

W.S. 1,186

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURÓ STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1186

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

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,186

Witness

Michael O'Sullivan,
Kildorrery Road,
Mitchelstown,
Co. Cork.

Identity.

O/C. Mitchelstown Company
Castletownroche Battalion, Cork II Brigade,
1916 - .

Subject.

Mitchelstown Company, Irish
Volunteers, Co. Cork, 1913-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S. 2477

Form B.S.M. 2

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STATEMENT BY MICHAEL O'SULLIVAN,

Kildorrery Road, Mitchelstown, Co. Cork.

I was born in Mitchelstown on 15th June, 1887. My father was a carpenter but both my parents came from farming stock. Their parents had been evicted from their holdings during the Land War.

During my young days there was very little interest in national affairs beyond the activities of the political parties of the time - O'Brienites and Redmondites. The latter party was the stronger throughout the country but in the South there was good support for William O'Brien. At election times there were often violent clashes between the members of the opposing parties. My family were supporters of the O'Brienite party.

This was the position when, with the promise of Home Rule in the air, Sir Edward Carson formed the Ulster Volunteers in the North. Steps were taken to form a similar militant organisation in Dublin and throughout the country and so the Irish Volunteers came into being. The first unit of the Irish Volunteers in Mitchelstown was formed late in 1913 - November I think. This unit was controlled by a committee composed of William Casey, Tim Dwane, Paddy Coughlan, Jackie Connors, David Walsh, Jim Hannigan, William J. Ryan, Richard W. Barry, James O'Neill, Paddy Rice and Michael O'Sullivan (witness). At the initial meeting approximately 30 members joined. The first officers were Jim O'Neill, Dave Walsh and Paddy Coughlan. But, beyond knowing that Jim O'Neill was in charge, I do not recollect the positions held by the others. At this stage no training was carried on.

Early in 1914 another meeting was called and a provisional committee

consisting of Paddy Coughlan, Tim Dwane, Jim Hannigan, Jim O'Neill, Michael O'Sullivan (witness), Dave Walsh, Richard W. Barry, William J. Ryan and Paddy Rice was set up. At this meeting the Company was established on a firm footing. The strength was about 80. The members were taught close order drill by British Army reservists under Sergeant Major Patrick Gleeson who was a native of the district. Parades were held on one evening each week and on Sunday evenings. The officers, who were appointed by the committee, were as at the end of the previous year, viz:- Jim O'Neill, Dave Walsh and Paddy Coughlan. This was a temporary arrangement until the organisation had been stepped up. An organiser was sent from G.H.Q. about Easter 1914 and, with the co-operation of the Mitchelstown Company, he organised units in Anglesboro', Ballylanders, Galbally, Kilfinane and Knocklong. These Companies, with Mitchelstown, later formed the Galtee Battalion. The name of the organiser who came from G.H.Q. was Ward.

In June, 1914, a big review of Irish Volunteers was held on the Square, Mitchelstown. About 2,000 men paraded. The salute was taken by Colonel Maurice Moore and Captain Talbot Crosbie. I think that the review was to have been attended by Sir Roger Casement but he went instead to Germany. The Volunteers reviewed at Mitchelstown on this occasion came from the Companies in the Galtee Battalion and those in the surrounding areas in the counties of Cork, Limerick and Tipperary.

Late in the summer of 1914 Jim O'Neill was sent to Birmingham to secure arms. When he made contact with the arms firm in Birmingham he received every assistance from the British authorities. He returned with 30 rifles (Lee Enfield Mark IV.) and two Miniature Rifles together with supplies of suitable ammunition.. The money to purchase these rifles was obtained from -

- (1) Weekly subscriptions of members.

- (2) Money collected for the arms fund by a ladies' committee composed of Mrs. Jim Hannigan, Mrs. Tom De La Rue, Lena Burke, Eilish Bailey.
- (3) Subscriptions by the following members each of whom contributed the price of his own rifle :- Jim Hannigan, Paddy Coughlan, William J. Ryan, James G. Skinner, Solicitor.
- (4) The balance necessary to complete the payment was paid in by William Casey.

The thirty rifles, when received, were handed out to the members of the original group of Irish Volunteers formed in late 1913.

