

W. S. 1,182

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BUREAU STAIRS MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1182

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

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,182

Witness

George C. Kiely,
Ballynabanogue North,
Kilmacthomas,
Co. Waterford.

Identity.

Adjutant, West
Waterford Flying Column.

Subject.

National activities, West Waterford,
1914-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S.2461

Form B.S.M. 2

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STATEMENT BY GEORGE C. KIELY.

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No. **W.S.** 1182

Ballynabanogue North, Kilmacthomas, Co. Waterford.

I was born on 8th January 1896 at Abbeyside, Dungarvan, Co. Waterford, and am the son of an evicted farm tenant.

I was associated with the Gaelic Athletic Association during my youth and first took an interest in national affairs when The O'Rahilly, with Eoin MacNeill, came to Dungarvan about the year 1913 and addressed a meeting asking young men to join the Irish Volunteers. At that meeting I handed in my name. At the time I was employed as assistant 'boots' in the "Devonshire Arms" Hotel, Dungarvan, Co. Waterford.

In the early days of the Volunteer movement here, we had, I am sure, upwards of 300 men in the local company, but this thinned out very considerably subsequently, and when the Rising of Easter Week 1916, took place, I doubt if there were more than 30 or 40 men left. Drilling was carried out in what was then known as "Dan Fraher's Field" in Dungarvan, now known as the "Sports Field". So far as I can recollect, we had no guns then; our training was most done with wooden rifles. Pax Whelan of Dungarvan was the officer in charge.

In January 1915, my people moved to Ballynabanogue, which is about ten miles east of Dungarvan and about three miles from Kilmacthomas, Co. Waterford. I went to work in Bonmahon where there was no Volunteer company at that time, but I kept in touch with my former company in Dungarvan and helped in dispatch work, being the link between Waterford-Kilmeaden-Kilmacthomas-Bonmahon-Dungarvan.

I was not mobilised during Easter Week 1916. As a matter of fact, the first I heard of the Rising was when I read about it in the newspapers. I was not molested by the British subsequent to the insurrection.

After the Rising I went to a position in Kilmacthomas,

Co. Waterford, and later in the year 1916, or perhaps it was early in 1917, I started a Sinn Fein Cumann in Kilmacthomas - the place became the centre for the East Waterford Comhairle Ceanntar - P.C. O'Mahony was the chief organiser in the area and I was appointed the first secretary.

I got in touch with the late Pat Keating of Comeragh, who was then captain of the Kilrossanty company of the Irish Volunteers, and, as a result, a Volunteer outpost was formed in Kilmacthomas in September 1917. The first members were Eddie Power, a grocer's assistant in Kilmacthomas, my brother Mark and myself.

Later on in the same year, 1917, at a fair in Kilmacthomas a British recruiting sergeant was going around amongst the men at the fair seeking recruits for the British army. Two Sinn Fein friends of mine, named Frank Drohan and Paddy Lawlor, and myself proceeded to jostle the sergeant and make things unpleasant for him. We then delivered impromptu speeches to the boys at the fair deriding the recruiting sergeant and exhorting those present to have nothing to do with the British army. The R.I.C. arrested the three of us for having delivered a 'seditious' speech. We were brought up before a court in Kilmacthomas and sentenced to two weeks imprisonment. We served the sentence in Ballybricken gaol, Waterford, and on our release received a great welcome from waiting crowds at Waterford and Kilmacthomas, where we appealed to the young men to come into the fight for freedom.

During the year 1918 I was mostly engaged in election work for Sinn Fein. I was one of a party of Volunteers from West Waterford under command of Pax Whelan, Dungarvan, who took a hand in the notorious Waterford by-election of February 1918. The contestants in that election were Dr. White of Waterford representing Sinn Fein, and Captain Willie Redmond representing the Irish Parliamentary Party, the leader of which

was John Redmond, a brother of the candidate.

