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W.S. 1,178
ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BUIRO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1,178

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.
STATEMENT BY WITNESS.
DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,178

Witness

Andrew Keaveney, ex N.T.,
71 Stiles Road,
Clontarf,
Dublin.

Identity.

Intelligence Officer Loughlynn Coy. I.R.A.
South Roscommon Brigade.

Subject.

I.R.B. and Irish Volunteers,
South Roscommon, 1915-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S. 2460

STATEMENT OF MR. ANDREW KEAVNEY, N.T. (retired),

71, Stiles Road, Clontarf, Dublin.

I joined the Irish Republican Brotherhood in March 1915. Mr. M. Brennan of Roscommon invited me to become a member when a local circle was being formed in the area at the time. Seán McDermott - one of the executed leaders of the insurrection - was organising the I.R.B. throughout the country. In the summer of that year I met Dermot Lynch at a football match in Carrick-on-Shannon and he authorised me to tour North Roscommon and take selected men into the Brotherhood. He impressed on me the objects of the organisation and the type of men who were to be taken in. In those days and of necessity the organisation, which was very secret, had to be ultra selective in the type of men it took into its ranks.

The rising in 1916 came upon us and found us in a completely unprepared state of action. There were no arms amongst our members except some few small arms and no concrete military organisation. This, coupled with the confusion, brought about by orders and countermanding orders and finally no orders, all left us in a state of bewilderment, with the result that nothing was attempted and the rising was over in Dublin before we could think logically and make an estimation of the situation. I have no doubt that had things as planned taken their normal course and arms been available, the I.R.B. members from Roscommon would have mobilised with the rest of the country and given a good account of themselves.

After the rising in 1916, all I.R.B. activities in the area ceased for the time being. Sometime in 1917 I met Mick Staines in Mountbellew in Galway County and he told then not to swear in any more men into the I.R.B. but to keep the organisation going with the members we already had and to get all our old members active and interested again. As well as taking the

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IRB oath, each man had to fill in a card the details of which I do not remember now, but on which each member undertook to be faithful to the objects of the organisation. Some of our members were arrested and interned after the Rising. I was not.

A company of the Irish Volunteers was started in Loughlinn in early 1918 at the time of the conscription threat. I was instrumental in getting them started. I called a public meeting and spoke to them and a big number of men joined but, when the conscription threat died down, only about one-tenth remained on and the strength of the company fell to about 25 or 26.

During the conscription crisis we constructed several dugouts to accommodate our men should the thing come to a head. We also made an amount of bandages and first aid dressings and a census of food supplies in the area. We had no arms, but we had listed the owners or holders of all shotguns and supplies of cartridges which could be had within a few hours.

The first captain of Loughlinn company was Pat Glynn, a very fine type of intelligent young Irishman, and the 1st Lieutenant was Martin Ganley. I was just an ordinary ranker. Pat Glynn later became battalion commander. He was killed in 1920.

There was a battalion organisation in existence in Castlerea at this time. Dan O'Rourke was the Battalion O/C. The companies comprising the battalion were:- Lissliddy, Moore, Ballingar, Loughlinn, Ballina, Treen and Gortagarriney Arms did not exist except for a few revolvers, but there was a good number of shotguns in the area which could be got at short notice. This was the Springtime of 1918. About this time also the South Roscommon Brigade was organised. Jack Brennan was the first brigade commander.

There was a general election in 1918. In North Roscommon where I lived, there was no election as Count Plunkett was returned unopposed. Castlerea, for election purposes, was in South Roscommon, and there the contest was very hot. Loughlinn where I lived is about five miles from Castlerea.

After the first Dail met and took over the Volunteers as the army of the Republic, all our members were required to subscribe to an oath of allegiance to the Republic and the Dail as the elected government of such. All our 25 or 26 members took this oath without fail and we were then the I.R.A.

The training of the company was done mostly by the company captain. Ernie O'Malley had been to the area and had put all the officers through an intensive course, so they were well qualified to train the company.

When the Dail Loan was started, the local company with two or three others, older people who were good Sinn Feiners, organised it in the area. I was treasurer. Not a single individual refused to subscribe to the Loan, but quite a few had not got the money to subscribe. As well as I can remember, we collected something between £250 and £270. The company captain, Pat Glynn, and I delivered that money with the list of subscribers to Dan O'Rourke and he conveyed it to Michael Collins in Dublin. It was safely delivered I know, because afterwards when it was about to be paid back, I wrote to Headquarters asking if there was a list there and I was informed there was. Subsequently every subscriber got his money returned to him.

