

W.S. 1,220
ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRE MILITA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1220

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,220

Witness

James Keating (Seamus Ceitinn),
Brookhill,
Fethard,
Co. Tipperary.

Identity.

Vice-Commandant, 1st Battalion,
3rd Tipperary Brigade.

Subject.

National and military activities,
Fethard, Coy. Tipperary, 1917-'21.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S.2526

Form B.S.M. 2

ORIGINAL

STATEMENT BY MR. JAMES KEATING.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRE MILEADU 813/220

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Brookhill, Fethard, Co. Tipperary.

I was born in August of the year of 1895 in the house where I still reside. It was in this same townland of Brookhill that Michael Doheny, one of the leaders of the Young Ireland Movement of 1848 was born and reared.

I attended the Patrician Brothers' School in Fethard until I was 18 years of age, during the last three of which I occupied the position of monitor. I then went on to De La Salle Training College in Waterford and spent a further two years training as a teacher. Having completed my training, I returned home and took up a teaching position in my old Alma Mater - the Patrician Brothers' School in Fethard.

I cannot say what the position was as regards the Irish Volunteer Movement in Fethard at the time of the Rising of 1916. Even when the reorganisation of the Volunteers started in 1917, I cannot recall any company having been formed at the time in Fethard. In some undefined way, however, I seem to have become connected with the movement in that year of 1917. It was probably due to my association with the late D.P. Walsh with whom I was then very friendly. D.P., who later became Assistant Q.M.G. of the I.R.A., had been arrested after the Rising of 1916 and had served a term of imprisonment in Frongoch Internment Camp.

Towards the end of March 1918 - it was on the night of the declaration of the poll in the famous Waterford by-election - I attended a parade of Sinn Fein sympathisers in Fethard. What led to this parade I cannot exactly say; it certainly was not a victory parade for Dr. Vincent White, the Sinn Fein candidate, had been defeated in the by-election.

Next morning, myself, D.P. Walsh and another comrade named Paddy Ryan were arrested by the R.I.C. We were charged with illegal assembly and with the offence of giving military commands. That same day, we were tried at the Petty Sessions Court in Fethard. We refused to recognise the right of the Court to try us; we were found guilty and sentenced to three months' imprisonment each. That evening, we were taken to Waterford Prison. There were six other political prisoners including Pax Whelan of Dungarvan there when we arrived. All nine of us immediately demanded to be treated as political prisoners and went on hunger strike in support of our demand. After five days on hunger strike, we got an opportunity at Mass time on our first Sunday in the prison to hold a whispered discussion about the position amongst ourselves. We decided to come off the hunger-strike if the prison authorities showed any indications of moving us to another prison. That evening we were told by the warders to pack up and be ready to move next morning.

On the Monday, under an escort of 12 R.I.C. men, we were brought to Dublin en route for Belfast Prison. In Dublin we met other batches of prisoners and their escorts from Limerick, Galway and Sligo, all bound for Belfast. In Belfast a special wing of the prison had been set aside for political prisoners and the political prisoners already there were being treated as political prisoners. Amongst those imprisoned there at the time were Austin Stack, Piers Beasley, Seamus Robinson, Fionan Lynch, Martin Corry (Cork) and Joe McDonagh. The late Eamon Fleming of The Swan, Leix, was the prisoners' commandant.

During my time in Belfast Prison, the conscription crisis developed in the greater part of Ireland. Austin Stack and some of the other leaders then in Belfast Prison were of the opinion that the political prisoners would be deported to

England, and they decided that any prisoners who had the option of bails should get bail and thus secure their release. This applied in the case of D.P. Walsh, Paddy Ryan and myself. We arranged to be bailed out and were soon back in Fethard again.

On my return from prison I found a big change in Fethard and district as regards Volunteer activity. Men were now drilling and training openly and it looked as if a Volunteer company had been established and put on a proper footing. Subsequent events proved that all this activity and enthusiasm was due to the threat of conscription and, towards the end of that year of 1918, when the conscription threat passed away, the enthusiasm for Volunteer work faded away with it.

As there was no Volunteer company in Fethard during the year of 1919, I kept in touch with established Volunteer companies in the neighbouring towns and villages of Cashel, Rosegreen, Drangan and Mullinahone, and I acted as dispatch carrier between these units. The H.Q. of what was then known as the Cashel Battalion was located in Cashel and the Brigade H.Q. of the 3rd Tipperary Brigade had been set up in the Rosegreen district.