Extra Volunteers were drafted from many counties into Waterford to help to maintain some sort of order and enable Sinn Fein candidate and his supporters to combat the black-guardly attacks on them, which were persistently carried out by the Ballybricken pig-buyer element supported by the British ex-soldiers who all sided with Redmond in the election. I would also like to record the fact that the assaults perpetrated by the people mentioned were done with the connivance of the alleged custodians of law and order, the R.I.C., with the help of British military forces stationed in Waterford.

Early in 1919, Volunteer activities began to speed up a bit in the Kilmacthomas area. We had, still, no more than about five Volunteers there as, nationally speaking, the spirit of the people in that district was, generally, low. One household was, however, outstanding in supporting the national cause and that was the Cullinanes of Kilmacthomas. This house was the centre for receiving and passing on Volunteer dispatches and was, up to the finish of the fight, the place where I.R.A. men met and sheltered when on the run. The four girls of the Cullinane family were active members of Cumann na mBan.

I might here mention that dispatch work in this district was carried on by means of pony and trap, bicycle or on foot. Motor cars were few enough and were liable to suspicion by the British.

Our first real activities in the Kilmacthomas area began in the Spring of 1919 when extensive raids for arms on private houses were undertaken. We had little or nothing in the way of arms then - I think we had a .22 rifle and a revolver or two - and something had to be done about it.

Led by Pat Keating, captain of the Kilrossanty Company,

and with the help of his brother Willie, Eddie Power of Kilmacthomas, Rody McKeown, captain of Bonmahon Company, and Pat Burke of Stradbally, I took part in night raids for arms on many houses in the neighbourhood. Some of the men - Pat Keating, Eddie Power and myself - carried revolvers, but in no case was it necessary to use them. We did meet with persons whom we knew were opposed to us politically and who were reluctant to part with their guns, but, generally speaking, we got the weapons without a great deal of trouble. As a result of these raids, we got hold of quite a good number of shotguns and also a few revolvers.

Raids on mails became of frequent occurrence in 1919. Postmen were held up and their mail bags taken. Mails delivered by hired car were taken off and sent on to brigade headquarters in Dungarvan where letters addressed to the R.I.C. or military were opened and read for information which might be of value to us. The Volunteers previously mentioned were those who, as a rule, took part in all these raids. We were armed with shotguns and revolvers in case an R.I.C. or military escort might be with the mail cars.

During the first six months of 1920 the raids for arms by our men became more intensive; in addition, a crude type of land mine was being made from the steel stocks of cartwheels filled with gelnite with fuse and detonator.

Early in the month of May 1920, I took part in an attack on the occupied R.I.C. barracks in Stradbally, Co. Waterford. In this attack about 25 or 30 men took part. These men were selected from the Kilrossanty, Bonmahon, Kilmacthomas and Stradbally companies. Pat Keating, O/C. of the Kilrossanty Company was in charge. There was a mixed assortment of arms consisting of a few rifles, revolvers, shotguns and some home-made bombs. I was armed with a shotgun, but had little ammunition. The barracks was occupied by about six R.I.C. men. It was a stoutly-built stone building and was strengthened for

defence by steel shutters with loopholes for firing.

The attack took place about 10.30 p.m. on a dark night and was opened by a fusillade of rifle and shotgun fire from our party. I was in position about thirty yards from the building. The success of the attack really depended on the effect of our bombs on the roof of the building. These bombs consisted of a short piece of lead piping filled with explosive to which a fuse and detonator were attached and the whole lot encased in mud. When thrown on to the roof of the barracks the mud would stick and the explosion blow a hole in the roof. It was intended to pump petrol into the holes in the roof and set the building alight, forcing the garrison to capitulate.

After about half an hour of intermittent firing by us to which the garrison replied with rifle fire (sending up Verey lights to summon assistance) it was discovered that the mud bombs failed to stick on the roof and, as our ammunition was insufficient to carry on the attack much longer, orders were given to us to withdraw.

