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**ORIGINAL**

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21  
BURO STAIRE MIL' 1 2  
No. W.S. 1218

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

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,218 .

Witness

James Hickey,  
Main Street,  
Millstreet,  
Co. Cork.

Identity.

Lieutenant Millstreet Company  
Millstreet Battalion, Co. Cork.

Engineer do.

Member of Millstreet Batt'n. Column.

Subject.

National and military activities,  
Millstreet, Co. Cork, 1912-1923.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. 8.2521

Form B S M 2

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STATEMENT BY JAMES HICKEY,

Main St., Millstreet, Co. Cork.

I was born in Millstreet on June 29th, 1889, and was educated at Millstreet National School until I reached the age of 16 years. I then went to serve my time as a blacksmith with my father.

The first national movement with which I became associated was the Gaelic League. I was one of the founder members when a branch was established in Millstreet about 1912. Other members were Mick O'Riordan, Con Meaney, Jim Buckley, Molly Tucker, Dan Enright, Mary Hickey, Tom Griffin, Kathleen Tucker, Jerh. Bresnahan, Lena Hickey, Kathleen Manley, Julia Sullivan, Jerh. Twomey, John and Phil Dennehy, Ellie Regan, Jerh. McSweeney, Dan Leary, Andy Hickey, Con Murphy, Denis Manley, Michael Hickey, Brian McSweeney, Wm. O'Riordan and Pat Griffin. The teacher was Liam Buckley. We had Irish classes one night each week and there was also Irish dancing. The membership of the Gaelic League about this time was in the neighbourhood of 25.

When the Irish Volunteers were formed in Millstreet early in 1914 I became a member. I cannot recollect who the officers were or the names of any of the members.

I left Millstreet late in 1914 and went to work in Charleville where I joined the unit there. I remember that Capt. Talbot Crosbie arrived there to address a parade some time after the outbreak of the 1914-18 war. He appealed to the members to unite with the Ulster Volunteers to defend the coasts of Ireland. As I did

not agree with this policy which appeared to use the Irish Volunteers to hold Ireland for Great Britain, I protested and left the meeting. Being the only vocal dissenter, I'm afraid I was looked upon by the people, and Volunteers in Charleville as not quite right in the head and one who was seeking notoriety. At this time I owned a single shot rifle and about 100 rounds of ammunition, which I had procured before I left Millstreet and which to me appeared to be the first essential if the Irish Volunteers were in earnest.

Early in 1915 I left Charleville for Cork City, where I rejoined the Volunteers at Sheares St. I cannot remember the name of the company to which I was attached or the names of the company officers. I joined the I.R.B. while in Cork. I was sworn in at Red Abbey St. but I do not know the name of the man who was in charge there. I continued to serve with my unit in Cork City until the end of the summer of 1915, when I returned to Millstreet. I then rejoined the unit there when Con Meaney was O/C. Other members of the unit were Denis Kelliher, Con Meaney (Big). The unit then had two single shot rifles and about 200 rounds of ammunition. The other members had shotguns.

On Easter Sunday morning 1916 the company was to march to Carriganima to meet the Macroom contingent, but when the countermanding order was published there was no parade.

On Easter Monday morning I cycled to Cork City to try to contact the leaders there - Tomás MacCurtain and Terry MacSwiney - but I failed to do so. However, I met Seán Sullivan and Tadhg Barry but they could give me

no information. They knew at the time that they were fighting in Dublin, but they had no instructions to give me beyond saying that we should "stand to" and avoid arrest. I then returned to Millstreet and with the others remained out during Easter Week. We billeted in a disused house at Priests' Cross, Drishane. Amongst those who were out during the week were: Con Meaney (Sonny) Mick O'Riordan and Jim Hickey (witness).

I think I should record particulars of an incident which occurred on Easter Sunday night. About 11.30 p.m. that night a despatch arrived from Rathmore for transmission to Con Meaney (Sonny) - O/C Millstreet. The despatch was handed to a young brother of mine - Danny - who was a dispatch rider. He did not know the country too well and he lost his way in the dark and mislaid the despatch. When he returned he was unable to explain what happened to the despatch and he appeared to have fallen from his bicycle. It later transpired that he was subject to fits and the explanation appears to be that he got a fit on this occasion. It was never ascertained what the message from Rathmore referred to, but possibly it had to do with the official cancellation of the manoeuvres fixed for Easter Sunday.