Training parades and meetings of the company were always held in secret at this time and at different venues. In the early part of 1920, Ballinagar and Castleplunkett R.I.C. Barracks were evacuated by the R.I.C. and the garrisons transferred to other areas. Both barracks were burned by our men on Easter Saturday night 1920. This was a country-wide operation - the burning of vacated barracks.

Loughlinn Barracks was evacuated later on in the summer of 1920. For some time after the R.I.C. had left, it was occupied by a party of the 9th Lancers - a cavalry regiment of the British army. When the Lancers left it, it was also destroyed by burning.

Ballinlough Barracks was burned on the night of 13/14th of September 1920. On that day, 13th September, Pat Glynn, who lived near me, got a dispatch - most of his dispatches came through me, but not this particular one - that the barracks in Ballinlough was being evacuated. He sent word to the Volunteers there to watch the place and that he would go and burn it that night. I saw him that night going off on this job as I was on my way to attend a meeting to appoint parish magistrates for the Sinn Fein Courts. I met him on the road and he told me where he was going. I just said to him: "Be careful". He and his party of Volunteers had just set fire to the barracks when a party of British military, who were hiding not far away from the barracks, fired a volley and Glynn was shot dead. Two other Volunteers, Michael Glavey and Michael Kane, were also killed. The barracks was successfully burned and the remainder of the Volunteers got safely away.

When the general raid for arms was ordered by G.H.Q., and as a step to forestall an operation for the same purpose by the British military and R.I.C., there was no great excitement in our area, as the people handed over their guns to us on request. There were no shooting incidents whatsoever in the area. We got no rifles or service weapons, only shotguns and cartridges and a few pairs of field glasses.

The Sinn Fein Courts were operated successfully in the area with the result that the British Courts died out completely. There were a few cases of assault and a couple of big cases which might have gone to the higher Courts.

under the British but which were settled locally. The attitude of the people to the Courts was very good. They took to them and abided by their decisions. Local men were the judges in the Sinn Féin Courts. One was Michael Frayne, he was the Chairman. The others were William Madden and Michael Freeman. Frayne and Madden were farmers and Freeman was a blacksmith and small farmer. Solicitors or Barristers did not attend at our Sinn Fein Courts until after the Truce. There were a few Protestant families in the area and they, where necessary, made use of the Sinn Fein Courts instead of the British ones. The R.I.C. went around as usual trying to collect fines for dog licences and suchlike, but could only do so by the threat of using arms. We had no reason to set up places of detention or "unknown destinations" in the area.

Raiding by British military and R.I.C., which was spasmodic up to now, began in earnest in 1920 in our area. The 9th Lancers were then stationed in Castlerea. They started raiding and looking for arms but I don't think they ever got anything. Crawley's, Creighton's and my house were the first three houses to be raided in the Loughglinn area. Crawley came to me and warned me that his house was being raided; as a result of this I was able to burn a lot of documents before they arrived and they got nothing, although they made a careful search. I remember there was a bottle of poteen in a corner and they did not touch it. It was military who carried out the raid and they would not know what it was. Had there been R.I.C. on the job they would have known all right and probably have arrested me for having it.

I was never 'on the run'. Out of that company (Loughglinn) there were only six Volunteers who were really 'on the run'. Two or three were arrested before I was.

Others were living quietly at home and were never interfered with.

In the winter of 1920 two men were shot in the area for giving information to the enemy. One was an ex-R.I.C. man and the other was an ex-British soldier who had fought in the 1914-18 war. Those men had been suspected of assisting the enemy for some time, but definite evidence against them was not available or to be got. Their houses were visited one night by a party of our men dressed in British army uniforms who pretended they were British soldiers and got them to talk freely and to give them information about the Volunteers and Sinn Feiners. This evidence was convincing. The matter was reported to Headquarters who ordered them to be executed which was done. Ganley was captain of the company at this time.

In early 1921 the Tans arrived in Castlerea and established a strong post there. They did not open a post in Loughglinn. Raids and searches now became a frequent and a mild form of reign of terror was started by them. Hold-ups, searches and beatings were a regular and almost daily feature. The military from Castlerea and Boyle also took part in those activities.

Sometime about the end of 1920 an active service unit, or flying column, as they were better known, was started in the battalion area. There were about 10 or 12 men in this unit including four from Loughglinn and two from Ballingar. I think the column was commanded by John Bergin who was a Tipperary man. The column had four rifles which Commandant Glynn had obtained from G.H.Q. The remainder of the men were armed with shotguns and there were also a few odd revolvers.