The usual training in close order drill, route marches to neighbouring Companies each Sunday, as well as occasional spots of target practice with the miniature rifles, continued throughout the summer of 1914. The strength of the unit ^{remained} at about 80 and there was no change in the officers.

When, following the outbreak of the the war in August 1914, John Redmond appealed for recruits for the British Army there was a split in the Volunteers. The Volunteers who supported the Redmondite party sought to capture control of the local committee, but failed. They then demanded half the rifles held by the Company but this was also refused. The Redmondite element then left the Irish Volunteers and formed a unit of the Irish National Volunteers. Approximately 35 members of the unit remained on in the Irish Volunteers. When the split was mooted at first the Irish Volunteer section of the Company arranged to collect all rifles and ammunition in order to ensure that no arms would fall into the hands of the Redmondite supporters in the event of a "show down". Following the split the rifles were redistributed amongst some of the members in groups of two or three for safekeeping. A hall with an adjoining yard was then rented by the Irish Volunteers

in Clonmel Road. Parades were held here on one night each week. Each Sunday was devoted to route marches and field work. Training went along on these lines well into the summer of 1915 and there was no change in the officers who were Jim O'Neill, Dave Walsh and Paddy Coughlan.

During the spring of 1915 Terry MacSwiney was in the area on an organising tour during which, with the help of the members of the Mitchelstown unit, units were organised in Aherlow, Bansha and other places in the Galtee area.

The Mitchelstown Company to the number of about 35 travelled by train to Cork to take part in the parade there on St. Patrick's Day 1915. The Company was in charge of Jim O'Neill, Dave Walsh and Paddy Coughlan. All members on the parade were armed with rifles.

On Whit Sunday (23rd May) 1915 a big parade of Irish Volunteers was held in Limerick. Units from Dublin, Cork, Tipperary, Limerick and the Galtee Battalion were represented on this occasion. Amongst those who paraded were - Padraig Pearse, Tom Clarke, Terry MacSwiney, Tomás MacCurtain and Seán MacDiarmada. The Limerick City Battalion was under the command of Michael P. Colivet and Jim Leyden.

Our Company (Mitchelstown) travelled by car to Galbally on the morning of the parade. Here we linked up with Anglesboro', Ballylanders and Galbally Companies and marched to Emly Railway Station where we entrained for Limerick. Over a thousand men took part in the parade which marched through Limerick City. On the parade in some parts we passed through a barrage of abuse from thousands of excited women - apparently the wives of British soldiers serving in France. Passing through the Irishtown district the mob became more hostile. Bottles, stones and other missiles were hurled at the pro-German Sinn Feiners as the demonstrators called the Irish Volunteers.

On their way to the railway station that evening the Volunteers of the Dublin, Cork and Galtee Battalion contingents had to fight their way through hostile mobs.

About this time I was invited to join the I.R.B. by Donnacadh Hannigan. I was sworn in by him. Amongst others who were taken into the organisation at this time, were :- Tom De La Rue, William Casey, Paddy Coughlan, Tom Roche, Mick Dunne, Dan O'Keefe, Dave Walsh, Robert Noonan. Donnacadh Hannigan was Head Centre.

There was nothing outside the usual training and field exercises during the remainder of 1915.

Early in 1916 Ernest Blythe arrived in the area as an organiser. During his stay he presided at a general meeting of the members of Mitchelstown Company at which an election of officers took place. The strength of the unit about this time was still in the neighbourhood of 40. The officers elected at this meeting were -

O/C. - Jim O'Neill,
 1st Lieut. - Tom Walsh and
 2nd Lieut. - Dan O'Keefe.

The officers of the Galtee Battalion at this time were, as far as I can recollect - O/C. Liam P. Manahan and Adjutant Jim Hannigan.

About three weeks before Easter 1916 I was in Ballylanders area where Liam P. Manahan resided. I was acting more or less as an aide-de-camp to Manahan who was O/C. of the Galtee Battalion. My duties were to ensure that any messages or despatches received were disposed of to the proper destination with the minimum delay. It was accepted, at the time, among the inner circle (I.R.B.) that some action was due for Easter 1916 and my allocation to Ballylanders was in order to keep in touch with the Battalion O/C.

