

W.S. 1,223
ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRE MILITIA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1223

ROINN



COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,223

Witness

Peter Tobin,
Glenbower,
Carrick-on-Suir,
Co. Tipperary

Identity.

Member of Third Tipperary Brigade
No. 1 Flying Column;

O/C. 8th Battalion, Third Tipperary
Brigade, A.S.U.

Subject.

Irish Volunteer activities,
Grangemockler, Co. Tipperary, 1918-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

N11

File No. S.2527

Form B.S.M. 2

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BUREAU STAIRS MILITAIRE 1913-21
NO. W.S. 1228

STATEMENT BY MR. ^{PETER}~~EDWARD~~ TOBIN,

Glenbower, Carrick-on-Suir, Co. Tipperary.

I was born in the year of 1898 at Breanormore, Grangemockler, Co. Tipperary. My father was a farmer and I attended the national school at Grangemockler until I was 15 years of age. My schooldays over, I assisted my father on his farm at Breanormore.

Towards the end of the year 1918 or early in 1919 I was invited to attend a meeting in the parochial hall in Grangemockler. The object of this meeting was to form a company of Irish Volunteers and it was attended by about 20 or 25 young men, all from around the Grangemockler district. All those who were present at the meeting agreed to join and an election of officers took place. Patrick Butler of Breanormore (now of Nine Mile House) was elected Company Captain; Edward Glendon, also of Breanormore, was elected Company Adjutant, and I was elected Company Quartermaster.

The company paraded about twice a week in various places around Grangemockler. The normal routine of Volunteer companies at the time was carried out. Pat Butler, the Company Captain, acted as drill instructor. We had no arms except for a few shotguns which were the private property of some of the members. A small weekly subscription towards an arms' fund was collected from each member. Money for the arms' fund was also obtained by holding an occasional dance or ceilí.

When the 8th Battalion of the South Tipperary Brigade was formed our company became "C" of this battalion.

John O'Keefe of Carrick-on-Suir was the Battalion Commandant, and the headquarters of the battalion was in that town.

Sometime about the beginning of 1920, with Pat Butler, his brother, Jimmy, and Ned Glendon I went to a place called Duffhill to assist Volunteers from Carrick-on-Suir in the hold-up of a mail train. I am not now sure whether we were armed or not when going to Duffhill, but at the back of my mind there is a faint recollection that we had some revolvers of small calibre. If we had, I have no idea now of where we got them from. John O'Keefe, the Battalion Commandant, was in charge of this operation. The train was stopped by a railway linesman named Frank Roche who was a member of the Volunteers in Carrick-on-Suir. He flagged the train, and when it came to a standstill the mails were seized and taken away by O'Keefe and some of the Carrick-on-Suir Volunteers.

About this time, too, I was in the habit of bringing dispatches from Grangemockler to the Brigade H.Q. at Rosegreen. I generally cycled with the dispatches and my route brought me past the R.I.C. barracks at Glenbower. This must have come under the notice of the R.I.C., for Sergeant Enright, who was then in charge of the R.I.C. in Glenbower, mentioned to an aunt of mine that I had been frequently noticed cycling past the barracks and that I should be warned as he was convinced that I was going on illegal business. However, the police in Glenbower never made any attempt to hold me up or search me.

About August or September, 1920, I assisted in the collection of arms, shotguns etc. held by private persons in the company area. As a rule the farmers who had these guns handed them up willingly enough, but in a few cases

we met with opposition. In one case, that of an extensive Protestant farmer named Barnes, Pat Butler, Ned Glendon and myself raided the house and in addition to a few shotguns we got a couple of revolvers. In all, I should say the company collected about 30 shotguns. These were really the first arms which the company had. After collecting them we hid them underneath the floor boards in the parochial hall in Grangemockler. Subsequently Pat Butler, Glendon and myself took them from the hall and brought them to a more secure hiding place in the national school.

On a Sunday early in September, 1920, Pat Butler and myself attended a battalion council meeting which was held in the house of Maurice McGrath at Rath near Carrick-on-Suir. The late Seán Treacy, then Brigade Vice Commandant, was present. It was my first time to meet or see him. The meeting dealt principally with organisation and activities in the battalion area. After the meeting Seán Treacy put all present through arms and field drill and lectured us on organisation and tactics.