Early in the week following the surrender in Dublin we returned home from Priests' Cross, but we were vigilant and endeavoured to evade arrest. A party of R.I.C. and military raided my home but I escaped. The following were arrested: Jerh. O'Riordan (an old Fenian), Mick O'Riordan (his son), Paddy Sullivan, Jerry Twomey and my brother (John Hickey). All were deported to Frongoch. Mick O'Riordan was released

after a few weeks but the others were detained until the general release of internees at the end of the year (1916). I was 'on the run' from Easter Week until the general release.

The reorganisation of the Irish Volunteers was undertaken early in 1917. At this time most of the members were from the rural area. The O/C was Con Meaney (Sonny), while some of the pioneer members were Mick O'Riordan, Jerh. Crowley, Wm. O'Riordan (despatch rider), Jack Regan, "Neilus" Healy, Denis Healy, Jimmie Hickey, Tim Healy and Con Callaghan. The strength was about 15.

The usual close order drill was the only activity at parades - usually held in the surrounding country - at this time. Weekly subscriptions of 2d or 3d were collected for the arms' fund.

The organisation of the Irish Volunteers went hand in hand with the progress of the political wing of the Republican movement - Sinn Féin. This organisation was composed mainly of Volunteers and members of their families. All recruits to the Volunteers at this period were usually vetted by the officers of the unit before being accepted.

There was no unusual activity during the year 1917. The Volunteers were mainly engaged in organisation work and in selecting new recruits. The strength of the company had increased to about 60 towards the end of the year. I think that it was at this time that Millstreet Battalion was formed from the companies in the surrounding area. The companies in the battalion were: Millstreet,

Drishane, Rathcoole, Kilcorney, Rathduane, Derrynagree, Cullen and Dooneen. The first officers of the battalion were:

O/C - Con (Sonny) Meaney  
 Vice C/C - Denis O'Brien  
 Adj't.- Jerh. Crowley  
 Q/E - Denis Kelliher.

When conscription was threatened in the spring of 1918 the Redmondite party approached the O/C ("Sonny" Meaney) seeking information about the plans of the Volunteers in this emergency. He informed them that he could not disclose the plans, but the Redmondite leaders in the district advised all their members of military age to join the Volunteers. As a result the strength of the company rose to 130 or so. There was no change in officers. All guns in the area were collected now. They were surrendered voluntarily by the holders, who were mainly farmers. We now had about 40 shotguns with 300 rounds of ammunition, in addition to the two single shot rifles and ammunition which were the property of Con Meaney and myself. All shotgun cartridges held were reloaded with buckshot. When the conscription scare had passed, a large number of the new recruits fell away but many remained on to give good service. The strength of the company was in the neighbourhood of 100. The officers of the company - following the appointment of Con Meaney as Battalion C/C - were:

O/C - Mick O'Riordan  
 1st Lt.- Jimmie Hickey  
 2nd Lt.- Jack Regan.

There was no activity in the area in connection with the general election in December, 1918, as the Sinn

Féin candidate - Dan Corkerry, I think - was returned unopposed.

In January, 1919, Cork 11 Brigade was formed, as Cork Brigade of about 20 battalions was considered too unwieldy. Cork 11 Brigade embraced seven battalions, which covered the area of North Cork from the Waterford border near Fermoy to Kerry border at Millstreet. The battalions in the brigade were: Millstreet, Fermoy, Mallow, Kanturk, Newmarket, Charleville and Castletownroche. The brigade officers were:

O/C - Liam Lynch, Fermoy.  
 Vice O/C - Dan Hegarty, Mallow.  
 Adjt. - Tom Barry, Glanworth.  
 Q/M - George Power, Fermoy.

Cork 111 Brigade, which embraced West Cork area, was also set up at this time.