It was not until March of 1920 that a further effort was made to establish a Volunteer company in Fethard. At that time the late Paddy Hogan, then adjutant of the Cashel Battn., paid a few visits to Fethard. On his first visit he contacted Paddy Ryan whom I have already referred to, and between them they selected an evening for Hogan's next visit. Meanwhile, Ryan and I approached any men whom we considered to be trustworthy and likely to make good Volunteers. We had 13 men to meet Hogan on the occasion of his next visit and, at this meeting, the company was formed. Paddy Ryan was elected company captain; I was elected 1st Lieutenant, and Jerry Whelan was elected 2nd Lieutenant. Hogan administered the Oath of

Allegiance to all thirteen. A man named Tommy Lee was No. 13 on the Company Roll and, approximately 12 months later, he was shot dead near Fethard when escaping from a house which was being entered by a party of R.I.C. men.

After the formation of the company, we were given a Colt automatic revolver by the Battalion Q.M. and this was the only piece of arms which we possessed.

Gradually we built up the strength of the company from likely young men, but we had to be very careful about those whom we approached to join. At the time of the Truce in 1921 we had a company strength of 63, and this included a half company based on the townland of Coleman, about one mile from Fethard. In 1920, the British forces in Fethard comprised a battery of artillery stationed in the military barracks and 10 R.I.C. men and Black and Tans located in the R.I.C. Barracks. Subsequently, these forces were reinforced by a company of the Lincolnshire Regiment or the "Lincolns" as they were commonly known.

On 12th May 1920, 12 members of the company including Paddy Ryan, the company captain, and myself took part in the destruction of the Courthouse in Cashel. This was a battalion operation and was done to prevent its occupation by British military. As a matter of fact, at the time of its destruction, a mobile party of British military was encamped outside Cashel. Our party cycled to Rosegreen and marched from there to Cashel. Those who had no arms, or for whom arms could not be procured, were allotted to the party actually carrying out the destruction. Those who had arms took up positions in various streets leading towards the Courthouse. My position was with a party in John St. through which the police should pass if they went to the Courthouse. I was armed with a .22 rifle. Petrol, oil and all kinds of inflammable material were spread inside and outside the Courthouse before setting it ablaze.

It was completely destroyed. This job was done during the hours of darkness and the police, if they were aware of what was happening, made no attempt to leave the barracks. It was broad daylight before we reached our homes next morning.

On the night of 4th June 1920, Drangan R.I.C. police barracks, about 6 miles from Fethard, was attacked and captured by members of the Drangan Battalion supported by other units under the command of Ernie O'Malley. On that night our company was engaged blocking all roads from Fethard to Drangan. Our instructions, which were received from the Battalion H.Q. in Cashel, were to commence blocking the roads as near as possible to Fethard by felling trees across them, and then to proceed in the direction of Drangan, and at intervals, to block the roads in a similar manner. Towards morning, we received word that the attack was successful and we returned to our homes, leaving the job of clearing the roads to the British military.

In July 1920, the Brigade staff prepared plans for an attack on Clerihan R.I.C. Barracks. Again our company was given the task of blocking all roads from Fethard to Clerihan. This we did on the night arranged for the attack, but the actual attack itself was called off at the last minute. I understand that the attacking parties were actually in position when Sean Treacy, the Brigade Vice Commandant, who was taking charge of the operation, received a dispatch from G.H.Q. containing an order forbidding attacks on enemy posts unless detailed plans were first submitted to G.H.Q. and sanction for the operation obtained.

The explosives for use in this proposed attack on Clerihan R.I.C. Barracks were brought from G.H.Q. in Dublin to Fethard by Mr. P.J. Coffey, Burke St., Fethard, who was then an engineering student in the National University, Dublin. The explosives which were handed over to him by the late

D.P. Walsh, then Assistant Q.M.G., were packed in two or three suitcases. Joe Coffey (as he is generally known) arrived with them by train at Fethard railway station on a Saturday night. He expected his father's motor car to be at the station to meet him, but as it was not there, he put the suitcases up on an outside car and told the driver to take him into town. A short distance from the station the driver remarked that the British had a barricade on the road hereabouts and were holding up and searching vehicles. As they were at the barricade, it was too late to do anything but, to Joe's surprise, they were neither held up nor searched. It appears that the British were only holding up and searching motor cars on that particular night.