On Good Friday morning I was instructed by the O/C. (Liam Manahan) to notify Mitchelstown Company that manoeuvres would be held in Galbally on Easter Sunday morning. I returned to Mitchelstown on Good Friday and contacted Paddy Coughlan, Tom De La Rue, William Casey and Dave Walsh. I reported to them and relayed the instructions received from the Battalion O/C.

Arrangements were made for the mobilisation of Mitchelstown Company at Lios-o-Gurrane - about $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles from Mitchelstown on the Kilbehenny road at 7 a.m. on Easter Sunday. The members mobilised at the appointed spot where about 30 rifles with 50 rounds of ammunition for each were distributed to the members. I was instructed to remain in Mitchelstown to await the arrival of any dispatches and to take them to Battalion Headquarters. The names of the men who paraded on Easter Sunday 1916 are :-

Jim O'Neill	Jim Burke	Tom O'Brien
Dave Walsh	Mick Dunne	John Condon
William Casey	Tom De La Rue	Bob Noonan
Tom Walsh	Tom Roche	Pat Roache
Pat Walsh	Jim Hannigan	William Roache
Pat O'Sullivan	Dick Carroll	Mick O'Sullivan (witness)
Tom O'Sullivan	Mick Casey	David Dwane
Jack Clifford	William Coughlan	Dan O'Keefe
Patrick Clifford	Ned Hoare	Mick Murphy)
Seán Keane	William Hoare	John Curtin) Ballylough
Joe O'Brien	William J. Ryan	Joe O'Keefe)

On Easter Sunday morning, after the other members of the Company had gone to the assembly point at Lios-o-Gurrane a dispatch rider on a motor-bike arrived in Mitchelstown. He brought a dispatch from Eoin McNeill which I took to the assembly point and handed to Company O/C. (Jim O'Neill). I then learned that the dispatch cancelled the manoeuvres fixed for that day. I was then handed a dispatch and told to take it to Battalion Headquarters. I then cycled on to Galbally where I made contact with the Battalion O/C. (Liam Manahan) to whom I handed the message.

The Battalion O/C. decided to carry on the manoeuvres and I remained with the Battalion Staff. When the manoeuvres were over the parade was dismissed. I returned home by cycle to Mitchelstown and reported back next morning to the Battalion O/C. at Ballylanders. Here I also met representatives from each of the other units in the Galtee Battalion. I remained in Ballylanders awaiting instructions or news from Dublin - until Wednesday night when word was received by the O/C. from Pierce McCann ordering an immediate mobilisation of the battalion. I then returned to Mitchelstown and contacted Company O/C, Jim O'Neill. He gave instructions for the mobilisation of the Company at Lios-o-Gurrane at 2 a.m. next morning (Thursday). All on parade were armed with rifles and 50 rounds of ammunition. The parade moved off about 2.30 a.m. and was on its way to Anglesboro' when word was received from the Battalion O/C (Liam Manahan) to disperse. The members of the Company who paraded on Thursday morning of Easter Week were :-

Dave Walsh (in charge)	Pat O'Sullivan
Bob Noonan	Tom O'Sullivan
Tom De La Rue	Mick O'Sullivan (witness)
Tom Walsh	Pat Walsh
Dick Carroll	Pat Roache
William Clancy	William Roache
Mick Dunne	Joe O'Brien
Tom Roache	Dan O'Keefe
William Casey	Jim Burke
Jim Hannigan	Paddy Coughlan
Pat Clifford	Mrs. Hannigan.
Jack Clifford	

When the order to disperse was received I was instructed to go to Ballylanders (Battalion Headquarters) in order to maintain contact. I remained there for the remainder of the week while the members of the Mitchelstown Company were "standing to" awaiting instructions. All other Companies in the Galtee Battalion were in a similar position. No further instructions were received and we knew nothing of the happenings beyond what was reported in the newspapers of the time.