It was explained to me afterwards that the failure of the bombs to stick was probably due to the fact that the roof of Stradbally barracks was a particularly steep one.

Shortly after the attack the barracks was evacuated and the garrison sent to other stations. The building was burned by us, subsequently, to prevent its re-occupation by enemy forces.

In June 1920, owing to constant raiding by R.I.C. men, I left my job in Kilmacthomas and went on the run in West Waterford.

In August of 1920, after many days watching for patrols of R.I.C. to pass, it was decided to hold up and disarm a party of two R.I.C. men who used cycle from Lemybrien to Kilmacthomas with weekly pay for the police there. One afternoon, Pat Keating, Captain of the Kilrossanty Company,

Jim Bagnell - known locally as 'Jim Bagg' - and myself lay in wait for the two R.I.C. men a short distance outside Kilmacthomas. We were armed with revolvers. Before the R.I.C. came in sight Pat Keating sent 'Jim Bagg' to contact Willie Keating, a brother of Pat's. A short while after 'Bagg' leaving us, we spotted the two R.I.C. men approaching on bicycles. When they came near us we noticed that one was a sergeant and the other a constable. We jumped out on to the road and gave the order 'hands up'. The constable, who was covered by Pat Keating, dismounted and put up his hands. The sergeant, however, continued to approach me on his bicycle. I again shouted to him to surrender but he came on. I then fired at him from close range and he fell wounded on the road.

We searched the R.I.C. men for arms but found, to our surprise, that they were unarmed. We took the money they were carrying as police pay and handed it over subsequently to the Brigade Quartermaster.

Meanwhile, Sergeant Morgan (that was the name of the wounded man) was lying on the ground obviously in a bad way. I went to him and said an Act of Contrition into his ear. He was quite conscious then. We attended to his wound as best we could and sent the constable on his bicycle into Kilmacthomas for a priest and doctor. Sergeant Morgan died a day or so afterwards.

In September 1920, I learned from Pat Keating that the East Waterford Brigade intended to attack by night the occupied R.I.C. barracks of Kill and wanted some help from us in the West Waterford Brigade. Kill is about six miles east of Kilmacthomas. Early on the date of the proposed attack, Pat Keating and I cycled over to the house of a man named Hayes who lived in Cahernane, about two miles north east of the village of Kill. We went there to have a general chat with Hayes about the strength of the garrison, whether they left the barracks at night and also to look over the ground

generally. Having satisfied ourselves, we returned to Kilmacthomas.

About 8 o'clock that night a party of 14 or 15 of us left the Kilmacthomas area for Kill. All were armed with either rifles or shotguns. Some of us had bicycles, others left earlier than we did and went across country on foot. A number of the latter were not armed but were engaged felling trees to block the roads in the vicinity of the barracks to hamper enemy forces if they approached Kill. Prior to moving off for Kill, I remember drying damp sticks of gelignite over a fire for use in mud bombs. It was intended to throw these bombs on to the barrack roof and when exploded to pump petrol into the hole in roof and set the place on fire.

When we reached Kill about 9 o'clock at night, so far as I can remember, we were placed in position by Pat Keating behind a hedge in front of the barracks and about 25 to 30 yards from it. We had instructions not to open fire until Pat Keating gave the order to do so.

There was a large party of the East Waterford I.R.A. under Paddy Paul also at Kill, but I do not know how many, or how they were armed. The first sign of activity was a single shot which was fired in Kill village. It transpired afterwards that one of the garrison in the barracks was out in the village in a publichouse and was held up by the East Waterford men and taken prisoner. He was pressed to give the password into the barracks for that night, but he refused to give it and became noisy, having taken a good deal of drink. One of the East Waterford men fired a revolver shot over his head, apparently with the idea of sobering him up. Actually, the shot gave a warning to the R.I.C. men in the barracks, who immediately began to fire up Verey lights to summon assistance, at the same time opening up with rifle fire and grenades.