At the time, I was contemplating rushing the guards on this particular barricade to seize their arms, and I had made up my mind to make the attempt with a picked party of Volunteers on the next afternoon. Knowing that the explosives were hidden over the weekend in Coffey's Mill and, fearing the difficulties I would be involved in with the Brigade staff if the explosives were captured in the raids which the British forces would inevitably carry out after the attack on the barricade, I decided to postpone the attack.

Next day, in Coffey's motor car, Joe Coffey and I brought the explosives to the Brigade H.Q. at Rosegreen. That night I sent a Volunteer to scout one of the other barricades - the British had three of them in all on roads leading into the town - with a view to making an attempt to rush the guard on it that same night. The scout reported that, in addition to the soldiers on the barricade, there was a second party of soldiers, a hidden party, so placed that anyone approaching the barricade came directly into their view. In view of this information, I abandoned the idea of rushing the barricade.

Towards the end of August or early in September 1920, the general order for the collection of shotguns and other arms held by private persons in the area was received. For the purpose of carrying out this order, we divided the company into two parties, Paddy Ryan, the company captain, taking one party and I took the other. We raided all farmhouses where shotguns were likely to be found. As far as I can now recollect, we collected in this way about 12 guns and some ammunition. We prepared a dump in which we kept these guns but subsequently a few of them were found by a British raiding party.

From about this time until the Truce in 1921, I acted as receiver for all arms and stores forwarded by G.H.Q. to the Brigade H.Q. The practice was for the Q.M.G. to forward the stores packed in cases, labelled as STATIONERY and addressed to O'Shea's stationery shop in Burke St., Fethard. The stores were always forwarded by rail. On receipt of a consignment, Miss O'Shea, who was a member of Cumann na mBan, notified me, and I made the arrangements to get it out to the Brigade H.Q. in Rosegreen. One particular case which came in this way contained two automatic revolvers and, if I remember correctly, some kind of a military uniform for Ernie O'Malley when he came to this area after his escape from Kilmainham Jail.

Sometime about September 1920, Paddy Ryan, the company captain, had to go on the run and I then became O/C. of the company. Shortly afterwards, some reorganisation took place in the brigade and it was then that the 1st (or Rosegreen) Battalion was formed. Initially this battalion consisted of only three companies, viz:

A/Coy.	Rosegreen	-	P. Aherne,	Coy. Captain.
B/Coy.	Fethard	-	James Keating (Myself)	Coy. Captain
C/Coy.	Mortlestown-		John Lonergan	do.

The battalion staff elected for this new battalion were: Jerome Davin, battalion commandant; ^{PATRICK} ~~...~~ Quinn, battalion vice-commandant; James Delahunty, battalion adjutant; John Purcell, battalion quartermaster; John Delahunty, battalion intelligence officer.

Prior to the formation of the 1st Battalion, our company was attached to the Cashel battalion.

I remember on one occasion, at a battalion council meeting which I attended, one of those present raised the question of getting as many Volunteers as possible to join the Irish Republican Brotherhood. He pointed out that we had sworn allegiance to Dáil Éireann and his case was that while Dáil Éireann might compromise the national position, the I.R.B. never would. I don't think he was taken very seriously for I can't recall any particular drive being made to get members for the I.R.B.

On the night of 31st October 1920, Paddy Ryan, whom I have previously mentioned, accompanied by Tommy Donovan, commandant of the 7th (or Drangan) Battalion, went to the village of Killenaule about 7 miles from Fethard. They were seeking out some much-wanted R.I.C. men. On their way to Killenaule they knocked at a publichouse and the lady who answered their knock recognised them and remarked: "Tommy Donovan and Paddy Ryan and this house full of policemen". The policemen inside must have overheard her remark and they must have succeeded in sending word to the British forces in Killenaule, for when Ryan and Donovan went into the village they were fired on by military hidden in doorways. Tommy Donovan was shot dead and Paddy Ryan was wounded.

