, as I believed we had the country at our back and the enemy asking for mercy. I am not sorry that I never changed horses. All I have to say now is, God rest my comrades and all of Ireland's noble dead!

SIGNED: Thomas F. Meagher
(Thomas F. Meagher)
DATE: April 12, 1955
April 12th, 1955.

WITNESS: Sean Brennan (Lt. Col.)