Glynn got a dispatch one day from Ballinlough saying that there were 400 gallons of petrol in tins in the railway

station there. He made arrangements immediately to seize them and the operation was successfully carried out. For safety the tins were buried in a bog. Glynn sold this petrol from time to time and with the money he got for it he purchased four rifles and some hand grenades from G.H.Q. When the column started they had these four rifles. Petrol at this time was scarce commodity and what was of it was distributed in tins. There were no petrol filling stations then as we see them today.

The column was billeted and fed by the people in the areas where they put up. The first casualty to the column occurred outside Loughlinn at a house owned by Mrs. Mannion - a house where they were always welcome and were always put up. The house was surrounded by the enemy who, apparently, had traced them there. There were only four members of the column there at the time and they put up a fight until all their ammunition was gone. One soldier was killed and one of the four Volunteers was wounded. The other three Volunteers were captured. They were: the O/C. of the column, John Bergin, Stephen McDermott and Joe Satchwell, who was an ex-British soldier. The wounded man was Thomas Scally and he managed to escape. When he was wounded he fell into a drain. The wound was in his leg but, lucky for him, did not touch a bone and he was able to crawl along the drain without being observed and got away safely.

The enemy force, consisting of military and Tans held a Drumhead Courtmartial on the three captured Volunteers. They shot Bergin and McDermott there and then and took away Satchwell as a prisoner. Satchwell had also been wounded in the foot. The fact that Satchwell had served in the British army was the thing that saved him from being shot out of hand also. The Volunteers lost all the arms they had and

this in itself, apart from the tragic deaths of our men, was an awful setback to us.

Sometime afterwards, about May 1921, two members of the column went to another house. The two of them were in bed when enemy forces surrounded the house. They tried to put up a fight but were armed only with revolvers and both were shot in bed. One of them, Michael Carty, was shot dead, and the other, Peter Shannon, was severely wounded and made prisoner. Peter Shannon is alive today. He received a revolver bullet through his head. The bullet entered in front of his left ear and made an exit wound in his neck on the other side.

Some time later still, on the other side of Castlerea at Cloonsuck, three members of the column were staying at Vaughan's house and the house was surrounded by the enemy. Edward Shannon and John Vaughan were shot dead. Thomas Vaughan and Martin Ganley, who was there also, were taken prisoner. This took place in June 1921. Bad luck seemed to attend the column right from the start and it was surprising that the morale of the Volunteers in the area did not crack up under the circumstances. Despite these happenings, the rank and file remained steadfast and were ready whenever called upon. On the face of it, it looked as if enemy agents were active and that the men were given a way or it might have been just a spasm of good luck for the enemy. I cannot say. It looked more like good luck, as for the few cases in which they were successful, they drew blank dozens of times.

In April 1921 a party of military and Tans from Boyle and Castlerea swooped down on the school in Loughlinn where I was teaching at the time. They had surrounded the whole area and the only capture for that whole day was myself. In the round-up they had captured several very active Volunteers from the East Mayo Brigade who were in the area,

but they did not know them and released them again. In fact, the Vice-Commandant of the East Mayo Brigade was there beside me, but they did not know him. I was not abused in any way when I was arrested.

I was taken to the R.I.C. and Tans' Barracks in Boyle in a lorry. I spent three days there in a cell which had no window. The concrete floor of the cell was wet and filthy. There was no bed and I got no exercise and there were no sanitary arrangements whatsoever. The cell was just like a very bad pig-sty and one had to use corners when necessary. Food was taken into me from a hotel. When I was arrested they found some money in my pocket and I was made pay for the food with this.

After three days I was handed over to the military at the military barracks in Boyle, and put in the Guardroom. I was there for a fortnight. Here I had a boarded floor but no bed. There was another prisoner here with me. He was John Tansey, an oldish man. The place was full of rats and they walked over us all night. We were now changed from the Guardroom to a shed where there were about 60 other prisoners. The shed was about 70 ft. long and about 9 ft. wide and had a zinc roof about 8 ft. high. There was a door at the end and two windows in the roof. The floor was of ordinary clay. The shed had been built and used as a miniature rifle range. We were given blankets here and the rest of the bed consisted of a very small quantity of straw in sacks. The blankets were of the army issue type and were plentiful enough. The whole place was crawling with vermin.

The food we received was not too bad, about the same as given to the soldiers or "Tommys" as they were known. We were brought to the Wash House at about 5 o'clock each morning under escort. To satisfy certain needs of nature they had bored a hole in the wall of the shed. There was a trench about 3-ft. deep across the floor of the shed near one end

which was used as a latrine at night. Our drinking water came from the river through which passed all the sewage of the town.