Shortly after this meeting Pat Butler, the Company O/C, and Ned Glendon, the Company Adjutant, visited the Brigade H.Q. and with what money was in the arms' fund they succeeded in purchasing two rifles and some rifle ammunition. These were the first rifles we had in the company and they were brought into use a few nights later when from the hill over Glenbower, Butler, Glendon and myself sniped the R.I.C. barracks at a range of about 350 yards. This was the first occasion on which I fired a shot from a rifle and, as I had no previous musketry training, I have no idea what effect, if any, my shots had. We kept up

the sniping for an hour or so. The policemen in the barracks replied to our fire and they also sent up Verey lights and flares. I have an idea that we did this sniping as a result of a brigade instruction that all barracks in the brigade area were to be sniped on this particular night.

In October, 1920, the company was asked to forward to the Brigade H.Q. the names of members of the company who were prepared to volunteer for full-time service with the Brigade Flying Column which was then being formed. Pat Butler, his brother Jimmy, Ned Glendon and myself offered our services at the time, but we were not called for full-time service until the column came to the Grangemockler district immediately after Christmas of that year.

Meanwhile Butler, Glendon and myself were considering the capture of Glenbower R.I.C. barracks, which was then garrisoned by about 12 men, composed of Black and Tans and R.I.C. We scouted it for some time and noticed that regularly on Sunday afternoons a patrol of 5 or 6 men left the barracks and were absent on patrol duty for some hours. Our idea was for a small party of Volunteers to drive up to the barrack door in a motor car and to have another party ready to rush the door when it was opened by the policeman on duty, who, we assumed, would come out to inquire what was required by those in the car. Our intention was to do this on a Sunday evening when the patrol already referred to had left the barracks.

The Company O/C reported to the Brigade H.Q. what he proposed to do and asked for some assistance in the carrying out of the operation. We were particularly

short of arms.. Brigade H.Q. sent Seán Hogan and Seán Hayes to Grangemockler to investigate the project. They were accompanied by Jerry Kiely. Both Hogan and Hayes were seasoned campaigners at the time. They certainly had much more experience of such jobs than we had and both of them were of the opinion that the plan was not feasible, so it was abandoned. Had the Brigade H.Q. not been brought in on it, the company would probably have tackled the task on its own, but with what result God only knows.

On Bloody Sunday, November 21st, 1920, a member of the company, Michael Hogan of Grangemockler, was shot dead by British Forces in Croke Park where he was playing a game of football with the Tipperary football team. His remains were brought home for burial and were waked overnight in Grangemockler Church. With another member of the company named Patrick Davern, I acted as bodyguard on the remains in the church that night. I was armed with a revolver and I cannot now say if Davern was similarly armed or not. Next day I was present in the graveyard at his (Michael Hogan's) burial when three volleys were fired over his grave by a party of Volunteers. The British forces did not make any attempt to interfere with the funeral arrangements.

I recollect an incident which happened about this time. A few of us, probably the two Butlers, Ned Glendon and myself, went to the top of Laurence's Hill near Nine Mile House with the intention of sniping any convoy of British forces which might pass along the Clonmel-Kilkenny road. A convoy did come along from the Clonmel direction, but the lorries stopped before they entered the straight

part of the road on which we had intended to snipe them. We decided that they must have seen us (it was broad daylight at the time), so we made a hasty retreat from the vicinity.

Just a few days before Christmas of 1920 a party of Volunteers from the 7th Battalion of the Kilkenny Brigade occupied an ambush position on the Kilkenny-Clonmel road near Nine Mile House. The actual ambush position was in the 3rd Tipperary Brigade area but it was only a very short distance from the border of the Kilkenny Brigade area, and, I should say, it was about the most suitable position for an ambush on this particular road. The convoy of British forces came along, but a shot fired too soon by one of the Volunteers warned the convoy of the presence of the ambushing party. The soldiers dismounted and took cover. There was an exchange of fire for some time until the Kilkenny men withdrew. The British suffered some casualties. The engagement was over by the time we learned of it, although it took place only a few miles from Breanormore where the Butlers, Glendon and myself lived at the time.

That night a large party of Auxiliaries and Black and Tans arrived in Nine Mile House to carry out reprisals. They forced their way into the licensed premises owned by John O'Sullivan, and after drinking all they could consume they did considerable damage to the shop. They terrorised the inhabitants of the village, and in one house, that of Laurences where only an old man and his daughter resided at the time, they fired shots inside the house and smashed up pictures and furniture. They also set fire to the hay in the haybarn of a man named Richard Coady.

From Breanormore the Butlers, Glendon and myself saw the fire at Richard Coady's. We assumed at once that it was the British forces carrying out reprisals, and the thought occurred to us that when they were finished in Nine Mile House they would go on to Grangemockler to burn the creamery there. At that time we had four rifles - I cannot now recollect where the additional ones came from - so we got the rifles and went towards the creamery with the intention of having a few shots at them if they came near it. As luck would have it, they did not come near the creamery but drove back along the main road in the direction of Clonmel.