Early in the week following the surrender in Dublin, Dave Walsh and Jim O'Neill were sent to Cork City by the Battalion O/C. (Liam Manahan) to find out what was happening there and to seek instructions regarding the surrender of arms. They got no instructions and no advice. The O/C. then sent two men (Tom Walsh and Pat O'Sullivan) to Limerick on a similar mission. They contacted Michael P. Colivet and Jim Leyden but received no instructions and returned home. About two days later - accompanied by Robert Noonan - I went to Limerick. We again contacted Mick Colivet and Jim Leyden. We were instructed to surrender all arms as had been done elsewhere in the area. This order was in writing - written by Jim Leyden after consultation with Mick Colivet - and was handed by me to the Battalion O/C. (Liam Manahan) on my return to Battalion Headquarters at Ballylanders.

I then returned to Mitchelstown with instructions regarding the surrender of arms. I reported to Company O/C. (Jim O'Neill). The officers of the Company held a meeting and it was decided to surrender the arms. I cannot recollect the circumstances in which the rifles, which were surrendered, were collected, but I did not hand up my gun nor did Tom De La Rue. At the time of the surrender I had six rifles in my possession and these were not surrendered. The remaining twenty-six rifles, together with some shot guns, were given up. These arms were surrendered on 5th May or 6th, 1916.

On the morning of 8th May, 1916, I was arrested by a party of British Military. My father and my two brothers (Pat and Tom) were taken prisoners at the same time. Others who were arrested on this date were - Dave Walsh, William Casey, Jim Hannigan, Tom De La Rue, Patrick Roache, William Roache, Jack Clifford, Patrick Clifford, Dick Carroll, Jim Slattery, Ned Hoare, William English, Patrick Keane, William J. Ryan, Christy Ryan and Dan O'Keeffe.

With the exception of William Casey, Jim Hannigan, Patrick O'Sullivan, Patrick Roache and Mick O'Sullivan (witness) all the others were released after some hours. The group who were detained were sent to Richmond barracks, Dublin, then to Wakefield gaol and later to Frongoch Internment Camp where we were detained until our release some months later.

When I returned home towards the end of 1916 I found that the Volunteer organisation was still operating in the area due to the activities of a few old reliables - mainly those who had answered the mobilisation call on the Thursday of Easter Week. I was immediately accepted as O/C. of the unit. There was nothing much doing until 1917 except reorganising and keeping the unit intact. During the spring of 1917 the work of reorganising the Irish Volunteers went on apace in the area. I was in charge of the Mitchelstown Company to the number of about 50 - when it paraded at the O'Neill Crowley Monument in Kilclooney Wood in March 1917 on the fiftieth anniversary of the '67 Rising. Tadg Barry, Cork City, delivered an oration.

About this period all Volunteers were engaged in organising the political wing of the Republican Movement - Sinn Féin. As a matter of fact this section was, at this time, composed mainly of Volunteers and the members of their families. With Tom De La Rue I was a delegate to the Sinn Féin Congress late in 1917.

I think that during the summer of 1917 I went with Tom De La Rue to Limerick to contact Mrs. Tom Clarke to get some funds to send Donal Hannigan, who was wanted by the authorities for the shooting of a District Inspector of the R.I.C. in Drogheda or Dundalk, out of the country. He was recorded on "The Hue and Cry" (the official list of wanted men circulated to the R.I.C.) under the nickname "Limerick" and was described as a sailor. The necessary funds, £50, were made available by Mrs. Clarke and arrangements were made to get Donal away to U.S.A., which he reached in due course.

When the Volunteer Convention was held in Croke Park in October, 1917, I attended as a delegate. I remember that Joe McGrath had a dispute with De Valera regarding the position of officers who had been replaced while in prison, but I cannot now recollect the exact terms of the dispute.

There was very little out of the ordinary doing until the spring of 1918 when Conscription was in the offing. This threat led to a big influx of new recruits. The strength of the Company was about 150, but when the Conscription scare passed the strength fell to the normal crowd of old reliables. About this time several raids for arms were carried out in the area and all shot guns were collected together with any available ammunition. The premises of two local hardware merchants - O'Neill's and Cusack's - were raided at this time and a considerable amount of gelignite, detonators, fuses, as well as about 1000 cartridges, were obtained. There was no difficulty in the case of the raid on Cusack's as we had an inside operator - Tom Fogarty - who was employed at Cusack's and was 1st. Lieutenant of the Company - while amongst those who were engaged on this and the other raids were - Dick Carroll, Tom De La Rue, William Clancy, Tom O'Sullivan, Pat O'Sullivan, Mick Dunne, Tom Roache, Tom Walsh, Pat Clifford, Mick O'Sullivan. As a matter of fact, nearly every member of the Company took part in one of these raids at one time or another.