Parcels were allowed to be sent in to us until there were some escapes and then they were stopped. Exercise was only very seldom and then only for half an hour. Often a week and sometimes three weeks went by without we being allowed out to exercise. A piece of white cloth about six inches square was sewn to the back of each prisoner's coat between his shoulders. This, our jailers informed us, would be used as an aiming mark should we try to escape.

Our first successful escape was that of James Molloy. He was about to be courtmartialled on a Tuesday for the shooting of a policeman. We pushed him out through the wash-house window at 5 o'clock one morning and he was dropped into the river below - a fall of about 12 feet. The river was very low at this time owing to the very dry summer. John Downes of Ballaghaderreen let him down on a rope. There was no assistance from outside. The arrangements for his escape were made by James Fehilly, Martin Killilea, Peter Heslin and Philip Murray - fellow prisoners. We expected that Molloy would be missed on our return from the wash house, which would give him an advantage of only 10 minutes, but the sentries disagreed on the numbers that went down to the wash house and the numbers that came back and so he was not missed until 2 o'clock in the afternoon when his mother came to see him about his courtmartial. He made good his escape and was never captured afterwards.

Things were tightened up then for the prisoners - no more parcels and no exercise. The food became worse. There was one dinner plate for every four prisoners and a jam pot for tea for every two.

About a week or so later, Michael Dockery escaped. He was Brigade O/C North Roscommon and was in one of the detention cells. The escape in this case was carried out with the aid of one of the military police - Corporal McLachlin. This corporal was a London man and was always sympathetic to us for the reason that he had been a prisoner of war himself in Germany for a number of years.

Conditions became worse and worse now for us prisoners - threats of all kinds were used to frighten us and we were counted in bed about three times every night. Each man had to raise his leg when the counting officer came to his bed. This was, I suppose, to ensure that it was not a dummy man was in the bed.

An outbreak of typhoid fever amongst the prisoners now occurred to add to our difficult situation. The place was visited by a military doctor from Headquarters in Dublin. I never heard his name, but he was a Maltese and was practically a black man. Most of the prisoners were now transferred to the internment camp in the Curragh, Co. Kildare, and the rest were sent to Sligo Jail. This took place on 8th or 9th July, shortly before the Truce.

I was sent to the Rath Camp in the Curragh. Conditions there were much improved. There was plenty of fresh air and water at least, although the food, if anything, was worse.

I was there until I was released at Christmas 1921. There was some excitement there over escapes also. I think the first man to escape was Rory O'Connor. Dr. Conlon escaped in a refuse cart covered with a pile of refuse. Two or three others escaped in a bread car, and a big crowd of about forty prisoners got away through a tunnel they had constructed.

In June 1920, the Lancers had an outpost at Lisallway. Plans were made by our battalion to attack this outpost, but before they matured the Lancers evacuated it. When the

Lancers from this post were proceeding into Castlerea on their withdrawal, one of a party of them who were mounted on cycles got a puncture. He went into a forge on the roadside and another man of the party was told off to wait for him. There was a man at the forge getting a horse shod at the time who happened to be Brennan, who was O/C. of the South Roscommon Brigade at the time. He had a revolver on him and disarmed the two cyclist soldiers. This was a one man job. He told me afterwards that he thought one of them was glad to be handing over his rifle as he smiled happily while doing so.

In June 1920, also, a number of Volunteers in charge of Dan O'Rourke held up a train at Ballymoe station and removed from it an amount of clothing, shoes and bread which was being consigned to the military in Castlerea. They kept some of these things and destroyed the rest.

In April of 1921 a party of Volunteers entered Castlerea with the intention of shooting up any British forces found on the streets there. When three or four soldiers emerged from a publichouse they were fired on by the Volunteers. One soldier was killed and one civilian - a Mrs. Donagh, who unfortunately came into the line of fire - was also killed. All the Volunteers got safely away.

The only attempt to make munitions in the area was the construction of concrete mines, a crude form of bomb made from the boxes of cartwheels and water pipes, and the filling of shotgun cartridges with slugs which were made locally.

I acted as Intelligence officer in the Loughglinn area. This was not an enemy garrison and, as such, did not give scope much scope for any intelligence work - just ordinary spotting. It was only in raids and round-ups and suchlike

we saw the enemy. The people running the Post Office in the town were neutral and we got no assistance from them; not being a garrison town, they would not have much information to give.

Signed: A Keaveney

(A. Keaveney)

Date: 3rd June 55.

3rd June 1955.

Witness: Matthew Barry Comd't.

Matthew Barry, Comd't.

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