During 1919 and early 1920 there was very little beyond normal training and parades. Classes in signalling and scouting were held and training was becoming slightly more advanced. Occasionally field exercises were organised in which the whole or sections of the battalion took part. These were carried out with a view to helping the men on parade to learn how to make the best use of cover. In addition, nearly every company had a .22 rifle, which gave the members an opportunity of having some target practice.

There was no activity in Millstreet Company area following G.H.Q. general order of Easter 1920 re destruction of evacuated enemy posts. The only evacuated post in the area was Rathcoole R.I.C. barracks and this was destroyed by the members of Rathcoole Company.

When the Brigade Column was formed in September, 1920, Millstreet Battalion was represented on same by Paddy Healy and Seán Healy. Both these men drove motor cars which removed the captured arms and stores from Mallow Military Barracks on September 28th, 1920. They also took part in all column engagements throughout the brigade area in which the Brigade Column or many of the individual battalion columns were engaged.

Following the capture of Mallow Barracks the Brigade Column carried out a successful ambush of a military party in the vicinity of Kanturk on October 11th, 1920.

They later moved into the Millstreet area during November, and on the night of November 22nd, 1920, they moved into Millstreet with the intention of attacking the Black and Tans who were stationed there. The column was assisted by a number of members of the local company who were acting as scouts. All sections took up positions about 8 p.m. (I think). The members of the Brigade Column were distributed over positions at the Market Yard, Fair Field and Green's Lane.

With Paddy McCarthy, Tom Coughlan, - Kennedy of the Brigade Column, I was acting as scout at Green's Lane on the right-hand side of the Main St. facing Mallow. I was accompanied by "Neilus" Healy. The members of the column opened fire on an R.I.C. man and a Black and Tan who passed the end of the laneway. We all then dashed across the Main St. to Mill Lane, which was almost directly opposite Green's Lane. We were now in a position to cover Mill Lane and Mill Road. We remained in this position for at least 1½ hours after firing had



ceased. At this stage Paddy McCarthy suggested that there was little likelihood of any more activity and "Neilus" Healy proceeded to the junction of Mill Lane with Main St. to have a look round. As he reached the junction he noticed two people leaving Nicholson's publichouse at the opposite side of the street. He returned immediately and reported accordingly. We were then about 20 feet from Main St., and as the message was being conveyed by "Neilus" Healy a shot rang out and Paddy McCarthy dropped. He had been shot through the head and was killed outright. The Tan who fired the shot dashed for the R.I.C. barracks and escaped. I then picked up Paddy McCarthy's rifle and we removed his body to the rear. I then went to report the position to the Column O/C (George Fower).

I was then sent to make contact with the Brigade O/C (Liam Lynch) at Lombardstown and to report what happened. I cycled to Lombardstown where I met Ned Murphy, who took me to Liam Lynch. When I had reported we both cycled back to Millstreet area, where we made contact with the members of the Brigade Column who were standing guard over the body of Paddy McCarthy where he was "waking" at Owen Sullivan's, Gurtnavehy.

With all the other locals who were engaged in the Millstreet job, I went 'on the run' from this date. We formed the nucleus of a battalion column from, as far as I can remember, the following: Mick O'Riordan, Wm. O'Riordan (his brother), "Neilus" Healy, Con (Sonny) Meaney, Con Meaney (Big), and Jimmie Hickey (witness). There were also a number of others. Con Meaney (Sonny) was in charge.

This column went into training in the Kilcorney and Rathcoole areas and after a few weeks were lying in ambush in various positions throughout the area on a number of occasions but failed to make contact with the enemy. On a few occasions we took up positions in the town of Millstreet at night but met with no success. This column - to the number of about a dozen - with the exception of two who were armed with single shot rifles, had shotguns. This type of activity continued over Christmas and into the New Year. In addition, we were engaged with members of the local companies in the work of impeding enemy movements by blocking roads, destroying bridges and cutting railway lines.