About this time there was some trouble in the Galtee Battalion owing to dual claims to leadership in which sides were taken. The contending parties were Liam P. Manahan and Donnacadh Hannigan. Arising out of this dispute an inquiry was held at Dan Moloney's, Knocklong. Mr. M. W. O'Reilly, representing G.H.Q., presided. Together with representatives from the other Companies in the Battalion,

I was present at this inquiry. I was accompanied by Tom De La Rue. Following the inquiry I was invited to attend a meeting in Dublin at which the following were present :- Mick Collins, Dick Mulcahy, Seán Wall and, I think, Father Tom Wall. At this meeting the whole question was discussed at length. I was sent home with instructions to reorganise the Mitchelstown Company and to keep it going and was told that the question of the Galtee Battalion would be settled in a short time. It was at this time that Mitchelstown Company became a unit of Cork Brigade. The other units in the Galtee Battalion becoming, as far as I can recollect, units of the East Limerick Brigade.

In June, 1918, I secured £87 from William Casey and travelled to Manchester to make arrangements for the purchase of some revolvers and ammunition. I made contact in Manchester with an agent who arranged to supply 19 revolvers and a stock of ammunition. These supplies duly reached Dublin and were delivered in Mitchelstown within three weeks by Mrs. Dave Walsh.

Following the transfer to Cork II. Brigade, there was an increase in the strength of the Company. A number of men who had been members of the Irish National Volunteers joined up. The strength of the Company was now about 50 and, due to the organisation of a new Battalion in Cork Brigade, a fresh election of officers was held. The new officers were, I think - O/C. Seán Keane, 1st. Lieutenant Tom Walsh and 2nd Lieutenant Dan O'Keeffe.

It was now August 1918 and in the period to May 1919 there was nothing outside the normal drills and parades to report.

When Seán Hogan was rescued from his R.I.C. escort at Knocklong railway station in May, 1919, some members of the rescue party, who were wounded, were billeted in the Mitchelstown area. These were Jim Scanlon and Ned O'Brien. They were billeted at Bailey's, Ardclare, and Denis O'Brien's, The Workhouse. I was engaged on scouting and guard duty for

about three weeks while they were in the area. They were attended by Dr. Barry, Fermoy, and Nurse McCormack, Mitchelstown. During this period I was visited by Dan Breen, Seán Hogan (the rescued prisoner) and, I think, Seán Treacey. As my home was being raided regularly, at this time, I felt it was not safe to allow them to stay so I took them to Christy Ryan's, The Square, Mitchelstown, where they remained for about ten days. It was a lucky move as early next day my home was raided. I was not sleeping at home at the time.

The remainder of 1919 passed without any incident of particular note in the area. The usual parades and drills were held while the members were now getting a little target practice with .22 rifles. This usually took place at the Sunday evening parades in the surrounding country.

On 31st January, 1920, the following members of the Company were arrested :- Seán Keane, William J. Ryan and Mick O'Sullivan (witness). We were removed to Cork gaol and later deported to Wormwood Scrubbs where we found a number of political prisoners from other counties. Within a short time all political prisoners went on hungerstrike and after a hungerstrike of 18 days we were released in May 1920.

On the evening of 15th August, 1920, a number of members of the Mitchelstown Company took up a position at Kilyglass - about two miles from Mitchelstown on the Limerick road - with the intention of attacking a cycle patrol of the "Green Howards" under "Shaky Head" who were in the habit of returning to Galbally, where they were stationed, by this road. We were in position behind the roadside fences at a crossroads. We were divided into two parties of four each - one to the right and the other to the left of the cross. We had a field of fire of about 200 yards and were all armed with rifles. We remained in our position for about three hours until we got word that the patrol had returned to Galbally by another road (Kilbehenny-Geragh road).