Meanwhile, the pump to spray the petrol on the barrack roof was found unworkable so that those men of ours whose job it was to throw up the mud bombs on the roof did not do so. I might mention here that the arrangements for spraying the roof with petrol were in the hands of Paddy Paul's men and not in our hands. Some of the East Waterford men replied with rifles to the fire from the barracks, but I certainly did not do so, nor did any of the western men near me. We were waiting instructions from Pat Keating, our commandant. Pat was disgusted when he saw the failure of the petrol pumping apparatus and also with the fact that the element of surprise had gone, by reason of the firing of the revolver shot previously referred to.

After about a quarter of an hour of this uncertainty, during which the R.I.C. kept up heavy rifle fire, word reached us that a body of British military were approaching on our flank and that the East Waterford men had been ordered by their officer commanding, Paddy Paul, to retreat. Pat Keating then told us to leave our positions and retire westwards towards Kilmacthomas.

It later transpired that a group of the East Waterford riflemen noticed some horses moving restlessly in a field immediately behind the hedge where they lay and thought they saw soldiers advancing behind the houses. Actually, no British military came on the scene until a few hours after we left. We encountered no enemy forces on our return journey to Kilmacthomas.

It was early in the month of August 1920, when I was informed by Pax Whelan, O/C. of the West Waterford Brigade, that it was proposed to disarm a party of R.I.C. men at Dungarvan railway station who used escort mails from Dungarvan town to the train every day.

It was on the morning of 8th August 1920 when I met

Pat Burke, Q.M. and Ned Power (of Glen), 1st Lieut. of the Stradbally Company, We set out on bikes for Dungarvan and carried revolvers. On arriving at Dungarvan railway station in the forenoon, we met Pat Keating, commandant of the Kilrossanty Battalion, and four other local Volunteers whose names I cannot recall. Pat Keating was dressed in the uniform of a wireless operator. Our party concealed themselves in a station out-office, whilst Pat remained out on the platform opposite where we were. An R.I.C. sergeant came into the station alone and, when passing Pat Keating, saluted him. Pat returned the salute and then whipped out his revolver, disarmed the sergeant and brought him across the railway bridge over to where our party was. We locked him up in an outhouse. Shortly afterwards, the expected R.I.C. escort came down on to the platform and was rushed and held up by us. There were four R.I.C. constables under a sergeant named Hickey. The latter was slow to surrender and went to draw his revolver. A shot was fired over his head at which he put up his hands and was disarmed like the rest. The guns captured were then brought across to the Dungarvan Gaelic ground about a half mile distant where they were taken over by some of the local Volunteers. We then returned on bikes to the Stradbally-Kilmacthomas district without meeting any enemy opposition.

The Sergeant Hickey referred to in the previous paragraph was the man who was captured by I.R.A. in the Burgary ambush Dungarvan, in March 1921, and was subsequently shot after courtmartial by the officers of the Flying Column.

During the latter end of August 1920, I took part in the attack on and capture of Bonmahon coastguard station. This attack took place at night and was led by George Lennon, Vice O/C. of the West Waterford Brigade, and Commandant Pat Keating. There were about eight of us in the actual raid, all armed with revolvers, whilst about a dozen or so local I.R.A. men were on scout duty in the vicinity.

I was one of the first over the wall of coastguard station and held up the sentry who was walking up and down. The remainder of our lads went through the buildings and removed a number of binoculars and station equipment. We expected to get some guns and ammunition, but we were very disappointed to discover that there wasn't a gun in the place.

It was in the early autumn of 1920 that I took part in the hold-up of trains conveying mails from Cork to Waterford. I remember quite well carrying out these raids at Carroll's Cross station, Durrow and Kilmacthomas.