Early in February it was decided to ambush the evening train which passed between Mallow and Tralee each evening about 8 p.m. It was reported that this train occasionally carried a party of British military. The column took up a position on the railway embankment about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles on the Mallow side of Millstreet station about a week before February 11th, 1921. During the period to this date the nightly watch was in vain as there were no enemy forces on the trains when they passed through our position. In the period up to and including February 10th, 1921, the column had withdrawn to billets without firing a shot. I should have mentioned that, in addition to the main body at the ambush position, there were two I.R.A. men on duty at Millstreet railway station and a similar number at Rathcoole. These were the stations between which the ambush position had been prepared. The duty of the men at these stations was to board the engine if there were

troops on the train. They further had instructions to signal by blowing the whistle on the engine at a certain point if they were on the train. There were also two men with red lamps just beyond the extreme ends of the ambush position to signal to the driver where to stop. The men at Millstreet station were Seán Buckley and Pat Joe Hickey - both from Dooneen Company. The men at Rathcoole station were Dan Coakley and Jack O'Keeffe, while the men with the red lamps were Tom Crowley (Millstreet end) and Wm. Kelliher ("The Kaiser") at the Rathcoole end. The remainder of the column were extended over a distance of about 50 yards on both sides of the railway and on the high embankment overlooking the train.

On the night of February 11th about 8 p.m. the train from Rathcoole whistled at the railway arch as it approached our position. This indicated that the enemy party was on board. Tom Crowley immediately went on to the railway line with his red lamp and signalled to the approaching train driver to halt. The train stopped at the selected position and the British party was called on to surrender. There was no reply and fire was immediately opened by our party and replied to by the enemy. The exchange of fire lasted about ten to fifteen minutes and the enemy then surrendered. All members of the ambush party then came on the railway and ordered the enemy to assemble on one side of the train. When all had been rounded up it was found that one of their party had been killed and several wounded. We then collected our booty - 14 rifles and a good supply of ammunition - and withdrew to Kilcorney area where we billeted. In addition to those

already mentioned, the men who took part in this engagement were, as far as I can recollect, Con Meaney (Soany), Con Meaney (Big), Jerh. Crowley, "Neilus" Healy, Denis Hickey, Jerome Buckley, Wm. Riordan, Mick Riordan, "Miah" Galvin and Seán Reid.

We now had a stock of rifles and ammunition and we continued our efforts to make contact with the enemy in our own area, but with no result. However, while we were billeted at Lackadota on the morning of March 5th, 1921, word was received about 4 a.m. that we were to report to Clonbanin without delay. We immediately left our billets and travelled by car and on foot to Clonbanin, where we met the members of the Charleville, Newmarket and Kerry 11 Brigade Columns. They were moving into position when we arrived about 9.50 a.m. The position selected was about  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile west of Clonbanin Cross on the main Mallow-Killarney road. Our column was divided into two sections. I was one of a section of six who took up positions in Shaughnessy's haggard - south of the road. A machine-gun party from the Newmarket Column (Liam Moylan and Denis Galvin) were also positioned here. We were all behind a sod fence on high ground about 150 yards from the road. The members of the Kerry 11 Brigade Column were on our left (west), as were the other members of our own column. Our men were armed with the rifles captured in the train ambush on February 11th.

The Newmarket and Charleville Columns were on the north side of the road. There were also flanking parties at each end of the position as well as scouts at suitable spots. A mine was laid in the road at the eastern end

of the position just in front of the machine-gun section.

We had only just moved into our positions - it was nearing 10 a.m. - when two lorries of military passed through the position from the east (Mallow). There was no further activity until about 2 p.m., when the approach of an enemy convoy from the west was signalled by our scouts. As far as I can recollect, the convoy consisted of two lorries, a private car and an armoured car, followed by another lorry. As the leading lorry reached our position at the eastern end the signal to open fire was given. The leading lorry managed to get through, but the second lorry and private car were disabled by the opening burst of fire from the machine-gun and the armoured car got ditched in an attempt to pass the disabled transport in front. The party in the leading lorry, under cover of a farmhouse beyond the eastern end of the position, were pouring heavy fire on our position, while the crew of the armoured car were still able to operate their machine-gun effectively. The enemy in the other lorries, who escaped the opening fire, took cover behind the roadside fences and continued to reply to our fire. The fighting went on for about 2 hours and we were eventually forced to evacuate our positions and break off the engagement as there was no hope of silencing the guns of the armoured car. When we withdrew from our position we moved with Kerry 11 Brigade Column to Cullen area, where we billeted. The members of the Charleville and Newmarket Columns moved off towards their home districts. The enemy lost their Brigade O/C - General Cummings - and, I believe, 14 others in the engagement, while they also had a large number wounded. The I.R.A. had no casualties. The combined

I.R.A. forces were, I believe, under the command of Seán Moylan. The Kerry 11 Column was under Tom McEllistrim..