Activities during the months of November and December 1920 and January 1921, were confined principally to trenching and blocking roads and to occasional raids on the mails. Our usual practice in connection with raids on the mails was to hold up

the mail van, seize and take away the mail-bags, censor the correspondence that evening or night, and leave back the mail-bags on the road next day where they would be found by the mail van driver.

In January of 1921, the late Senator William Quirke, who was then a lieutenant in my company, was arrested by British forces. He was sent to Spike Island internment camp where he was detained until his escape some months later.

In February 1921, the company was asked to supply two men for the No. 1 Brigade flying column. At that time, owing to raids on my house, I could not sleep at home and I also had to give up my position as a teacher in the Patrician school, so I immediately volunteered for full-time service with the column. The battalion commandant would not, however, permit me to go away on the column, as he wished me to remain in the Fethard area. The two men from my company who were selected for the column were Dick Mackey and Jack Myles. It was in this month, too, that I was appointed vice-commandant of the battalion. Quinn, who was appointed battalion vice-commandant at the time of its formation, had left the district

About 3rd March 1921, I seized a parcel of stores which had arrived at Fethard railway station for the R.I.C. The parcel was made up principally of stationery which I destroyed. Next day, the R.I.C. carried out raids and searches in the hope of recovering the parcel. In the course of their raids, they approached a house near the town in which Paddy Ryan, then recovered from the wounds which he had received in Killenaule, and Tommy Lee were staying. Seeing the R.I.C. approach, Ryan and Lee left the house by a back window and took different routes. They exchanged shots with the R.I.C. in the course of which Lee was seriously wounded and captured. He died that night in the barracks. Paddy Ryan succeeded in making good his escape.

After this incident, a Black and Tan whose name, as far as I can recollect, was Evans, made himself particularly obnoxious in Fethard. He was reputed to be the one who shot Tommy Lee, but I do not think that was correct. He commenced to hold up people in the street at the point of a revolver and, being a rough uncouth type of man, he made himself most objectionable. One night I put a revolver in my pocket with the intention of letting him have its contents, but though I walked the streets several times, I failed to locate him. Within a few days, as a result of a raid on the mails, I found a letter from the sergeant in charge of the R.I.C. in Fethard to his superiors asking to have this Black and Tan transferred. The sergeant's request was granted, for Evans - if that was his name - was transferred from this district.

One evening about the end of May 1921, with 3 Volunteers I held up the horse-drawn mail-van, which was proceeding with the outgoing mails from Fethard to Clonmel, at a place called Market Hill, about one mile from Fethard. The mails were light, so I decided to examine them there and then and, for this purpose, I moved the mail van a short distance up a boren to the right of the road. To prevent the news that the mail van was being held up reaching the town, I placed one of the Volunteers on the road to hold up any cars going into Fethard. He had just held up the first car which came along when a lorry load of Black and Tans came on the scene. I was the first to see the Black and Tans and I signalled to the Volunteer on the road to rejoin us. As he did so, fire was opened on us by the Black and Tans with rifles and a machine gun. We took off across country and were pursued by the Black and Tans for over a quarter of a mile before we succeeded in making good our escape. During the pursuit the Black and Tans fired a number of rifle grenades after us. As we had

only a revolver between the four of us, we made no attempt to reply to their fire. The horse of the mail van was shot dead in one of the first volleys fired by the Black and Tans. He was the only casualty.

In May or June of 1921, a small 1st Battalion active service unit was formed. The strength of this unit was only six men and I was appointed to take charge of it. The main brigade columns had not been disbanded at the time.

On a Sunday evening on or about 18th June 1921, the A.S.U. captured three British army officers, viz: Lieutenants Betteridge, Twogood and Glossop. These three officers were in civilian clothes and were found spying in fields near the brigade H.Q. at Rosegreen. Betteridge had raided my home at Brookhill the previous night. They were taken to either the brigade or the battalion dugout. Here James Delahunty, who had escaped from the military barracks in Tipperary Town, where he had been a prisoner some time previously, recognised Lieut. Twogood as the officer who had interrogated and ill-treated him in the barracks.

Later that evening and night, large forces of British military combed the area in a vain search for the three officers. Apparently, when the officers had not returned to Fethard Military Barracks by a certain time, the search parties were sent out. Early next morning, the three officers were taken to a place called Woodroffe, on the Clonmel-Cahir road, and there they were executed as spies. As far as I can now remember, Ernie O'Malley was at Brigade H.Q. at the time and it was under his supervision that the executions were carried out.