About a dozen of us usually took part in these actions armed with revolvers and invariably under the charge of Pat Keating of Comeragh, who was killed in action against the British at the Burgary, Dungarvan, Co. Waterford, on March 19th, 1921. The usual plan of attack was to put the signals against the trains which, at times, were not scheduled to stop at these places, especially at Carroll's Cross, the mail van was then rushed and the mails taken off. We did encounter British military on the train on more than one occasion, but it so happened that they were unarmed and, consequently, we hadn't to open fire on them.

The captured mails were examined later on and any correspondence addressed to military, R.I.C. or people known to us to be hostile was carefully read for information which might be of value to our Brigade H.Q. to whom such correspondence was forwarded by us.

It was, so far as I can remember, about the month of September 1920, when the West Waterford Brigade Flying Column was organised. The officers were George Lennon, Dungarvan, O/C., Mick Mansfield, Old Parish, Dungarvan, Vice O/C., and myself as Adjutant.

We had about 20 men in the column mostly men 'on the run'

at the time. We were fairly well armed with shotguns, about six rifles and some revolvers. This was considerably strengthened by the capture of arms from the British at the ambush which took place at Piltown Cross about ten miles west of Dungarvan in November 1920. Our headquarters was in the Comeragh Mountains in the neighbourhood of Kilrossanty from which position we could move across country to attack and retire again to the comparative safety of the mountains. All our movements were, of course, on foot, especially in the later stages of the fight, as the use of motors or bicycles by unauthorised persons was forbidden by the British military authorities.

The column relied for food and shelter on the local people who were most hospitable and who welcomed us at any hour day or night. In this connection I would like to refer to the house of the Cullinane family at Kilmacthomas. These people kept an open house for I.R.A. men and their home was the centre for dispatch work in that area. The four Cullinane girls were, in fact, active members of Cumann na mBan; one of them served a term in jail for her activities.

I remember, in the month of September 1920, going with the column towards Brown's Pike, a district about three miles west of Dungarvan on the Dungarvan-Cappoquin road to lie in ambush. It was in the evening and during daylight, when about eight members of the column, under the command of George Lennon, took up a position behind a ditch overlooking the road at Brown's Pike and near a level railway crossing. We closed over the gates of the crossing and awaited the coming of a lorry load of R.I.C. which had been reported as having gone out from Dungarvan towards Cappoquin some time earlier and which would, most likely, return by our position. Four of us had rifles, the remainder had revolvers.

It would be about 5 p.m. when the lorry came very quickly

into the ambush position. There were about a dozen R.I.C. and Black and Tans in it. We opened a heavy fire on the occupants with our rifles, ^{&/}revolvers, and one of our lads was successful in landing a home-made bomb into the centre of the lorry. However, it continued to proceed at speed right through the level crossing gates and on out of range towards Dungarvan town. I cannot say what casualties the British suffered, but they undoubtedly must have had some losses.

Following the Brown's Pike affair the column retired into the Comeragh Mountains to Coolnasmear about 10 miles north west of Dungarvan. While we were billeted there a round-up by hundreds of British forces took place. This was carried out by day and by the aid of searchlights at night and forced the flying column to move towards the village of Modeligo to avoid encirclement.

When we reached Modeligo it was dark and we went towards the house of the Catholic Curate. A quantity of grenades, guns and ammunition belonging to the column was brought along in a pony trap. On reaching the Curate's house, Jim Bagg and I were placed on outpost duty at the gateway on the main road. There was an avenue lined with laurels from this gate to the house. We were a very short time there when we heard the command 'halt'. On peering around the gatepost we saw the lights of a lorry and a British officer taking soldiers into raid a farmhouse a short distance down the road from us. When we spotted the raiders, we immediately rushed up the avenue and told the rest of the boys. Pat Keating gave instructions to have the guns and ammunition taken out of the pony trap and hidden in the laurels growing along the avenue. George Lennon, the column O/C., told the priest of what was happening and then he and the remainder of us ran quickly into a turnip field close to the priest's house. We had no sooner thrown ourselves down in the field when we