Following this engagement the column continued to attempt to contact enemy patrols, and on two or three nights each week individual members were engaged in sniping enemy posts throughout the area. In addition, the local companies were engaged more or less full time keeping the enemy lines of communication closed. Roads were being continually blocked by fallen trees, trenches and the destruction of bridges. Occasionally it was necessary to supply guards from the column for these operations, especially when they were in close proximity to enemy posts. Activities of this nature continued until mid June, when the column were mobilised for Rathcoole ambush on the night of June 15th, 1921.

The assembly point was Rathcoole Wood. When we arrived there early on the morning of June 16th, 1921, we found the columns from Newmarket, Mallow, Charleville and Kanturk also assembled there. The combined force numbered about 120 and was in charge of Paddy O'Brien (Brigade Vice C/C). About 80 were armed with rifles, while the remainder had shotguns.

The whole force was divided into sections. There were from six to eight men in each section. The sections were extended over a distance of about 1,200 yards, along which six mines had been laid at intervals. I think that all sections were on the southern side of the Millstreet-Banteer road. With five other members of the Millstreet Column, I was a member of a flanking party beyond the western end of the ambush position proper.

We were behind a sod fence about 200 yards from the road and about  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile from the centre of the main ambush position. We were all armed with rifles. About 10 a.m. an enemy convoy of four lorries passed through our position from the west (Millstreet) towards Banteer. As it was known that the convoy usually made two trips each day, they were allowed to pass through and they returned some time after midday.

About 3 p.m. the convoy passed through on the second journey to Banteer. All this time we had been under cover in Rathcoole Wood, which is on the road between Drishanbeg and Rathcoole. When the lorries had passed through to Banteer, all sections moved into their prearranged positions and awaited the return of the convoy. It was now shortly after 3 p.m. and within an hour we heard an explosion and an outburst of machine-gun and rifle fire. We then knew that the scrap was on and we prepared to attack any enemy forces that might get through to our position. However, although the fight went on for about an hour we did not see any sign of the British. When firing ceased we withdrew to the rear of Rathcoole Wood, where we received instructions from Faddy O'Brien to return to our billets. The members of the flanking party with me were: Wm. O'Riordan, "Neilus" Healy, "Miah" Galvin, Wm. Kelliher, Tom Crowley. We were all armed with rifles.

Between June 16th and July 11th, 1921, the column were mainly engaged in sniping enemy posts in the area.

My rank at the Truce - Battalion Engineer,  
Millstreet Battalion, Cork IV Brigade, I.R.A.

The strength of the battalion was about 600.

During the Truce I took part in a Brigade Training Camp at Knocknagree, where I underwent a course of instruction in the use of explosives, the manufacture of mines, demolition of railways and buildings. I cannot recollect the name of the officer in charge of the course, which lasted about a fortnight. This camp was held during September, I think. I later attended a more advanced course at Fermoy, which was visited by the Director of Engineering (Rory O'Connor) during my stay there. Engineer training camps were held at Graune and in other company areas up to the end of 1921.

When Millstreet barracks was taken over I went home to work at my trade as a blacksmith and remained at my job until I was called to Battalion and later Brigade H.Q. after the outbreak of the Civil War. During the latter I took part in a number of engagements against Free State forces in Limerick and Cork areas up to the cease fire. I was arrested on May 6th, 1923, and was detained in Cork Prison until the general release.

Signed: Seamus O h-Iceadha  
(Seamus O h-Iceadha)

Date: 30<sup>th</sup> Jul 1955

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

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