The bodies of the three officers were removed from Woodroffe by a party of British troops and taken in to Fethard military barracks and from there to the military barracks in Tipperary Town. I was scouting the military barracks in

Fethard from the ruins of Cramps Castle at the time the military escort returned from Tipperary Town. It was a very heavy escort accompanied by armoured cars. I had carelessly dropped a burning match when lighting a cigarette; the dry grass around the castle ruins started to burn and gave off a considerable quantity of smoke. Seeing this, I thought that the military in the barracks would observe the smoke and come to investigate, so I left my position and moved away across some fields. I had not gone very far when the military and the armoured cars opened fire on the castle ruins from a nearby road. A party of the military moved out in extended order and, under cover of the fire from the armoured cars, they rushed the castle ruins, but of course there was no one there.

That night, some soldiers started to carry out reprisals in Fethard. They broke shop windows and did some damage to private houses. Their action must, however, have been unofficial, for a picket was sent out from the barracks to round them up and take them back into the barracks.

Towards the end of June 1921, I was appointed by the Brigade staff to sit on a courtmartial in the 3rd (Dundrum) Battalion area. The columns were disbanded at the time and Dick Mackey took charge of the active service unit during my absence in the 3rd Battalion area. The brigade commandant (Seumas Robinson), James Delahunty, adjutant of the 1st Battn., and Tadhg O'Dwyer, commandant of the 3rd Battalion, travelled with me from Rosegreen. The courtmartial was held in the open air in the hills near Rossmore. Seumas Robinson presided, and the other officers who, with myself, constituted the Court were Brian Shanahan, commandant; Arthur Barlow, vice-commandant and James Maloney, adjutant, all of the 4th Battalion. Con Moloney acted as Clerk of the Court and took notes of the proceedings. Dan Breen was also present but took no part in

the rumours of a truce. Seumas remarked something to the effect that a truce would give us a rest for awhile. O'Malley then replied: "Yes, but what will happen? Lloyd George will offer Dominion Home Rule and we will have to fight the people for the Republic".

On the following Saturday, someone brought a daily newspaper to the house where Seumas and I were. It contained the news of the pending truce, and it carried a statement that Dáil Éireann had been summoned to meet in Dublin on the following Monday. Seumas was then a member of Dáil Éireann, so we had to hurry back to Rosegreen that night as it was necessary for him to travel to Dublin on the Sunday so as to be in time for the meeting of the Dáil on the Monday morning.

After the Truce I was appointed brigade police officer. I took the Republican side during the Civil War.

Signed: Seamus Ceitinn

Date: 2nd August '55
(Seamus Ceitinn)
2nd August 1955.

Witness:

J. Grace
(J. Grace)

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the proceedings. The defendants were either 3 or 4 Volunteers, all members of the 3rd Battalion and all with good service records in the Volunteers. They now faced a charge of stealing and selling cattle to the value of £250.

There was no question of the defendants' guilt, as they admitted the charge and pleaded guilty. The next question to be decided was the punishment to be inflicted. Seumas Robinson asked the views of the other three before asking for mine. All three were in favour of inflicting the death penalty. I assume that what influenced their views in suggesting such a serious penalty was that such stern action would act as a deterrent to any others contemplating similar actions. When it came to my turn to express my views, I asked Seumas Robinson if he was aware of any order or instruction by which the defendants should know that by their action they were leaving themselves liable to the death penalty. No such order had been issued by either G.H.Q. or the Brigade H.Q. I pointed out that a somewhat similar case was pending in another area and that if the precedent was once established it might be necessary to execute Volunteers for similar offences, and that it would perhaps eventually lead to serious trouble in the brigade. After some discussion it was decided to put the defendants doing unpaid work under supervision in various places. On my suggestion, an order was prepared and issued to all units of the brigade to the effect that any Volunteers found guilty of the robbery of goods or money in excess of a certain specified sum would leave themselves liable on conviction to the death penalty.

Seumas Robinson and myself remained in the 3rd Battalion area for a week or ten days after the courtmartial at Rossmore. We went to Glenbane. One day we called to a house where we met Ernie O'Malley. O'Malley asked Seumas if he had heard