heard the military come up the avenue and we were near enough to see the officer when the priest opened the door to his (the officer's) knock. I had my rifle with me and I remember quite well training it on that officer if he made a move in our direction. I'm sure I was no more than 30 yards away from him. The officer asked the curate if he had seen a band of men around the locality. The curate replied that he had not and that it was unlikely that any armed men were in that area which was a quiet one. After a discussion lasting about ten minutes, the officer appeared to be satisfied with what the priest told him, so he said 'goodnight' and took his troops off with him to raid further away from us.

We remained as we were until the danger had passed and then went in to the priest's house where we were hospitably received.

Later that night, we billeted in Vicarstown about two miles west of Modeligo in the house of a friendly farmer who gave four of us a room to sleep in. The other men were distributed in other farm houses.

It would be shortly after midnight when we awoke with a start. All around the house we could hear voices and the sounds of feet as if there were many persons outside. We looked through the window but saw nobody. We jumped out of bed and grabbed our rifles. I remember well Pat Keating saying: "It looks as if we are surrounded, lads; when they come in I'll take the first that comes, and ye make a dash for it". The voices and footsteps still continued while we waited, all tensed up for what looked like a fight to the death. We had resolved to sell our lives dearly that night.

This went on for fully half an hour or so. Gradually the voices faded and so did the footsteps. We were puzzled, but, naturally, relieved. We lay on the bed until morning came, but none of us slept.

When we were having breakfast the following morning, the woman of the house asked us if we had slept well. Not wishing to appear discourteous, we said we did and left it at that. When we had finished breakfast we went to contact some of our lads in a nearby farmhouse. We asked them if they had been raided during the night and told them of our experience. They said they neither heard nor saw anybody, certainly no British military were around. An old woman living there was listening to us and told us that the explanation was that the room which we had occupied the previous night had been built over what she called a "Mass path" which was used by people going to Mass at night during the penal days; this path was, she said, desecrated by the erection of the room over it and the voices and footsteps we heard were of those people. Whatever the explanation, I can certainly vouch for the truth of the extraordinary occurrence.

In November 1920, with other members of the column, I took part in the removal of the guns and ammunition captured by the column in the ambush of the military at Piltown Cross, which, so far as I can recollect, took place on November 1st. I cannot now remember why it was that I didn't take part in that particular ambush, but I do remember bringing captured rifles and equipment across country nearly ten miles to the Comeragh Mountains near Kilrossanty where they were carefully dumped. I do know that a party of about 30 soldiers were captured and disarmed that night at Piltown Cross; that a couple of them were killed and about half a dozen wounded. As a result of the arms captured in that fight, the column was fairly well equipped for the first time since it was formed.

In the months of December 1920-February 1921, I contracted a skin disease which forced me to discontinue active service, but, on recovering somewhat early in February 1921, and being then in the South Tipperary area, I linked up with the South Tipperary Column under Dinny Lacey.

While with the South Tipperary men I was mostly engaged in the manufacture and testing of an explosive known to us as "war flour" which was made in the Rathgormack district. I was, at that time, not fully fit for active service in the column.

In the summer of 1921, I moved again into the East Cork-Waterford area and served in the 3rd Battalion, 2nd Cork Brigade under its O/C., William Fitzgerald.

During this period I was engaged in extensive road blocking, mining of bridges and demolition work to hamper enemy movements in the Lismore, Tallow, Araglen, Youghal areas. This was part of a general plan to hamper the movements of large enemy forces who, at that time, were engaged in a round-up campaign in the more active parts of the country.

I was engaged on this type of work when the Truce came in July 1921, after which I fought on the anti-treaty side until the 'cease fire' order

Signed: George C. Kiely

Date: 10th June 1955

(George C. Kiely)

Witness: T. O'Gorman

(T. O'Gorman)