The members of the party were - Mick O'Sullivan (witness), William Walsh, Dan O'Keeffe, Jerry Clifford, Tom Walsh, Pat Walsh, Paddy Clifford, Tom De La Rue.

During the summer of 1920 I was approached by Liam Lynch, who was now O/C. Cork II. Brigade. He asked me if I would now give him the rifles which had been dumped since 1916 as he was about form a "Flying Column". I agreed to do so and handed him over 7 rifles (including one received from Paddy Coughlan in 1917).

I think that at this time the officers of the Mitchelstown Company were - O/C. Dan O'Keeffe, 1st. Lieutenant Patrick J. Luddy, 2nd Lieutenant Moss Walshe.

About early March 1921 an ambush was laid for a party of military which acted as a curfew patrol in the town of Mitchelstown. The ambush party was divided into two sections - one of five behind a stone wall in Carroll's boreen on the outskirts of the town, and a second party of three behind a fence on rising ground to the rear of the previous section. All were armed with rifles and took up positions about 8 p.m. Although we remained in position until about midnight, the enemy patrol did not put in an appearance. Our party then withdrew and all arms were returned to a dump in the area. Amongst those who took part in this job (attempted) were - William Roache, Dan O'Keeffe, Jerry Clifford, Patrick Clifford, Mick O'Sullivan (witness), Leo Skinner, Tom De La Rue, Mark Ahern, Dick Carroll. Dan O'Keeffe, who was Company O/C. at the time, was in charge.

All members were engaged about this time on the destruction of enemy lines of communication - demolishing bridges, digging trenches, cutting telegraph wires. This work entailed the provision of guards and scouts as well as actual working parties. It was a full time job in the area as the enemy were continually compelling civilians to fill in trenches and clear roads during the daytime which had to be re-opened by the I.R.A. during the night.

Several large scale 'rounds-up' were carried out by the British in Mitchelstown area in the spring of 1921. In one of these it was estimated that, at least, 3,000 troops were engaged but only a few Volunteers, including Dan O'Keeffe and Tim Luddy, were captured.

On 23rd April, 1921, arrangements had been made to destroy a road-bridge at Ballygiblin. Accompanied by Paddy Clifford I left Mitchelstown about 8 p.m. We were both cycling in the direction of Ballygiblin. About $1\frac{1}{4}$ miles outside Mitchelstown on the Ballyporeen road we were surrounded by a party of military and taken prisoners. We were both armed with revolvers. I had a .38 automatic and about 20 rounds, while Clifford had a .38 revolver and four rounds. We were removed to Mitchelstown and later to Fermoy where we were detained until 1st May, 1921, when we were removed to the Military Detention Barracks, Cork. The necessary Summaries of Evidence were taken on this date. We were tried by a Military Court on 2nd May, 1921. We were found guilty of being found in possession of arms and were sentenced to death with no recommendation to mercy.

At our Courtmartial we were defended by Mr. J. G. Skinner, Solicitor, Mitchelstown.

When we were informed that we had been sentenced to death I arranged with one of the warders in the Detention Barracks to send a telegram to our Solicitor to inform him of the findings and sentence. The telegram was taken by a Sergeant of the Cameron Highlanders to General Strickland's office from which it was dispatched to Mr. Skinner. On receipt of the telegram he immediately travelled to Cork. When he called to the Detention Barracks and told the officer-in-charge that he had got a telegram from his clients I believe there was consternation in enemy circles as there was no record of the telegram sent by me having passed through official channels. I believe that the dispatch of the message was approved by one of the

I.R.A. Intelligence Staff who held a position in General Strickland's office.

Mr. Skinner applied for a conditional order of habeus corpus in respect of Paddy Clifford and myself. This was refused but leave to appeal was granted. Our Solicitor, on the advice of Counsel, then decided to appeal to the House of Lords and the case was being argued when the Truce was signed, on 11th July, 1921. All activities in connection with the case were, I think, suspended at this time, but we were detained until about mid-February, 1922.

My rank at the Truce - Volunteer.

Strength of the Mitchelstown Company about 50.

Signed: Michael O'Sullivan
 (Michael O'Sullivan)
 Date: 10th June 1955
 10th June 1955.

Witness: P. O'Donnell
 (P. O'Donnell)