Immediately after Christmas of 1920 the Brigade No. 1 Flying Column came to the Grangemockler district and billeted there for a few days. The four of us who had volunteered for full-time service were then taken on in this column, which was under the command of Denis Lacy, the Brigade Vice Commandant, with James Kilmartin as 2nd in command. The strength of the column at the time we joined it was about 15 men.

From Grangemockler the column moved off via Glenbower to the village of Ballyneil. Near Glenbower some of our party had an exchange of shots with a party of R.I.C. men who were on the road near Glenbower R.I.C. barracks. One of the R.I.C. men was wounded in the heel. That night we crossed the river Suir into Co. Waterford and we billeted for some time in the Windgap (Co. Waterford), Rath, Jonestown and Clonea areas. After a few weeks in Co. Waterford we returned to Co. Tipperary and moved from district to district in the various battalion areas. From time to time additional men were taken on in the column.

The first ambush position which I can recollect that we occupied was at a place called Barna on the road between Clonmel and Cahir where two lorries of British forces were expected to pass. Farm carts and ladders were collected at farmhouses and were in readiness to be pushed out on to the road when the approach of the lorries was signalled. We remained in the ambush position for about three hours, and as the lorries did not come along the column leader withdrew the column. Had the lorries come along I think this would have had to be a fight to a finish, for the ambush position was in a flat part of the country with no proper line of retreat and the only cover was that provided by some scattered trees.

The next incident of note took place on the Coach road between Tipperary town and the Glen of Aherlow. Here the intention was to ambush a party of about twelve British soldiers returning from escorting provisions to a military post in the Glen of Aherlow. For the purpose of this ambush the column was divided into two parties, one under the column leader and the other under James Kilmartin. I was with Kilmartin's party. The escort returned much sooner than expected and before the ambush position was properly occupied. In fact, Kilmartin's party had not gone into the ambush position at all at the time. The escort party was fired on by the column commander and some of his party, and an exchange of fire lasting about twenty minutes took place. Two or three British soldiers were killed. The column suffered no casualties.

On a few occasions when in the neighbourhood of Tipperary town, members of the column were detailed to go into the town at night in twos and threes to search

certain publichouses and hotels for members of the enemy forces. Each small party would carry only short arms and a grenade or two and would be accompanied by a local guide to point out the place allotted to each party. In this way it was hoped to get some wanted members of the British forces. For some reason which I do not know, these jobs were always called off - usually at the last minute.

Towards the end of April, 1921, the column was in the Castlegrace vicinity and the column leader received a report that a convoy of British forces was expected to pass along the Clogheen-Cappawhite road that day. Arrangements to ambush the convoy were put in hand and again the column leader divided the column into two parties, taking one party himself and James Kilmartin, the 2nd in command, taking the other party. I was again with Kilmartin's party. The column leader and some of his party were on the road when a number of British soldiers in a horse-drawn vehicle came along. This was not the expected convoy but about 12 men out on some kind of special duty. The column leader and those with him on the road had, apparently, no option but to engage the British party. From our position we could not exactly see what was happening on the road, but we did see some of the soldiers running away so we fired after them.

There was now no question of remaining in the ambush position to await the expected convoy. The column was assembled and moved off down a by-road which leads on to the Clogheen-Castlegrace road. I was marching third or fourth behind the column leader. Just as we reached the end of the by-road a motor car containing James Kilmartin and a strange man overtook us. The stranger, who was in civilian clothes, proved to be District Inspector ~~POTTER~~ of

the R.I.C. He had come along the Clogheen-Cappawhite road in his motor car just after the column had moved away and he had been taken prisoner by Kilmartin and Pat Butler who were acting as the column rearguard.

Almost at the same time as the motor car reached the head of the column we were fired on by a party of British troops who were ranged along a wall on the Clogheen-Castlegrace road and of whose presence we were unaware. The column immediately took cover and we commenced to reply to the fire of the British troops. Taking Potter with him, Lacy (the column leader) entered a field beside the by-road and crossed it. An old shed in this field gave some cover but Lacy did not remain in it. He just passed through it. In twos and threes and under cover of the fire of our comrades, which kept the British soldiers pinned down behind the wall of the road, we all succeeded in following him and in disengaging ourselves from the British forces. This action lasted, I should say, about three-quarters of an hour. Taken by surprise as we were, we were fortunate in not having any casualties. Later on we learned that the British had several casualties, both killed and wounded.

From the scene of this incident we moved off in the direction of Castlegrace and on to ^{Newcastle} ~~Castlegrove~~. Here we rested for some time and had some badly needed refreshments. We received warning of an impending British round-up, so next day we marched across the Knockmealdown Mountains to Ballybeacon. Potter walked all the way with us. We kept him a prisoner for some days in various places around the Clonea district in Co. Waterford while the Brigade H.Q. were endeavouring to arrange with the British for the

reprieve of a Volunteer named Thomas Traynor who was then under sentence of death in Mountjoy Prison. In return for the reprieve of Traynor, the Brigade H.Q. were prepared to release Potter. As the British executed Traynor, Potter was executed by a firing party of the column under the supervision of the column commander.

About this time, too, the column spent a week or so at a place called Curraghea which is situated high up in the Comeragh Mountains a few miles from the village of Rathgormack. Here we were engaged in preparing dumps for a consignment of arms which we understood was to be landed at Helvick Head on the Co. Waterford coast. The dumps which we prepared were rather crude affairs, simply holes in the ground measuring approximately 6 feet by 4 feet by 5 feet deep and covered by a large sheet of galvanised iron.

Some weeks before the column disbanded the column commander divided the column into two sections and he appointed me as section commander of one of the sections. The column at that time had a strength of over 60 men, and I should say that his reason for dividing it into two sections was to have two men responsible for ensuring that all the men were present when on the march or on parades. There was already a machine-gun section in the column which was responsible for the care of the machine-gun which we had from about the month of February, 1921. This section consisted of six men, with Seán Kennedy in charge.

A few general remarks about the column and its routine may not be out of place here. Before entering a company area the local Volunteer officers were notified in advance and they made arrangements with the houses in which

the column was to be fed and billeted. After arrival and before being dismissed to go to the billets, the column commander gave the password and indicated the point or place at which the column would assemble in the event of an alarm being raised. This point or place was called the "centre". It was also the place at which the column would parade at 10 a.m. next morning. The local Volunteers provided the scouts but one or two members of the column also remained on duty all night and kept in constant touch with the scouts. No matter how far we had marched or what hour it was when we got to bed, all members of the column had to be on parade at the "centre" at 10 a.m. No excuse was taken by the column commander from men coming late on parade, the penalty for which was carrying the machine-gun when next on the march. From 10 a.m. until dinner-time was spent on parade, drilling and training. After dinner there was another parade and more drilling and training until tea-time, after which we generally moved off to another area. The taking of intoxicating drink by members of the column was strictly forbidden.

George Plunkett and Ernie O'Malley, both G.H.Q. officers, visited the column on a few occasions. Plunkett was particularly keen on arms' inspection and O'Malley on drill and training.

During the six months I spent with the column we had only two casualties. One was at the execution of Potter when a member of the firing party accidentally wounded himself in the leg. The other was when Denis Sadlier was accidentally shot dead by one of his comrades. We buried Sadlier at 2 a.m. in the morning in the cemetery at Grange near Nine Mile House. During those same six months

no member of the column was captured by the British forces.

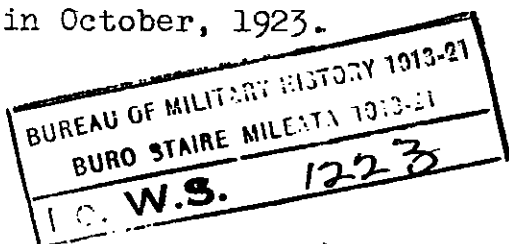
Early in June, 1921, the column was disbanded and the members were instructed to return to their own battalion areas and to form small battalion columns or active service units. I was appointed by Lacy to take charge of the active service unit in our own, i.e. the 8th Battalion area. Lacy himself returned to the Brigade H.Q. at Rosegreen.

At this time the British forces generally always travelled in large convoys, often protected by armoured cars, and in view of the meagre strength and armament of a battalion A.S.U. it was impossible to take any major action against them. In our case the only rifles we possessed were the few which those of us who were members of the brigade column brought with us. The new members brought on to the A.S.U. were armed with shotguns.

During the few weeks which intervened between the formation of the Battalion A.S.U. and the Truce, we visited the company areas but I cannot recall any incidents of particular note. We were in the Churchtown area at the time the Truce was signed.

I attended a training camp at Galtee Castle for some time during the Truce period before returning to my home in Breanormore.

During the Civil War I took the Republican side and remained on active service until the "Cease Fire" order in October, 1923.



Signed:

Peter Tobin
 (Peter Tobin)

Date:

3rd August 1955

3rd August 1955